AN EVALUATION OF NJ LEEP: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS

OF A COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM FOR

LOW-INCOME AND FIRST-GENERATION HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN

NEWARK, NEW JERSEY

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School-Newark

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Urban Systems

written under the direction of

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Newark, New Jersey

May, 2018

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

An Evaluation of NJ LEEP: An Examination of the Effectiveness of a College and Career

Readiness After-School Program for Low-Income and First-Generation High School

Students in Newark, New Jersey

By NICOLE BROOME

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Acceptance rates of low-income, urban minority students into colleges and universities

have risen in recent years; however, retention and graduation rates for these students are

still shockingly low when compared to their more affluent, white peers (Nyhan, 2015;

Schmidt, 2008).   Many after school programs in urban areas strive to ameliorate this gap

by providing experiences and opportunities in addition to academic guidance for urban

adolescents in order to help prepare these students for acceptance into and success in

higher education. Although there is significant research that indicates participating in

after-school programs can improve academic achievement in high school and can

contribute to the growth of other non-academic skills, such as social capital, there is a

scarcity of research that examines what aspects of after-school programs help urban

adolescent students prepare for and enroll in higher educational institutions or how these

programs help students to achieve this goal. This research examined how an after-school

program, NJ LEEP, helps urban adolescent students succeed in post-secondary education

through a theory, process, and outcome program evaluation using a convergent parallel

mixed-methods case study design. Interviews, observations, and document analyses were

used to establish program theory and to conduct a process evaluation, while quantitative

analyses of ACT/SAT scores, graduation rates, GPA, non-cognitive questionnaire, and

college enrollment data were used to assess program outcomes. Program Theory Evaluation was the guiding conceptual model to frame this research in order to provide a rich and holistic assessment of how and why the program is or is not achieving its goals. The results of this study indicated that providing comprehensive academic and socio-emotional skill development to low-income and first-generation students will contribute to increasing academic and socio-emotional indicators of college readiness, access, and success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research Problem

Globalization and advances in technology, along with current employment trends, have led to an increase in the level of education needed to successfully attain social mobility in the 21st century (Darling-Hammond, 2010). There has been a dramatic shift towards a need for high-skill workers and fewer opportunities for employment that will afford a middle-class lifestyle for individuals without, at minimum, a college degree (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). The need for highly skilled and educated workers will only continue to grow in the next decade, with an estimated two-thirds of 48.6 million job openings requiring post-secondary education during this time (Carnevale et al., 2010). President Barak Obama has also addressed the necessity of increasing the rates of college matriculation in the United States to meet the growing demands of the 21st century global economy through his 2020 College Completion Challenge, in which he calls for the current 40% college completion rate to raise to 60% by 2020 (Kanter et al., 2011).

Scholars and practitioners have well documented the need for and value of post-secondary education; however, there are still significantly underrepresented groups in the United States higher educational system, including racial and ethnic minorities, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation college students (Nyhan, 2015; I. Smith & Johnson, 2003). Although the acceptance rates of minority and low-socioeconomic status students into colleges and universities have risen in recent years, retention and graduation rates for these students are still shockingly low when compared to their more affluent, white peers (Nyhan, 2015; Schmidt, 2008). Research has found a 30% gap in college enrollment between minority, low-income students and affluent,

white students, and a 16% gap in college graduation between these same groups

(Corrigan, 2003; Perna, 2005). The increasing need for post-secondary education and

the vast college enrollment and graduation gap, as well as the gap in type and quality of

post-secondary education between these groups requires there be further investigation

into programs that provide services that prepare low-income, first-generation, and

racial/ethnic minority students for both college enrollment and persistence. Research in

this field could help to ameliorate the current educational disparity by providing evidence

of effective methods to increase equity of opportunity for all students regardless of race,

ethnicity, or socio-economic background.

Background and Justification

Many reforms that have addressed reducing the college enrollment and graduation gap

have focused on changes and interventions that take place during the traditional school

day; however, research has shown that there are many different out-of-school dynamics

that considerably influence the educational growth and development of low-income,

racial/ethnic minority children, particularly in urban areas (Anyon, 2005). While what

happens during school hours, including teacher quality, curriculum, and peer interactions,

has major implications for a child's academic achievement, according to Berliner, the

time spent outside of school with family, friends, and the surrounding community has an

even greater effect (2012b). Other out-of-school factors, including family structure,

individual agency, cultural capital, and social capital are also crucial influences on the

life of an urban child that either help or hinder success through the educational system

(Berliner, 2012b; Milner IV et al., 2015; Putnam, 2015). This suggests that to reduce the

achievement gap there is a need to focus on what can also be done outside of the

traditional school to increase academic achievement and prepare students for success in post-secondary education.

Out-of-school factors can be extremely influential for children living in areas of concentrated poverty with little access to extra-curricular activities because these children are at an increased risk of spending a substantial amount of time unsupervised (Darling-Hammond, 2010). One response to this problem is that various types of organized after-school programs have been developed to provide low-income students with structured extended learning time, or out-of-school learning time, in order to help diminish the academic achievement and opportunity gap and to provide a safe place for students after dismissal in urban areas. There has been considerable research conducted that has demonstrated the positive academic and non-academic outcomes of student participation in after-school programs (Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Maynard et al., 2015; Muñoz et al., 2014; Putnam, 2015; Vandell et al., 2007); however, there has been limited research investigating how after-school programs that are geared towards college and career readiness have affected low-income, first-generation minority student educational outcomes concerning college enrollment and graduation and best practices for achieving college readiness for these students.

Purpose Statement

This research seeks to investigate the effectiveness of one after-school program in preparing low-income and first-generation, urban minority students for college through a program theory, process, and outcome evaluation. The purpose of this research is to understand how the New Jersey Law Education and Empowerment Project (NJ LEEP) in Newark, NJ contributes to low-income, first-generation, urban adolescent students being

academically and socio-emotionally prepared for enrolling in and persisting through college or university. This case study includes an in-depth examination of the program history, various program components, and the perspectives of program participants, program administrators, staff, and other key stakeholders through the use of qualitative interviews, observations, and document analysis. Quantitative analysis of program outcomes was used to evaluate the effects of the various program components, including analysis of college entrance exam scores, GPA, and college enrollment in post-secondary education.

Research has demonstrated that students living in areas of concentrated poverty, particularly in urban communities, are at a much greater risk of having negative academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Murry et al., 2011). Research has also indicated that participating in after-school programs can yield positive outcomes for students, including improved academic achievement, growth of non-academic social-emotional skills, the development of positive relationships with adults and mentors, as well as access to a safe environment in the after-school hours (Hanlon et al., 2009; Holden et al., 2015; Malone, 2013; Vandell et al., 2007). There is, however, a scarcity of research that examines how effective after school programs are helping urban adolescent students to succeed in college, and which aspects of participation are most beneficial to getting accepted into and graduating from college. This research could add to the knowledge of educators and those who work in after-school programs, as well as policy makers, who could use this research to help inform after-school program development and funding, particularly in urban areas where attendance and retention in college is significantly lower than in more affluent, suburban areas. This type of research is necessary to understand how college-

readiness after-school programs attempt to diminish the academic achievement and opportunity gaps by providing supplemental enrichment intended to increase college acceptance and graduation rates for low-income and first-generation urban students.

Research Questions

To help fill the current research gaps, this examined a college and career readiness after-school program that indicates as its primary objective to empower at-risk, low-income, and first-generation adolescents with academic and social-emotional skills necessary to be accepted into and graduate from college or university. The research questions used to guide this study are broken into three components, including a program theory evaluation, a process evaluation, and an outcome evaluation.

      Component 1: Program Theory Evaluation. The purpose of a program theory evaluation is for an assessment of program theory and design to analyze the conceptualization of the program to ensure that it reflects valid assumptions about the nature of the problem and that the program represents a feasible approach to resolving the problem. This portion of the evaluation required working with the program administrators and key stakeholders to elucidate and describe the program theory in explicit and detailed form. This included developing a detailed description of the program goals and objectives as articulated by the key stakeholders. Once the program theory was established in detail, research was conducted to examine how reasonable, ethical, feasible, and otherwise appropriate this program is for addressing the problem. Furthermore, the assessment of program theory will lend to a better understanding of the program process. Semi-structured interviews conducted with program directors, staff,

current participants, program alumni, and parents were used to collect the data for the program theory assessment. The following overarching question guided Component 1:

What do key stakeholders identify as the primary goals and objectives of NJ LEEP?

    a. What are the characteristics of the intended program participants to be served?

    b. What services should be provided and how are these intended to meet program objectives?

Component 2: Program Process Evaluation. Assessments of program process are used to assess the fidelity and the effectiveness of the implementation of a program. This portion of the evaluation examined the various services provided by NJ LEEP to ascertain how well the program is operating in accordance with its program theory. Process evaluation is essential because in Scheirer's words, it "verifies what the program is and whether or not it is delivered as intended to the target recipients" (Rossi et al., 2004). The process and implementation evaluation were used to ensure that the program is reaching the intended target population and that the implementation of the services is consistent with the program design specifications and the program theory. Furthermore, the process evaluation is used to determine if the program uses high-quality practices, which was measured by the Out-of-School Time (OST) Observational Instrument (Pechman et al., 2008). Observations of program services, analysis of program records including student demographics, interviews with key stakeholders, and document analysis of program curriculum and curricular resources were used as primary data sources for the process evaluation. This step of the evaluation also contributed to

providing details for a rich, thick description of the program and services provided. The following overarching question guided Component 2:

1. How have NJ LEEP's programs and services been implemented?

    a. Do aspects and characteristics of the various program components provide evidence of quality?

    b. How do the program structures and activities align with the articulated program theory and goals?

Component 3: Outcome Evaluation. The outcome evaluation used statistical analysis of secondary academic achievement data and socio-emotional variables collected by NJ LEEP to examine the following overarching question:

To what extent has NJ LEEP achieved its objectives in terms of participant achievement in the areas of academic outcomes and socio-emotional outcomes?

Program Evaluation Theory Conceptual Framework Overview

Program Evaluation Theory was the conceptual framework used to guide this research. Program theory can be defined as the set of explicit or implicit assumptions held by key stakeholders about what actions will lend to short-term, intermediate, and long-term changes that solve a social, educational, or health problem, and why those actions will lead to change (Chen, 2006). Program evaluations that are theory driven are able to provide evidence regarding whether a program intervention does or does not work and can also provide insight into how and why it does so, which allows key stakeholders to continuously improve their interventions to align to their program theory and to actions taken to achieve long term goals. Using program theory to guide a program evaluation helped the researcher facilitate the stakeholders in clarifying their program theory and

guided the process and outcome evaluations. This was accomplished through working with key stakeholders to create a change model (casual processes that must occur to reach desired outcomes) and an action model (actions or interventions in a program that produce the desired outcomes) to develop program theory (Chen, 2006).

Methodology Overview

This research was conducted through the use of a convergent parallel mixed methods case study design that was driven by program theory as the conceptual framework to understand how an after-school program prepares low-income and first-generation urban adolescents for success in college. According to Creswell (2008), a case study seeks to provide an in-depth picture of a particular, bounded case. Focusing on the key stakeholders' perspectives to articulate program theory, using semi-structured interviews to elucidate students' perspectives and experiences in the after-school program, and observations to evaluate program process, as well as analyzing the quantitative data for student outcomes, provides an opportunity for an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the program's ability to help low-income and first-generation students succeed in college. Engaging in this research through this interpretive lens made a mixed methodology approach most appropriate.

NJ LEEP Brief Overview

The New Jersey Law Education and Empowerment Project (NJ LEEP) is an after-school program that was founded in Newark, NJ in late 2006. The first round of students entered the program in 2007, with an initial group of 36 students in the first summer program. Craig Livermore, who originally worked for Legal Outreach, a similar after-school program based out of New York City, developed NJ LEEP. Livermore realized

there was no such program available to students in New Jersey and came to Seton Hall Law School to propose a partnership to develop NJ LEEP in order to offer a high quality, college readiness based after-school program in Newark. The overall goal of the program is to provide high quality, college preparatory and access programing for low-income and first-generation students in the city of Newark and surrounding areas. The program attempts to achieve this goal through providing 4 years of college-bound readiness training, academic and socio-emotional enrichment, and college awareness during after-school and summer hours. Students enrolled in the program are provided with grade-specific services intended to improve college readiness for a minimum of two hours per week after school hours and on weekends.

During the 2016-2017 school year, the program had 138 students participating in the college-bound program in grades 9 through 12, with an average of 30 students per grade.   There are an additional 113 alumni of the program, of which the program directors are still in contact with approximately 85% percent of the students. There is also a robust parental involvement program that includes on average, 1.5 family members per college bound student in the program. The program actively works to engage parents of the alumni students throughout their college experience. The goal of working with the parents is to help educate the family on how they are able to support their child in college even if they have no prior experience with higher education.

NJ LEEP begins to recruit students into the program in January of each year. The recruitment process includes talking to numerous middle schools in Newark and surrounding areas, addressing the 8th grade student populations, and teaching a sample lesson. The goal of this step is to introduce students to the NJ LEEP approach, which

often times is very different from what students are used to academically. After this step, students are given further information on applying to the program. Students who complete the application are invited to a group interview, where they complete a group application, which is followed by individual interviews. From the individual interviews, the program typically accepts approximately 50-55 students into the five-week long summer program. Approximately 80% of the students from the summer program are then accepted into the four-year, college-bound program. The program staff examines participation, growth, performance, as well as other qualitative measures to determine who is accepted into the college bound program from the summer program. Administrators ask students to leave the program for various reasons, but most predominately if they have attendance issues or are not completing assignments or participating appropriately. The retention rate for the program for students entering in grade nine has stayed close to 75% for the history of the program.

The services offered through NJ LEEP have remained relatively consistent throughout the program's history, with the only adjustments primarily to the sophomore and junior year programs to make the curriculum more comprehensive, and to the amount of participation time required each week. Each year, the program begins for students the summer before 9th grade with a Summer Law Institute (SLI), a five-week long intensive program that serves as an extended interview and program acceptance period. Students who are accepted into the four-year, college-bound program following SLI, continue with NJ LEEP and participate in grade specific programing throughout their four years of high school. Summer programing is available to students in all grades and includes internships, ACT prep, and support through the college application process. The weekly,

after-school programing includes a life-skills course for 9th grade students, a debate review program for 10th grade students, an ACT/SAT preparatory program for 11th grade students, and a college application program for 12th grade students.   A weekly Saturday writing program is also offered to all program participants and incorporates a different writing focus for each grade.

Summary

The purpose of this case study is to understand how the New Jersey Law Education and Empowerment Project after-school program in Newark, NJ contributes to low-income, first-generation, urban adolescent students being accepted into and persisting through post-secondary education. Current research on after-school programs does not demonstrate how effective after-school programs are helping low-income and first-generation urban adolescent students to be academically and socio-emotionally prepared to enroll in and succeed in college or which aspects of participation are most beneficial. This research aims to fill this gap. This study assesses the effectiveness of the NJ LEEP college-bound, after-school program, how it influences academic achievement and college enrollment, and student perceptions of how the program influences college readiness by an evaluation of program theory, an evaluation of program process, and an outcome evaluation, and by comparing program participants' academic outcomes with those of students in Newark Public Schools who did not participate in the program. This study aims to garner a deep understanding of the theory, process, and outcomes of a college readiness after school program and how it prepares urban adolescents for post-secondary education through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings of this research could add to the knowledge of educators and those who work in

after-school programs, as well as policy makers, who could use the knowledge to help

inform after-school program development, particularly in urban areas where attendance

and retention in college is significantly lower than other student populations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Functionalist Theory Perspective of Education

Numerous reformers have blamed failing schools for the disparities in achievement that exist between urban and suburban schools and have called upon schools to increase academic rigor, meet specific standards, increase assessment, and hold teachers accountable, while asserting that more funding will solve the plight of urban schools, which are predominately attended by minority students and those from low-SES backgrounds. Many of these reforms have been based on the functionalist theory perspective, first introduced by Emile Durkheim, which contends that schools function through maintaining cohesive social order; however, this theory does not account for the considerable influence that race, socio-economic status, and place have on children in inner-city schools. This theory argues that education provides equality of opportunity for all students based on the purpose of education that is democratic, meritocratic, and technocratic (Sadovnik, 2011).

The functionalist theory further reasons that an individual's place in the social structure will be a result of their actions because education has the ability to equalize other life conditions and therefore provides all children the equal opportunity for success. This theory assumes that all children are served in a similar way, and that outside factors are not significant enough to negate the positive effects of free public education, which will in turn provide equal opportunity to all students in the educational system regardless of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status, and, therefore, education becomes a mechanism for positive change and equal opportunity. This perspective is problematic in the current educational system because it does not account for the numerous significant

inequalities that exist outside of the regular school day as a result of years of systematic social and political injustice and inequity that have caused de facto segregation and vast income inequality, but rather this theory argues that if educational opportunity is equal, then there will be equal outcomes for all students.

The Conflict Theory Perspective of Education

Many educational experts refute this traditional functionalist theory approach to urban educational reform and argue that conflict theory is a more valid approach. While the functionalist theory perspective suggests that society is held together by shared values, conflict theory argues that society is held together by various economic, political, cultural, and military powers that legitimize inequality and create a constant struggle (Sadovnik, 2011). Unlike the functionalist theory, conflict theory identifies the purpose of education as a means to maintain social inequality in order to preserve the power of the dominant class by perpetuating the status quo. While both the functionalist theory perspective and conflict theory perspective admit schools sort students, functionalists argue sorting is based on merit, whereas conflict theorists argue sorting is based upon class and race (Sadovnik, 2011). Jane Anyon, a supporter of conflict theory, addresses this perspective in her essay "What 'Counts' as Educational Policy? Notes toward a New Paradigm," by asserting the need for a radical movement to address poverty and income inequality as a tool to overcome the systematic problems of urban education (2005). Her conflict theoretical perspective demonstrates that policy change cannot only focus on pedagogy, but must examine urban systems as a whole, including jobs, wages, housing, and other policies, in order to reduce poverty. Anyon purports that federal policies can limit the success of educational reform in urban schools and unless other approaches are

integrated into urban educational reforms, achievement disparities will continue to prevail in inner-city schools despite attempts at reformations.

Social Capital Theory

Researchers and social theorists have long used the term social capital and have developed various definitions and interpretations of the phrase. Although the idea of social capital has a long history, it came into wide use in the second half of the 20th century with the assistance of Pierre Bourdieu, who described social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked…to membership in group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity- owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word" (1986). Robert Putnam, a well-respected political scientist and professor of Public Policy at Harvard University, provided his own interpretation, referring to social capital as "the social networks and associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness" (2007). Jacobs and Tillie also contributed their own definition of social capital, describing it as "being embedded in a social network through associational life" (2004).   In the most simplistic and general terms, social capital "describes certain outcomes, advantages and/or disadvantages that are derived from relationship networks" (Miller, 2012).

Educational programs including the public-school system and after-school programs are institutions that have the potential to foster and build social capital, which is important because it is needed to build networks of supports and resources. Furthermore, research suggests that increased social capital can contribute to increased academic achievement and therefore increase social mobility (Noguera, 2004; Putnam, 2007; Taggart & Kao, 2003; Wu et al., 2010). According to educational theory and Bourdieu

(1986), low proficiency levels in academics and high drop-out rates can be products of social reproduction that occurs when students come from families with low levels of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Research also suggests that social capital is influenced by multiple socio-demographic factors outside of educational systems and can vary greatly based on socio-economic status, social class, gender, and race (Aguilera, 2002; Nieminen et al., 2008; Parks-Yancy et al., 2008). Understanding social capital and the means by which social capital can be developed, particularly in specific vulnerable populations, can further contribute to increasing academic achievement and social mobility.

Federal Policies Affecting Urban Education Environments

Anyon's research is significant in illustrating the fact that various policies that are aimed at improving educational disparities and have specifically targeted urban district students and teachers have not shown the type of expected improvements because they fail to address the underlying issues that are at the root of these disparities. For example, Anyon cites several educational policies that were intended to increase educational equity, such as the Brown decision of 1954, which made segregation of schools illegal, as well as the 2001 enactment of No Child Left Behind, which set higher standards and increased testing for accountability. Each of these mandates was intended to produce positive learning outcomes, particularly for urban schools, since these enactments would surely produce greater equity in schools; however, despite making segregation of schools illegal, many urban districts are, in reality, racially segregated, and raising standards for students or teachers has done little to improve academic achievement (2005). This

indicates that despite the numerous federal policy attempts to increase educational

opportunities for low-income, urban students the results have been inadequate.

Anyon further argues that various federal policies have contributed to maintaining

poverty in urban areas as well. One specific example Anyon cites is the federal minimum

wage laws that are so insufficient that an individual, who is working full time, at

minimum wage, year round will be making so little that they will still be living in poverty

(2005). Furthermore, inequity in federal tax laws has allowed for many corporations to

pay zero dollars in taxes and many even receive millions of dollars in rebates, while at

the same time there have been significant increases in payroll taxes for lower and middle-

class tax payers. Since school districts are funded primarily by the tax-base, and low-

income families of color tend to be concentrated in urban neighborhoods, the resources

available to these schools are often depleted and the quality of service in the schools in

these areas tends to decay as a result. Additionally, lack of accessibility to jobs in low-

income urban areas has decreased. Many of the jobs available for adults with low

education levels are found predominately in the suburbs; however, most transit does not

provide affordable access to these locations, nor is the housing near these of types jobs

typically affordable to low-income residents (Anyon, 2005).

The Effects of Poverty on Education

The combination of these educational, federal, and regional policies contribute to the

poverty epidemic in the United States, with instances of extreme poverty rising in recent

years (Milner IV et al., 2015). This signifies that even if there was access to equal

educational opportunities in all schools, children living in areas of concentrated poverty

may never be able to overcome the overwhelming outside forces that further economic

disparity, regardless of educational reforms aimed at improving academic achievement. This is further supported by research that has demonstrated the significant influence poverty can have on childhood cognitive development and later academic achievement (Milner IV et al., 2015; Murry et al., 2011). Although it is possible over time that strong academic interventions can overcome the effects of poverty on a child's cognitive and behavioral development, it is more the exception rather than the rule. These studies addressed by Anyon and others reveal that socio-economic status is a far greater predictor of future academic achievement than is race or ethnicity (2005). This indicates that many of the recent reform policies attempting to address issues of past segregation are neglecting to address the economic disparity that resulted from these policies and that are truly impacting cognitive development and academic achievement in low-income children in urban areas.

The 2012 Berliner Report further supports the argument that there are multiple other factors that contribute to this disparate gap in educational outcomes. This report argues that current discussions regarding educational disparities predominately suggest that ineffective schools are the direct result of ineffective teachers and administrators; however, these discussions do not account for vast income inequalities or the significant amount of time that children spend outside of school and the substantial influence poverty can have on educational attainment (Berliner, 2012b). Additionally, this report shows the income inequality that exists in the United States contributes to other significant health and social inequalities that can impact mental health, high school dropout rate, teenage birth rates, and imprisonment (Berliner, 2012a, 2012b).

The Opportunity Gap

Anyon and Berliner both address how issues of poverty are major contributing factors in

the disparities in academic achievement between low-income, minority students

concentrated in poor, urban areas and their more affluent white peers in suburban areas;

however, these are not the only causes to this gap. Other educational researchers support

these beliefs and suggest that in addition to issues of poverty, there are multiple other

dynamics and conditions taking place that, when compounded with high levels of

poverty, increase academic disparities and inequalities (Milner IV et al., 2015; Murry et

al., 2011; Putnam, 2015). Robert Putnam, in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis,*

argues that the disparities between lower class families' economic circumstances and the

expanding resources for upper class families contribute to significant inequalities in

access to experiences (2015). The disparities in access to these experiences that enrich

education contribute to making low income children less prepared to develop their talents

and to reach their full potential (Putnam, 2015). Children from affluent families have

access to opportunities outside of school such as vacations, art and music classes,

museums, and camps that provide supplemental educational enrichment of which most

low-income children do not have the opportunity to engage.

Duncan and Murane further contribute to this argument with economic theory,

which states that "families with higher incomes are better able to purchase or produce

important 'inputs' into their young children's development" (2014). Moreover, many

poor, urban schools are far more likely to cut supplementary programing in arts, music,

and athletics to save money than affluent schools, which can afford to offer a variety of

extra-curricular activities both in and out of school. Putnam argues that the inability to

participate in educational experiences outside of the daily classroom environment and
basic content curriculum significantly limits learning time for low-income students
(2015). This results in many low-income children engaging in deviant behaviors during
unsupervised out-of-school time and having fewer adults or mentors who can set a
positive example in their lives (Miller, 2012; Murry et al., 2011). When these inequities
are coupled with concentrated poverty, high levels of segregation, and inadequate access
to extra-curricular experiences and opportunities, low-income minority children are
placed at a clear disadvantage to their more affluent peers. This disadvantage, if not
addressed, will continue to grow as a child continues on through his educational career,
which leads to an increased chance of being considerably ill-equipped to enroll in and
achieve in college and which additionally places students at greater risk of dropping out.

Urban School Environments and Teacher Quality

Linda Darling-Hammond, much like Putnam, identifies the opportunity gap present
between rich and poor districts, which increases inequalities between rich and poor
students, as a significant contributor to the major disparities in academic achievement
(2010). Darling-Hammond, like other educational researchers, describes the opportunity
gap as the accumulated differences in access to key educational resources, such as the
unequal access to qualified teachers and limited early childhood opportunities (Darling-
Hammond, 2010; Milner IV et al., 2015; Putnam, 2015). She attributes much of the
problems in poor, urban schools to the lack of funding these schools receive to hire and
retain highly qualified teachers and to provide a quality education to low-income,
minority students.

One of the most damaging aspects of this opportunity gap is that most urban districts have a high percentage of underprepared and under-qualified teachers because they do not have the financial resources available to offer a competitive salary to attract highly qualified candidates (Milner IV et al., 2015). Additionally, the working conditions in poor schools and districts can be "bleak and grimy," which results in the hiring of many inexperienced and unprepared teachers with emergency credentials and long-term substitutes in lieu of more expensive and experienced teachers with appropriate qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The consequences of underprepared teachers on student academic achievement are startling and have been well documented (Clotfelter et al., 2005; Clotfelter et al., 2007; Hanushek, 2011; D. N. Harris & Sass, 2011). There is a direct correlation between positive student achievement and fully certified teachers, and conversely, between low academic achievement and non-certified teachers (Hanushek, 2011). Research has demonstrated that "students who receive three ineffective teachers in a row may achieve at levels that are as much as 50 percentile points lower than students who receive three highly effective teachers in a row –a differential large enough to distinguish students who may struggle to graduate from high school and those who go on to a competitive college or university" (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This is much more likely to occur in a poor districts where teacher turn-over rates are significantly higher than in affluent districts that are able to hire and retain highly-qualified, certified teachers (Guarino et al., 2011). This further demonstrates that the functionalist theory perspective and democratic ideal of education providing equal opportunity to all students is not occurring equitably in the United States public educational system.

Urban School Environments and Curriculum

In addition to a dearth of highly qualified teachers in urban schools, there is also a lack of access to high quality, rigorous curriculum, beginning as early as preschool. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that children from low-income families begin school at a distinct disadvantage to their more affluent peers, with one study providing evidence that children from affluent families outscore children from the bottom 20% of the income distribution by 106 points in early literacy (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). This early disadvantage can be attributed to the influence of differing language acquisition and language patterns that vary by social class. Language acquisition for a child begins immediately at birth from speech interactions with the mother and other family socialization. Basil Bernstein (2003) suggests that each class develops distinct patterns of speech, which reflect a particular linguistic code. Children born into a working class environment are oriented to a more restricted code where meanings of knowledge remain implicit, whereas upper class children use an elaborate code where meanings of speech are more explicit in context (Bernstein, 2003). Since the educational system is based on the cultural capital (the knowledge an individual learns from family and social class) of the dominant class, curriculum and language patterns within the school reflect an elaborated code, with which a working-class child may very well have no experience with prior to entering school. A preschool education can help to ameliorate the language differences between low-income and affluent children, however, as Darling-Hammond (2010) describes, many low-income children do not have access to high-quality, affordable early childhood learning opportunities. As children progress through the educational system, these disparities compound, resulting in students who reach high

school at achievement levels far below their more affluent peers.   Without additional support outside of school to reduce these disparities, the achievement gap can continue to grow and result in far fewer students from low-income, urban areas prepared for college and career.

College and Career Readiness

A primary goal of k-12 education is to prepare students for college and career; however, disparities in the educational system in the United States have resulted in a significant number of students, predominately those living in low-income, urban areas, ill-equipped for higher education. College and career readiness can be defined as a student who can "qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit bearing college course leading to a baccalaureate or certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental coursework" (Conley, 2012). Traditionally, high stakes assessments such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and grade point average (GPA) have been used to provide college enrollment advisors with a snapshot of applicant's anticipated potential for success in higher education and are the key determinants in qualifying a student for college. While this has been the primary method for accepting students into college, research has indicated that this reliance on standardized tests for college admissions often results in overlooking otherwise strong candidates, particularly students who are typically underrepresented in higher education, including students of color, first generation college students, and those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Sedlacek, 2011).

Current research has found that high stakes assessments and GPA are not the only indicators of future academic success, but that non-cognitive (social-emotional and

psychological) variables can also be effective sources of information in predicting student success in higher education (Conley, 2012). These non-cognitive measures, which evaluate characteristics such as motivation, leadership, and student perception, have been found to be highly predictive of college success when considered alongside of the traditional means of evaluating students (Ramsey, 2008; Sedlacek, 2011). Incorporating program services and interventions that address supporting students in developing these non-cognitive variables in college readiness preparatory programs while also supporting academic development out-of-school can have significant positive benefits, which could include developing essentials skills that can help prepare students for success in college, particularly for students living in low-income, urban areas and who might otherwise not receive this support (Milner IV et al., 2015).

The Need for Out-of-School Support in Urban Environments

Learning and development are multifaceted and as a result occur across numerous milieus. The many educational policies that have been enacted in an attempt to diminish education disparities often only focus on implementing improvements that fall within or relate to the traditional school day environment. While these improvements are vital, they neglect to address the fact that the majority of students' time is spent outside of school hours with families, friends, and the surrounding community (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2012a; Milner IV et al., 2015). Educational policies that only address academic growth and improvement during the traditional school day are missing integral opportunities to support the learning that takes place after school hours. In order to best address the educational disparities found in many urban areas and help all student become prepared for college and career, particularly those who have been historically

underrepresented in higher education, additional supports outside of the traditional school day must be included in the dialogue.

After-school programs have long been identified as a crucial aid in the learning process by providing continued educational support outside of school hours, particularly for low-income and ethnic minority students living in urban areas who might otherwise not have opportunities to participate in academic and socio-emotional enrichment after they leave school (Halpern, 2002). While after-school programs are not an educational panacea, research has demonstrated that consistent, sustained, and engaged participation in high quality after-school programs can promote positive academic and social-emotional growth and address some of the challenges children living in poverty face, such as providing a safe environment, fostering positive adult relationships, and increasing social capital (Hanlon et al., 2009; Holden et al., 2015; Miller, 2012; Vandell et al., 2007). Although much must still be done to improve public education, it is equally as important to identify and support programs and activities that foster positive youth development during out of school time in order to help diminish the educational disparities that exist in the United States.

History of After School Programs

In order to frame the context of after school programs in the 21st century, it is necessary to understand the background in which after school programs were originally developed. After-school programs first emerged in the late 1800's in the form of "boys clubs" (Halpern, 2002). The emergence of such clubs was the result of changing labor laws that limited child labor and the increase of schooling as a result of improved compulsory education laws (Ravitch, 1974). The combination of these laws resulted in an out-of-

school time period in which many children were left unsupervised while their parents were still at work. Increased instances of tenement overcrowding and decreased supervision pushed many children into the streets in the hours following school and provided a rationale for the establishment of organized after school activities for school aged children (Hall, 2014; Halpern, 2002). The white middle class who believed it was their moral obligation to save poor immigrant children from the hazards of the violence and crime found in inner cities also drove the original development of after-school programs (Hall, 2014). Initial after-school programs were often established in churches and storefronts where they offered a safe space of unstructured play and relaxation for children, but quickly expanded into more formalized organizations that included activities based on the interests of the child, including woodworking for boys and art and music classes for girls (Halpern, 2002).

For much of the past century, after school programs and clubs remained relatively unregulated, predominantly focused on the idea of structured play, and were extra-curricular oriented. Most programs were started by non-profit organizations that sought to provide a safe and caring space for children with little accountability as to the development and growth of academic or social skills in their program. Interest in establishing more developed after-school programs was brought to national attention in the 1970s and 1980s when the idea of the "latch-key child" emerged as more women entered the workforce full time and the idea of leaving children unsupervised was viewed as undesirable (Halpern, 2002). The development of more formal after school programs continued in the 1990s, when for the first time, public funds were provided to low-

income neighborhoods for after school programs through the federal Childcare and Development Program (Halpern, 2002).

Increased Accountability for After-School Programs

Much like other education reforms, the emergence of public and federal funding resulted in a trend of greater accountability for receiving after-school organizations. The past two decades have witnessed a shift to after-school programs, particularly in low-income and urban areas, that focus on both academic and socio-emotional enrichment rather than structured play in order to ameliorate the achievement gap that affects many of these neighborhoods (Halpern, 2002). Increased focus on these after-school programs has produced a plethora of research that has found that successfully implemented academic after-school programs can contribute to a variety of positive outcomes for children or all ages and backgrounds, which in turn, has led to the continued growth of this educational field.

After-School Program Outcomes

After-school programs, which are predominantly offered for free, are one way in which low-income students can access and benefit from extended learning time that promotes academic and social-emotional growth, adult supervision, and a safe and caring environment. Although after-school programs vary significantly in type, purpose, and structure, a review of the literature suggests that there are several common themes that emerge: providing enrichment that builds capacity and increases social capital, raising academic achievement, developing positive peer and mentor relationships, and providing a safe environment with adult supervision (Hanlon et al., 2009; Holden et al., 2015; Miller, 2012; Strobel et al., 2008; Vandell et al., 2007).

Socio-Emotional Growth. An array of research has examined the various positive outcomes that can result from participating in an after-school program (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Bae et al., 2010; Hanlon et al., 2009; Holden et al., 2015; Kidron et al., 2014; Kotloff et al., 2010; P. M. Little, 2014; Maynard et al., 2015; Miller, 2012; Savage, 2013; Vandell et al., 2007). Several studies examined how after-school programs can be capacity building, or can increase social capital (helpful social networks), with a particular focus on social growth for urban adolescents that can in turn lead to improved academic achievement (Holden et al., 2015; Miller, 2012; Vandell et al., 2007). These studies examined both quantitative and qualitative data on low-income adolescents from urban areas who engaged in after-school programs and found that there are numerous non-academic benefits of participation in after-school programs. An examination of over 1500 middle and high school adolescents in New York who participated in an after-school program that focused on health careers found that students felt an increase in self-confidence and in self-efficacy after participating in the program for 10 weeks (Holden et al., 2015). Additionally, these students reported feelings of increased motivation to participate in more health related after-school programs that would continue to help them feel successful. Similarly, a study that compared the effects of low-income, minority urban adolescents participation in after-school programs with peers who did not participate found that students who participated demonstrated significant gains in work habits, motivation, and task persistence, as well as increased positive interactions with peers and mentors (Vandell et al., 2007). Additionally, a 2012 study examined the development of social capital in urban adolescents and found that students who participated in an after-school program were successfully able to develop

social capital through heterogeneous, bridging relationships that helped students to shape their future social, educational, and professional aspirations (Miller, 2012). Each of these studies demonstrated types of improved behaviors that can significantly contribute to improved academic achievement in school and an increase in individual agency, which are key aspects of college and career readiness.

Academic Achievement. Other research has examined the academic achievement of students participating in an after-school program (Hanlon et al., 2009; Kidron et al., 2014; Malone, 2013; Vandell et al., 2007). These studies have found that participating in effective after-school programs can result in positive academic achievement, as well as providing students with resources for furthering their educational careers. The extended learning times examined in the studies found that academic enrichment that is outside of the traditional major content areas and curriculum offered during the regular school day can contribute to academic gains in these areas. Much of the academic enrichment offered in these after school programs was more interactive and project based than students in urban school districts typically receive and was more reflective of the type of curriculum present in an affluent, suburban school curriculum. This is significant because the result of the educational policy No Child Left Behind has been to increase the time spent on standardized test preparation in many urban schools in order to increase student scores; however, there is no indication that this results in true student learning and preparedness for 21st century careers (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Positive Relationships. Multiple studies examining after-school programs have focused on the various factors that increase student retention and participation in these programs (Deschenes et al., 2010; Jones & Deutsch, 2011; Strobel et al., 2008). These

studies found that positive relationships between students and program mentors result in increased after-school program retention and participation. Furthermore, this is important because positive relationships with peers and mentors have been identified as an essential support for increased student learning (Bryk et al., 2010). After-school programs typically offer opportunities for adolescents to work closely with teachers and mentors in small group settings that allow for positive relationships to develop. Many urban adolescents in large, low-income districts rarely have this opportunity to engage closely with a positive adult role model during regular school hours where class sizes are large, and teachers are typically overwhelmed with too many students. Research has indicated, however, that when adolescents are able to forge positive relationships with adult mentors, they are more likely to succeed in school because they know they have someone that is there to support them and that there is someone counting on them to succeed (Bryk et al., 2010). Effective after-school programs provide opportunities for adolescents to develop these relationships in ways that are not typically possible in school alone. This is similar to the types of relationship more affluent students regularly forge through participation in a variety of extra-curricular activities. Urban adolescents who do not have the opportunity to participate in after-school programs instead are more likely to use their time after school engaging with peers, who are unlikely to encourage positive behaviors and development.

Safe Environment. Other studies have indicated that after-school programs are able to effectively provide a safe environment in the hours after dismissal when many children would otherwise be unsupervised. Research has shown that crime and instances of violence among youth in urban areas most frequently occur between the hours of 3:00

pm and 6:00 pm, when most after-school programs take place (Hanlon et al., 2009; Milner IV et al., 2015). Adolescents who are left unsupervised during this time are at an increased risk of participating in or becoming victims of crime or violence; however, for those who participate in supervised after-school programs, this risk significantly diminishes. Studies that have investigated urban minority student perceptions of participation in after-school programs frequently disclose that students identify the safe and caring environment that after-school programs provide as a primary factor in their choice in participating (Holstead et al., 2015). This suggests that students in unsafe environments who are likely to be most affected by crime in urban areas would significantly benefit from a safe environment that simultaneously extends learning. Providing a safe environment for urban adolescents after school is one effective way to address the problems that result from concentrated poverty and economic disparities addressed by Anyon and Berliner. Since out-of-school dynamics are so influential on urban adolescents' lives, it is imperative that there be opportunities for students to engage in structured activities after school hours where students have a safe environment. Furthermore, participation in after-school programs that are specifically designed to help prepare students for college and career could lend to decreasing the college enrollment and graduation gaps that currently exist between low-income, racial and ethnic minority students and their more affluent peers.

Summary

The research surrounding federal policies affecting education, urban educational environments, the effects of poverty on student achievement, and after-school program outcomes indicates that there is a pressing need to support students living in urban

environments outside of the regular school hours. One means in which to provide support for students in these environments is through the effective implementation of after-school programs that provide opportunities for academic and socio-emotional growth and allow for development of positive relationships with peers and adult mentors, while supporting both students and families in preparing for higher education. Although much research has been conducted that demonstrates the positive outcomes of participation in after-school programs, there is a scarcity of research that addresses how participation in after-school programs contributes to college enrollment and what students who have matriculated through high school in an after-school program perceive to have the greatest influence on success in higher education. This study seeks to fill those gaps through an in-depth evaluation of a college readiness after school program and assessing program outcomes related to college enrollment and matriculation.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Objective

The objective of this research was to understand how the New Jersey Law Education and Empowerment Project after-school program in Newark, NJ contributes to urban adolescent students being prepared for and enrolling in post-secondary educational institutes. Current research on after-school programs does not demonstrate how effective after-school programs are helping urban adolescent students to succeed in college and which aspects of participation are most beneficial to access and enrollment in college, and this research aims to fill this gap. This study assesses the effectiveness of the NJ LEEP college-bound, after-school program, how it influences academic achievement, college enrollment, and how student perception of the program influences college readiness by an evaluation of program theory, an evaluation of program process, and an outcome evaluation. This study aims to garner a deep understanding of the theory, process, and outcomes of a college readiness after-school program and how it prepares urban adolescents for post-secondary education through the use of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Research Questions

   Component 1. The program theory evaluation is qualitative in nature and is guided by the following overarching question:

   What do key stakeholders identify as the primary goals and objectives of NJ LEEP?

   a. What are the characteristics of the intended program participants to be served?

    b.   What program services and interventions should be provided and how are these intended to meet program objectives?

Component 2. The program process evaluation is qualitative in nature and is guided by the following overarching question:

How have NJ LEEP's programs and services been implemented?

    a.   Do aspects and characteristics of the program services provide evidence of quality?

    b.   How do program structures and activities align with the articulated program theory and goals?

Component 3. The outcome evaluation uses statistical analysis of secondary data of academic records including GPA, college entrance exam scores, college enrollment data, and socio-emotional data through the use of the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) collected by NJ LEEP to examine the following overarching question:

To what extent has NJ LEEP achieved its objectives in terms of participant achievement in the areas of academic and socio-emotional outcomes?

The overarching research question for Component 3 will be answered through the analysis of the following questions:

1. How does the program affect the academic achievement of student enrollees?

2. Do students who participate in NJ LEEP have significant improvements in their college entrance exam (ACT/SAT) scores before and after the program?

3. Do students who participate in NJ LEEP demonstrate *college readiness* (as indicated by the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire)?

4. Which types of colleges and universities are most attended by NJ LEEP participants?

Research Design

The focus of this research was to examine the overall quality and effectiveness of NJ LEEP in regard to its program theory, the implementation of the college bound program, and the outcomes related to the effectiveness of the program. Thus, the research questions that guided this study were broken into three components: theory evaluation, process evaluation, and a program outcome evaluation. Components one and two, program theory and process evaluation, were guided by overarching research questions related to the purpose and goals of NJ LEEP (program theory) and the implementation of the program services (process evaluation). These questions were qualitative in nature and sought to garner a deep understanding of the program based on the perspectives of various key stakeholders in the program. The responses to these questions helped to further develop a detailed program logic model and helped to evaluate the program implementation. Component three was guided by overarching research questions related to the effectiveness of the program as evaluated by various outcome measures and relied predominately on quantitative methods.

Answering these research questions in component's one, two, and three required two different types of evaluation, including both formative and summative. Formative evaluations examine the effectiveness of the program theory and implementation to assess whether the program is implemented as intended and is aligned to the program theory. This type of evaluation lends to improving program implementation and relies predominately on qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews,

document analysis, and observations. Summative evaluations, which measure the program outcomes, provide assessment of the effectiveness of the program implementation and rely heavily on quantitative data, including: high school graduation rates, college enrollment, college entrance exam scores, and other data sources that demonstrate program effectiveness.

Program Evaluation Theory Conceptual Framework

This research was guided by program evaluation theory as the conceptual framework. Using program theory to guide a program evaluation helped the researcher facilitate the stakeholders in clarifying their program theory, and it also guided the process and outcome evaluations. This was accomplished through working with key stakeholders to create a change model (casual processes that must occur to reach desired outcomes) and an action model (actions or interventions in a program that produce the desired outcomes) to develop program theory (Chen, 2006).

In Figure 1 (Chen, 2006), the change model at the bottom of the figure represents the casual processes that are created by the program and consists of three components: intervention (program activities that work to change determinants and outcomes), determinants (mechanisms that mediate between the intervention and outcomes), and the outcomes (the anticipated effects or results of participation in the program). This model is an essential component to the development and clarification of program theory because it assumes that the effective implementation of the program intervention and activities will directly influence the determinants that will then in turn affect the outcomes.

The action model goes hand in hand with change model because it identifies the systematic plan for implementing the components that will make the change model

effective. The action model consists of six components, including: the implementing

organizations (the organization responsible for the configuration of staff, resources, and

activities needed to implement the program services), program implementers (the people

responsible for providing or delivering the resources, such as the staff, teachers, mentors,

etc.), associate organizations and community partners (outside partnerships and

organizations with whom the program works and collaborates with to implement the

program), the ecological context (the environmental components that interact with the

program), the intervention and service delivery protocols (the steps taken or curriculum

implemented to deliver the intervention), and the target population (the group of

individuals the intervention and the program is intended to serve).
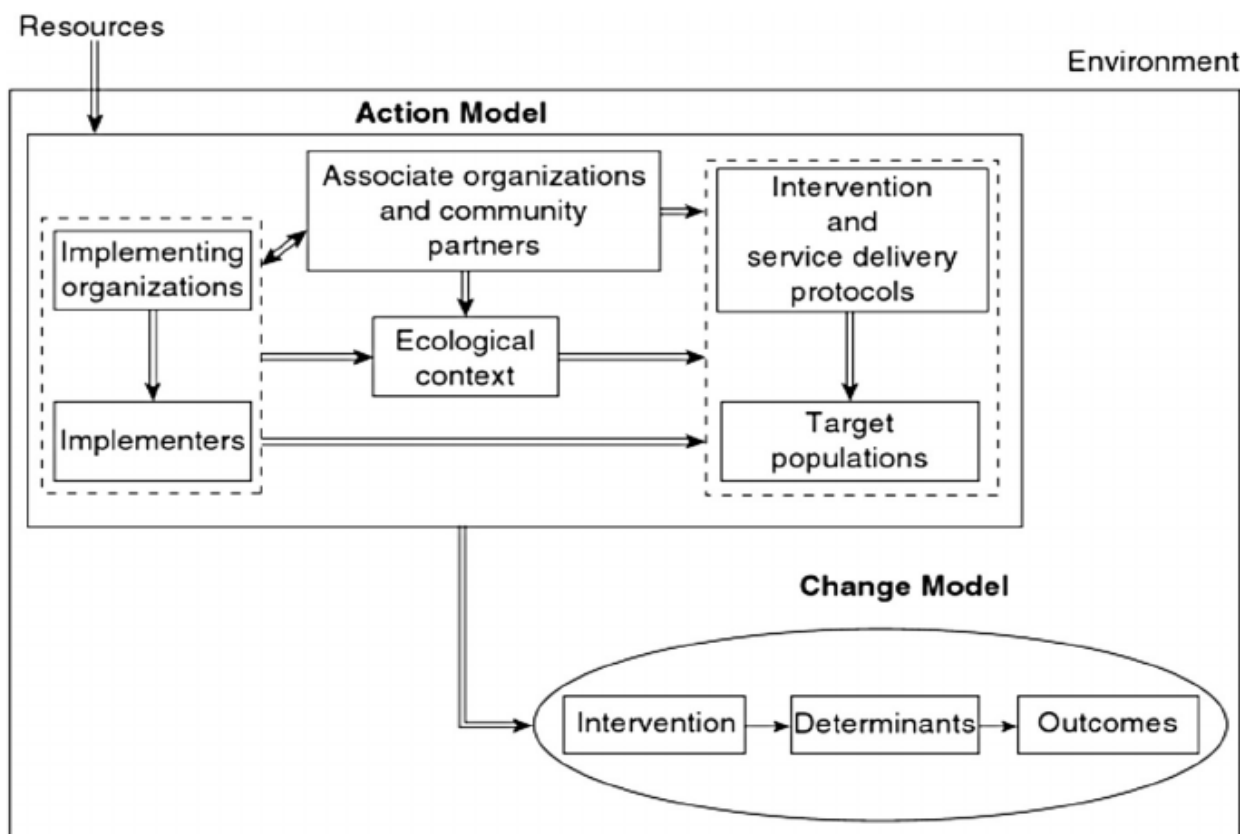
Figure 1. *Change Model (Chen, 2006)*

Theory driven evaluations provide a rich and holistic assessment of a program and its interventions including how and why a program reaches its program goals, or how and why it fails to do so. Furthermore, this conceptual framework lends to the use of a mixed methods approach by using triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data to facilitate clarification and development of program theory by key stakeholders and then empirically assessing program theory. This research used program theory as the conceptual framework for evaluation, which required the development of a program logic model and the identification of the program indicators (Table 1).

Formative Assessment: Theory and Process Evaluation. The theory and process evaluations were primarily qualitative in nature and contributed to the development of the program logic model, which facilitated in articulating the program theory and with the analysis of the program implementation. The program theory evaluation was used to determine if the program is grounded in research, logic, and that the program services will likely produce the desired outcomes. The program process evaluation was used to determine if the program was implemented as intended and to assess if and how the implementation produces the intended outcomes.

Summative Assessment: Outcome Evaluation. While the primary long-term objective of NJ LEEP is to socially and academically prepare low-income and first-generation students to graduate from college or university and obtain middle class employment, there are additional measurable short-term and intermediate goals as well. Table 1 represents a summary of program indicators that were evaluated, including the outcome description and source of data.

Table 1. *Program Indicators*

Goal		INDICATOR	DESCRIPTION	DATA SOURCE	COMPONENT ADDRESSED
INITIAL OUTCOMES		Initial change in attitude and behaviors	Participants begin to change academic behaviors and develop socio-emotional knowledge	One-on-one semi-structured interviews	2
		Effective implementation of program courses and curriculum	Effectiveness of Program services and activities implemented	OST Observational Instrument Document Review	2
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES		SAT: Verbal, Mathematics composite score or ACT composite Scores	Achievement on standardized college entrance exam	Program Records	3
		High School Graduation	Students do or do not graduate from High School	Program Records	3
		GPA	Student Grade Point Average	Program Records	3
		Non-Cognitive Questionnaire	This assessment predicts non-cognitive variables of college readiness	12th Grade students took the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire	3
LONG-TERM	OUTCOMES	College Enrollment	Students in the program enroll or do not enroll in college	Program Records	3
		Postsecondary Institution Type	2-year or 4-year postsecondary educational institute College Rank In-State or Out-of-State Public or Private institute	Program Records	3

Rationale for Design

As the purpose of this study was to understand how an after-school program prepares

students for success in college, the research employed a convergent parallel mixed-

methods case study design that was driven by program theory as the conceptual

framework. According to Creswell, a case study seeks to provide an in-depth picture of a particular, bounded case (2008). Focusing on the key stakeholders' perspectives and experiences in an after-school program that is dedicated to preparing students for college, using observational and document analysis data, as well as analyzing the quantitative data for student outcomes, provides an opportunity for an in-depth and comprehensive interpretation of the program's ability to help low-income and first-generation students prepare for and enroll in college. Creswell also advocates that a mixed methods design is pragmatic because a design that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods provides a more rich and reliable evaluation that only using one approach (J. D. Creswell, 2009). Engaging in this research through this interpretive lens made the mixed methods case study design most appropriate. A convergent parallel mixed methods design was used (Figure 2). Through this design, qualitative and quantitative data was collected in parallel, then analyzed separately, then merged in discussion to provide a deep understanding of the program (J. W. Creswell, 2014).
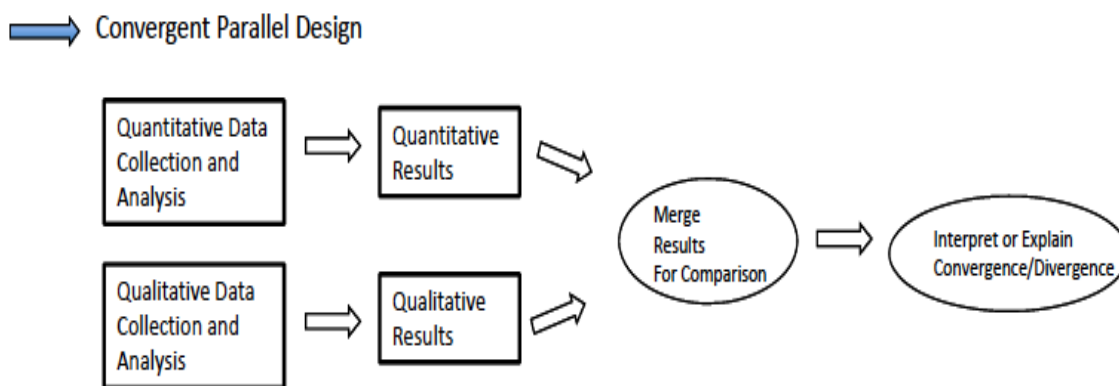
Figure 2: Convergent Parallel Design.   Source: (J. W. Creswell, 2014)

This study assessed whether the college-bound, after-school program, NJ LEEP, influences academic achievement, college enrollment, and students' perceptions of how the program influences college readiness. This evaluation includes an assessment of program theory, an assessment of program process, and an outcome assessment. This study aims to garner a deep understanding of the process and influence of how an after-school program prepares urban adolescents for post-secondary education through the use of secondary outcome data and the analysis of the perspectives of students who participated in the program, the perspectives of other key stakeholders, observations of program activities and document analysis. Both the problem and the research questions lend to the case study approach. According to Merriam, a case study must include an intensive description and analysis of a "single unit or bounded system" (1998). A case study as defined by Yin is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (1994). This research study corresponds fully with those definitions because it seeks to deeply examine a phenomenon within a single-bounded unit, the New Jersey Law and Education Empowerment Project (NJ LEEP) as the case. Additionally, Merriam argues that a case study is an appropriate inquiry approach when the researcher seeks to examine process through how or why questions, which is consistent with the research questions being addressed in this study (1998). Furthermore, this study includes a rich, thick description of the program itself (Chapter 4), which is an essential component of case study research.

This study takes an interpretive approach to case study design, which, as described by Merriam, includes rich, thick descriptions where the data are used to develop conceptual categories to illustrate, support, or challenge theory and are able to suggest relationships among the data or develop a new theory regarding the process of how after-school programs prepare students for success in college (1998). The decision to implement case study as the inquiry approach aligns closely with the contemporary definitions and understandings of case study and was the most appropriate approach for this research. Using both quantitative and qualitative data to examine this case helped to provide more depth to the understanding of the program.

Components 1 and 2: Formative Assessment.

Study Participants. Components 1 and 2 of this research included identifying and assessing program theory and evaluating the implementation and process of the program. As the research design is a case study, the participants comprised of the key stakeholders in the program, which included: current program administrators, program staff, current and former program participants, and parents of program participants. During the 2016-2017 school year, the program served 138 students in grades 9 through 12, 113 alumni, and over 200 family members. Program staff includes 3 program administrators, 10 staff members, and over 100 volunteers. The study sample included interviews with representatives from each group of stakeholders including program administrators, program staff members, current program participants, program alumni, and family members of program participants. Since one of the goals of this study is to fully understand the process of how the after-school program helps to prepare students for success in higher education, and since the number of available research participants is

limited, the sampling of participants continued until the categories and themes reached saturation. Any stakeholder in the identified categories who had been with the program for a minimum of nine months was considered for the study. Stakeholders who had been with NJ LEEP for fewer than nine months were excluded from the study, as they may not have yet been exposed to all the components of the program to provide effective and thorough feedback. Permission to gain access to current students, alumni, staff, and family members in the program was given by the executive director prior to the start of any data collection (Appendix B). Current students were required to obtain parental permission and give assent to participate in the study, following IRB approval. In total, 57 one on one, semi-structured interviews were conducted, including interviews with 4 program administrators, 9 staff members, 28 current student participants, 9 program alumni, and 7 program family members.

Qualitative observations took place of staff and students engaging in the after-school and weekend programs. Three formal observations using an observational instrument of each the after-school program components and the Saturday writing courses were conducted. Informal observations of the summer program classes and family meetings were also conducted to lend to the rich, thick description of the program. Observations included participating NJ LEEP students, staff, volunteers, and family members.

Data Collection. Multiple forms of data collection were used within Component 1 of this case study.   One primary source of data was the interviews with the research participants. Face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with students who currently participate in the program, staff members, family members, and

the administrators of NJ LEEP. Students who have graduated from the program and gone

on to higher education were also interviewed face-to-face if and when available;

however, due to many of these students residing outside of Newark, three of these

interviews took place through telephone conference. All interviews were audiotaped and

transcribed for content analysis. Study participants were offered the opportunity to

review the transcription for accuracy.

The interview protocols varied slightly for program directors, program staff,

program participants, program alumni, and participants' family members. Each protocol

included between eight and nineteen open-ended questions related to the program and the

study participants' experiences with the program (Appendix A). Study participants were

informed that the interview would be recorded and transcribed verbatim and signed a

participation consent form and audio recording consent form prior to the start of all

interviews. Student participants were required to obtain parental consent and give assent.

Respondents were given the opportunity to review and, if necessary, correct the interview

after it had been transcribed if they wished to do so.

Qualitative observations took place of students engaging in the after-school

program services. Each grade level in the program engages in a specific curriculum for

the course of the year, each specifically designed to prepare the students for particular

aspects college. Three observations of each of the four after-school programs and the

Saturday writing courses were conducted. Additional informal observations of

supplementary services, such as the parent workshops, and summer program instruction

were conducted as well to further lend to rich, thick description of the program. Field

notes were gathered by conducting observations as an observer and used the Out-of-

School Time (OST) Observational Instrument (Appendix C), an after-school program data collection tool used to "capture and rate observable indicators of positive youth development" and to provide a qualitative rating of program activities (Birmingham et al., 2005). The OST Observational instrument, developed by Policy Studies Associates, allows researchers to unobtrusively collect data on three major components of after-school programs that research has demonstrated indicate high quality services, including the types of activities that engage youth, the structures that facilitate activities, and the quality of interactions between the participating youth and the adults who work with them. The development of the OST Observational Instrument was based on a growing body of research that has identified key characteristics of high quality after school programs, which has found that "positive outcomes occur when adults deliberately create opportunities where activity content and instruction processes are both knowledge and youth centered and when adults use both structured and unstructured teaching strategies to promote learning and mastery" (Pechman et al., 2008).

The OST Observational Instrument has been used in multiple research studies and tested for validity and reliability, including use in The After-School Corporation (TASC) evaluations and the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development's Out-of-School Time Program for Youth initiatives (Birmingham et al., 2005; Pechman et al., 2008). The tool requires multiple 15 minute snapshot observations, during which time the researcher takes qualitative field notes and rates the quality of interactions and activities on a Likert-Scale across five domains: (1) youth relationship building, (2) youth participation, (3) staff relationship building, (4) staff instructional strategies, and (5) activity content and structure, all indicators of positive youth

development (Pechman et al., 2008). The construct validity of the instrument was

grounded in "research on OST programs that relate to positive development and

behavioral outcomes for youth" (Pechman et al., 2008; Vandell et al., 2007). Reliability

and internal consistency were measured through several approaches all which

demonstrated strong reliability, including: Pearson correlations, which established ratings

of co-observers, intra-class correlations, which established the correlations of ratings

across sites and observers, and Cronbach's alpha, which measured the degree to which

items assessed the underlying construct (Pechman et al., 2008). This instrument has been

used with student populations in k-12th grade from various ethnic, racial, and socio-

economic backgrounds with consistent validity. The instrument is available for free at

www.policystudies.com and no special permission is required to use the instrument.

The third form of data collection in Components 1 and 2 included document

analysis. This included an examination of public documents, comprising of program

pamphlets, curriculum materials, program records, and other relevant documents as they

became available. Documents were examined to provide details for the rich, thick

description of the program, as well as to provide an additional lens of the themes that

emerged from the interviews and observations. For this phase of the process evaluation,

"curriculum quality" was defined by the degree to which the program service delivery

protocols met four domains of curriculum quality standards identified by research on

what makes a quality curriculum (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008; Stabback, 2016). High-

quality curriculum is defined as addressing the aspects and characteristics of the

following four domains: 1) values each child and holds that every child matters equally,

2) is comprised of high-quality 'content' (up-to-date and relevant, suitably demanding,

appropriately sequenced and progressive, balanced, and integrated), 3) is well-organized, structured, and focused (clearly documented and comprises a number of inter-related components expressed in consistent and coherent documents), and 4) is underpinned by a set of theoretical and philosophical beliefs that are research based regarding best practices for how children learn (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008; Stabback, 2016).

Data Analysis and Interpretation. The data analysis of Components 1 and 2 of this case study took place continuously throughout the data collection period. Interviews were transcribed, and the data analyzed through the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo, which was used to help organize data and create themes and categories as data collection continued. The codes emerged from the data analysis and were not pre-determined. The interpretation of the data included a deep description of the program followed by an analysis of the data for both themes and issues related to how the after-school program prepares students for success in higher education, how the program is implemented, and how these align to the program theory. Member checking was an integral part of the data analysis process. Observational data collected through the Out-of-School Time Observational Instrument was used to provide a qualitative rating of the effectiveness of NJ LEEP in implementing research based high quality practices in after school programs based on the five domains of youth development. For the document analysis, the documents and materials were meticulously reviewed, qualitative notes were taken, and indicators of the four domains of high-quality curriculum content and implementation were identified as highly evident and consistent (evidence found across all curricular resources consistently), moderately evident and inconsistent (evidence found across the majority of the curricular resources), or infrequent and absent from the

materials (evidence absent from the majority of the curricular resources or very limited). This all contributed to the evaluation of program process.

Component 3: Summative Assessment

Study Participants. The outcome evaluation component of this research predominately used secondary data collected by NJ LEEP during the program's history from 2007 through 2017. The executive director of NJ LEEP, Matthew Feinstein, approved access to program data and records for secondary data analysis (Appendix B), following IRB approval. This included demographic and academic data regarding the current participants (n=138) and program alumni (n=113). Additionally, 12th grade students in NJ LEEP during the 2016-2017 school year (n=18) were selected as study participants to take the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to assess socio-emotional predictors of college readiness.

Study Variables and Measurements. The variables in this study included student academic achievement outcome data and college readiness. Academic achievement was measured through multiple means, including high school grade point average (GPA), college enrollment, and SAT/ACT scores. College readiness was measured by the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) to assess students' socio-emotional readiness for higher education. Data were collected on the following demographic variables to provide descriptive data on program participants: gender, race/ethnicity, low-income, first-generation, ESL status, and high school (type: public, private, charter, magnet). The demographic data were previously collected by NJ LEEP and required no additional data collection.

Since high student academic achievement is a primary goal of NJ LEEP, this variable was measured multiple ways. High school GPA is a common identifier of academic achievement. GPA is scored from 0.0-4.0 with a higher GPA indicating greater academic achievement. In this study, GPA scores were analyzed as a continuous variable. The types of higher educational institution program participants enrolled in, either a 2-year or 4-year, public or private, and in-state or out-of-state, were used to measure college enrollment and were collected through program records. These variables were measured as categorical variables. College enrollment data also included rank, based on Barron's college ranking, on a scale of 1-5. This variable was analyzed as a continuous variable.

In order to apply for college, students must take college entrance exams including either the SAT or ACT. The SAT critical reading and mathematics composite score is scored on a range from 200-1600 and the ACT is scored on a range from 11-36. Students are only required to take one of these college entrance exams, and therefore not all students will have scores for both. As a result, the College Board releases concordance tables to demonstrate comparable scores no matter which test a student takes (Table 2). For the purpose of this study, all college entrance scores were converted to the ACT single score and analyzed as a continuous variable ranging from 11-36. Writing scores for both the ACT and SAT were excluded from this research as many universities do not require submission of the writing score and the ACT writing assessment is optional to take, which could result in incomplete data if this score were included. The SAT and ACT were developed by the College Board and are routinely analyzed for validity and reliability.

Table 2. *ACT and SAT Concordance Table. Source: College Board www.act.org*

Concordance between ACT Composite Score and Sum of SAT Critical Reading and Mathematics Scores

SAT CR+M (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score	SAT CR+M (Single Score)
1600	36	1600
1540–1590	35	1560
1490–1530	34	1510
1440–1480	33	1460
1400–1430	32	1420
1360–1390	31	1380
1330–1350	30	1340
1290–1320	29	1300
1250–1280	28	1260
1210–1240	27	1220
1170–1200	26	1190
1130–1160	25	1150
1090–1120	24	1110
1050–1080	23	1070
1020–1040	22	1030
980–1010	21	990
940–970	20	950
900–930	19	910
860–890	18	870
820–850	17	830
770–810	16	790
720–760	15	740
670–710	14	690
620–660	13	640
560–610	12	590

The Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), which NJ LEEP staff administered to the 12th grade program participants, measures variables of college readiness. This instrument is used to measure socio-emotional variables that demonstrate adjustment, motivation, and student perceptions of college rather than the traditional verbal and quantitative measures used to assess academic preparedness for higher education and has a tested reliability of .85 (Sedlacek, 2011). This questionnaire is a self-reported survey consisting of 23 questions, including 18 Likert-scale, 2 multiple choice, and 3 open-ended questions. The NCQ analyzes 8 variables that demonstrate readiness for college with possible score ranges following each variable (Table 3), including positive self-concept (7-27), realistic self-appraisal (4-14), understands and knows how to handle racism/navigate the system (5-25), long-range goals (3-15), strong support person (3-15),

leadership (3-15), community (2-8), and nontraditional knowledge acquired (2-8) for a

total possible score range of 29-125.

The NCQ has been shown to have validity in predicting the success (grades and

retention) of students in higher education in multiple studies and is used as a predictor for

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for students to receive the Gates Millennium

Scholar award (Ramsey, 2008; Sedlacek, 2011). The NCQ was measured on a

continuous scale with higher scores indicating higher levels of college readiness. This

questionnaire is available in the public domain and therefore no special permission is

needed to use this instrument.

Table 3. *Non-cognitive variables assessed through the NCQ. Source: (Sedlacek, 2011)*

Variable #	Variable Name
1	*Positive Self-Concept* • **Demonstrates confidence, strength of character, determination, and independence.**
2	*Realistic Self-Appraisal* • **Recognizes and accepts any strengths and deficiencies, especially academic, and works hard at self-development. Recognizes need to broaden his/her individuality.**
3	*Understands and Knows How to Handle Racism (the System)* • **Exhibits a realistic view of the system based upon personal experience of racism. Committed to improving the existing system. Takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs, but is not hostile to society, nor is a "cop-out." Able to handle racist system.**
4	*Prefers Long-Range to Short-Term or Immediate Needs* • **Able to respond to deferred gratification, plans ahead and sets goals.**
5	*Availability of Strong Support Person* • **Seeks and takes advantage of a strong support network or has someone to turn to in a crisis or for encouragement.**
6	*Successful Leadership Experience* • **Demonstrates strong leadership in any area of his/her background (e.g. church, sports, non-educational groups, gang leader, etc.).**
7	*Demonstrated Community Service* • **Participates and is involved in his/her community.**
8	*Knowledge Acquired in or about a Field* • **Acquires knowledge in a sustained and/or culturally related way in any field.**

Procedures. NJ LEEP has already collected the data on academic outcome

variables through program records. The data were accessed following IRB approval.

Data regarding college readiness (NCQ) were collected once for senior student program participants (n=18) during the end of their senior year. This is a multiple choice and short answer questionnaire that each student completed during a 15-25-minute period during the regularly scheduled after-school college application program. The survey was self-completed by each individual student. NJ LEEP staff administered the survey.

      Statistical Analysis and Analytic Methods. The data analyses were conducted in two stages. The first stage included the descriptive (univariate) analysis of the demographic information to describe and summarize the frequencies and proportions of gender, race/ethnicity, low-income, first-generation, ESL, and high school type of the study participants. Descriptive analysis of college enrollment was used to describe and summarize the frequencies and proportions of the colleges in which NJ LEEP graduates enrolled. Descriptive analysis of the NCQ variables was used to describe and summarize the frequencies and proportions of the variable scores to determine socio-emotional college readiness for NJ LEEP seniors.

      The second stage of data analysis included the bivariate analyses of the study variables considered continuous including GPA and ACT scores. First, the paired t-test was used to compare student GPA during the first year of participating in NJ LEEP (9th grade) and the last year of participation (12th grade). Second, the paired t-test was used to compare student ACT diagnostic pre-test and the final ACT score. All statistical analyses were conducted through SPSS statistical software.

The Researcher's Role

The nature of this research required that I be the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis for the qualitative components. This necessitated that I identify

any personal beliefs, biases, and values that might influence either the collection or analysis of data. My perceptions of preparing urban adolescents for higher education has been shaped by my experiences as a high school English teacher and Reading Specialist in two urban area high schools, both of which were resolute in their mission to prepare students for college or university as a primary goal. These teaching experiences allowed me to work directly with students in preparation for college and required that I not only help prepare students academically for higher education, but that I provide additional college related support in preparing for college entrance exams, completing college applications, and developing interview and other professional skills. These experiences have shaped my beliefs that subject area academic support alone is not enough to prepare urban adolescents to get into and graduate from college or university and that many students require supplementary assistance. Even though these experiences have helped guide me towards my interest in preparing urban adolescents for higher education, I did not have a preconceived notion of precisely what is necessary and most helpful or beneficial to students once they are actually in college. Although I do have a personal belief that academic preparation alone is not enough to help students graduate from college, every effort was made to ensure objectivity throughout both the data collection and analysis processes.

I did not have a prior relationship with NJ LEEP that would influence or bias the outcomes of this case study. The relationship was forged through a mutual academic connection and a shared interest in understanding the process of how to best prepare low-income, first-generation urban adolescents for success in higher education. The director of the program has made NJ LEEP available for this case study and given permission to

access students, staff, and any necessary documents following IRB approval (Appendix

B).

Discussion of Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

The mixed-methods approach to this study helped to increase validity through

triangulation of data. Throughout the research process, I made sure to follow multiple

procedures to check for accuracy in order to further increase the validity of this study.

Part of this evaluation included a rich, thick description of the program. This detailed

account from multiple perspectives helped to increase accuracy of the analysis by

providing readers with the impression of a shared experience. In order to increase

authenticity and accuracy, I employed the validity strategy of *member checking*

throughout certain stages of the data analysis process.   The research participants were

given the opportunity to examine the program description, major findings, and themes

and were provided an opportunity to comment and provide feedback before completion

of the study. Triangulation of the data during analysis also contributed to increasing the

validity of this evaluation, as evidence from different sources and perspectives provided

support for the justification of the interpretation of the data.   In addition to taking steps to

increase the validity of the study, I also focused on making this research reliable by

clearly documenting each step of the procedures used, including documenting the syntax

used during the quantitative analysis. Furthermore, each transcript was carefully checked

to ensure there were no major errors made in the transcription process. While

generalizability is not a typical goal of program evaluation or case study research, the in-

depth description of the program will allow the reader to make connections to the

phenomenon through shared experiences. This research could also be used as a starting

point for examining several cases in future research to identify themes and patterns across

cases.

Human Subject Research

Prior to beginning the research study, a full Institutional Review Board review was

required because the study included a vulnerable population of children under the age of

18. Although permission was obtained to work with the program participants and access

program data from the executive director of NJ LEEP (Appendix B), both parental

consent and student assent were required for student participation in the research study.

The program directors, staff, and participating students received an Informed Consent

that communicated their status as a study participant, the study goals, the type of data to

be collected, the nature of their voluntary participation, the potential risks and benefits, as

well as their right to withdraw or withhold information, and information on contacting the

researcher and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were given adequate

time to review the consent prior to signing and submitting the form. Participant

confidentiality was preserved by de-identifying data and keeping all information and files

on a password protected computer.

This study posed minimal risks to study participants. There are several benefits to

study participants that were disseminated prior to beginning the research. Participants

will benefit from participating in research that could potentially lead to improvements in

their experience with NJ LEEP. Study participants who provided feedback on their

experience within the program may have their feedback implemented into program

changes and improvements. Program directors and staff received feedback on areas of

program effectiveness and areas in need of improvements, including recommendations

for implementing program changes and improvements as a result of this study.

Chapter 4: New Jersey Law and Education Empowerment Project

NJ LEEP Overview

New Jersey Law and Education Empowerment Project (NJ LEEP) is an out-of-school-time program for adolescents enrolled in grades 9-12 in Newark, NJ and surrounding areas. The program, founded in 2006, serves traditionally underserved youth through a college-bound program by providing both academic and social-emotional support to its participants, as well as by offering outreach to the students' families and program alumni. The program's overarching goal is help program participants graduate from high school and matriculate in competitive four-year colleges and universities in order to help break the cycle of poverty in the local community. NJ LEEP works to meet this goal by providing four years of intensive and continuous college-bound, law-focused educational curriculum after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer, and by assisting program participants and family members with the college application process and providing support to program alumni during their post-secondary experience. The role of this program is especially significant in the greater Newark community where many students come from low-income backgrounds and have multiple risk factors that limit opportunities to enroll in and graduate from higher educational institutes.

The Newark Context

The city of Newark, New Jersey, where NJ LEEP is situated, is the state's largest city by population (277,140 persons), encompasses the state's largest public school system, Newark Public Schools, and is one of the most diverse cities in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The racial makeup of the city includes 52% black or African American, 34% Hispanic, and 12% white, many of whom are immigrants from southern Europe,

Portugal, and Brazil, while the remaining 2% of the population include individuals who identify as other races or two or more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). In addition to being a largely populated and diverse city, Newark is also the seventh most impoverished city in the country, and the most impoverished city in the state of New Jersey. When compared to the rest of New Jersey, Newark has 42% of children living below the poverty level and reports a median income of $27,038 for families with children, whereas the rest of New Jersey reports 14% of children living below the poverty level and a median income of $83,208 for families with children (Russakoff, 2015).

The Newark Public School system serves approximately 35,000 students, many who come from low-income backgrounds, in 66 schools, including charter and magnet schools. This district faces many challenges similar to other large, urban districts with comparable demographics across the country. These challenges include reports of high student dropout rates, low levels of proficiency in math and reading, low attendance rates, and high levels of teacher absences and teacher turnover (Newark Public Schools, 2016). Reports from the Newark Public School website further show that in the 2011-2012 school year, according to the results of the American College Testing (ACT), only 19% of 11th grade Newark Public School students were on track to be college ready in English, 17% in Math, 12% in Reading, and 4% in Science (Newark Public Schools, 2016). Furthermore, data show that only 42% of students were able to graduate through passing the New Jersey High School Performance Assessment (HSPA), a math and reading proficiency exam, in 2013, and the overall graduation rate for NPS in that same year was 68%.

The Newark Public Schools have set as a primary goal through their strategic plan to strengthen academic and student supports to use "consistent, district-wide approach to instruction that helps develop students' college-and career-readiness skills" through improved course offerings, increased opportunities for hands-on learning through rigorous, relevant, and engaging instruction, and providing research-based interventions and supports for students who need them most (Newark Public Schools, 2016). Academic achievement outcomes in Newark Public Schools have improved slightly over the past several years, potentially as a result of the preliminary implementation of the district's strategic plan; however, too few students in Newark are graduating, and of those that do, many do not go on to higher education, and of those who do, even fewer graduate.

In recent years, an increasing amount of charter schools have open within the district, including many local schools that have been converted into public charters. This movement towards increasing the charter school presence in Newark is a result of a collaboration between former Mayor Cory Booker, former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and supported by funding from Startup: Education, an organization launched in 2010 by Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan (Kim et al., 2015). Funding from this partnership contributed to the widespread growth of charter schools within the district, which was supported by former superintendent Cami Anderson, who helped to create a universal enrollment system for all Newark public and charter schools in an attempt to provide equity to all students. As a result of this movement, a large portion of Newark public school students enroll in charter schools.

A report from the Newark Schools Research Collaborative with Rutgers University-Newark Education Research Collaborative found that for student cohorts graduating between 2004 and 2011, college enrollment peaked at approximately 60% of graduates, with nearly 70% of these students enrolling a 2-year rather than a 4-year college (Backstrand et al., 2014). Furthermore, of these Newark Public School students who went on to enroll in college, only 25% of the students went on to earn a college degree, with the vast majority of the degrees conferred from schools in northern New Jersey, including Essex County Community College, Rutgers University-Newark and New Brunswick, Montclair State, and Kean University (Backstrand et al., 2014). The results of this report in conjunction with Newark Public School district data show that Newark is in need of additional educational supports to meet the district goals to improve the academic achievement of its students and increase the number of students who are prepared to enroll in and graduate from college or university.

Program History

Craig Livermore founded NJ LEEP in 2006 to help meet the educational needs of the local Newark community. Livermore, prior to founding NJ LEEP, worked for Legal Outreach, a college bound access program in New York City that uses an intensive law-education programming model to help urban adolescents from underserved communities matriculate to and graduate from college or university. Identifying a need for a similar program in the Newark community, Mr. Livermore, with the assistance of Legal Outreach founder, James O'Neal, support from the newly elected Newark Mayor at the time, Cory Booker, and backing from Seton Hall Law School, founded a similar program to Legal Outreach, called New Jersey Law and Education Empowerment Project (NJ

LEEP), in the central business district of the city of Newark. The first incoming class to the college bound program in Newark was recruited during the winter of 2006 and began in the summer of 2007 with the Summer Law Institute (SLI). Since then, ten cohorts of students have matriculated through NJ LEEP and 100% of the students who have graduated from the program have gone on to enroll in colleges and universities.

Current Program

Since its founding in 2006 with an incoming 9th grade class, NJ LEEP has expanded its programming to serve students for all four years of high school and through enrollment and matriculation in higher education. During the 2016-2017 school year, NJ LEEP served 138 students, including 96 girls and 42 boys, and remains in contact with many of 113 program alumni. The program participants during this same academic year included 37 freshmen, 34 sophomores, 35 juniors, and 32 seniors. In addition to serving 138 students, NJ LEEP staff also provides outreach and support to over 200 family members of program participants. Weekly after-school programming includes a life skills class, constitutional law debate, ACT prep, a college application program (CAP) and seminar class for seniors. NJ LEEP participants are also required to attend weekly Saturday writing and grammar classes and participate in a five-week program each summer. Students who participate in NJ LEEP are held to high academic standards and are required to arrive promptly to weekly sessions and submit their report cards each quarter so that the program staff can ensure students are keeping their grades up in addition to participating in the program.   Students who have more than two C's or worse are brought before the Honor Council, which is NJ LEEP's judiciary body. The students of the Honor Council work to find ways to support students after reviewing the Personalized

Improvement Plans (PIPs), place the students on probation, or suggest expulsion from the program if the student is a repeat offender. The academic culture of NJ LEEP is intended to create an environment of discipline, rigor, and student engagement that is meant to prepare students for the intensive academic demands they will encounter in higher education.

Program Participants

Students who participate in NJ LEEP come from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds that represent the diversity of the greater Newark area. NJ LEEP strives to recruit students who are low-income, defined by NJ LEEP as a family of four with an income of $70,000 or less, or first generation, defined as a student whose parents have not earned a college degree in the United States. Historically, the program has not consistently achieved this target student goal; however, this has been made a recruitment priority in the past several years, resulting in over 75% of the 2016-2017 freshmen class and 100% of the 2017-2018 freshman class being either low-income or first generation. Currently, the program serves a diverse population of 138 students in grades 9 through 12, including 65% African American, 30% Latino, and 5% Asian, white, or biracial students, which closely reflects the diversity of the city itself. While the majority of program participants live in Newark, many come from surrounding areas, where participants attend over 20 different public, magnet, charter, and private schools.

Although NJ LEEP serves students from a range of socio-economic backgrounds, over 65% of program participants qualify for free or reduced lunch, indicating that the majority of student participants come from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Research has shown that children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and particularly those

from racial and ethnic minorities, have an increased risk of low academic achievement and school drop out if other mediating factors are not present, and that these students benefit more from additional educational supports than their more affluent peers (Bellibas, 2016; Lam, 2014). In addition to serving program participants in grades 9 through 12, NJ LEEP provides supplementary support to students who have graduated from the program and have entered into college or university, which includes 113 alumni. Family members of program participants and alumni also receive services from NJ LEEP such as home visits, parent workshops, regular progress reports, and tracking of family and student goals and objectives.

Program Components Overview

NJ LEEP has a multifaceted approach to its curriculum that includes after school law-related education courses, mentoring, college-bound programing, Saturday grammar and writing courses, summer programing, and family enrichment. This comprehensive system is intended to facilitate college readiness through academic achievement, provide support throughout the college application process, educate family members on the college bound process, and use law-related curriculum to teach transferable skills and habits that will assist students in succeeding in higher education and beyond. This is primarily achieved through scaffolding skill building by providing academic foundations in the freshmen year curriculum starting with the Summer Law Institute and building on those skills in each successive year through after school programs, Saturday writing classes, and summer programs. In addition to essential academic skill building, the four-year curriculum also includes other mechanisms that lend to the implementation of the program. Program participants and family members build strong relationships with staff

members and mentors through the continuity of the four-years of the program that contribute to beneficial youth development. Positive peer relations with other academically committed students also develop through the frequency of the time spent with peers after school, on weekends, and over the summer months. Each of these components is intended to work together to develop academically strong and college ready adolescents who are empowered to take on the challenges of college level work with the help of a sophisticated support system of adult mentors, family members, and peers.

The NJ LEEP program year starts each summer when the students participate in a course that will help prepare them for success in the upcoming school year. The summer programs are intensive five-week long courses or four weeklong internships that run from 9am to 4 pm, five days a week. The purpose of the summer component is to closely align with the grade level after-school program and Saturday writing class by setting a foundation for what students will continue to work on throughout their upcoming year. The students enter into the program with the Summer Law Institute before their 9th grade year. In 10th grade, students participate in internships in various law offices and corporations throughout the greater Newark area. During their 11th grade year, students take an intensive ACT preparatory course. Students begin to prepare to apply to college in the summer before their 12th grade year with the summer College Application Process course.

Students also participate in after-school programming one to two days per week, Monday through Thursday, from 4 pm to 6 pm at the NJ LEEP headquarters in downtown Newark. Grade level specific curriculum begins for students in 9th grade with

a life skills course, continues in 10th grade with constitutional law debate, followed by an ACT preparatory course in 11th grade, and commences with the College Application Process (CAP) program during senior year. Each of these courses builds on the materials and skills learned in the previous years and is also intended to correlate with the Saturday writing courses and associated summer programs. The after-school programs run from the start of the school year in September through the end of the school year in June, following the Newark Public School District calendar for regular holidays and breaks.

Students are required to participate in Saturday writing courses in addition to the after-school programming during the school year. The Saturday writing classes take place two to three times per month between the hours of 10 am to 12:00 pm. Much like the after-school courses, these writing courses are scaffolded to build on the writing skills mastered during the previous year. By the time the students reach the end of their senior year, they should be fully prepared to write analytical legal briefs and college level research papers.

Program Recruitment Process

It is the goal of NJ LEEP to recruit students prior to the start of their 9th grade year and retain these same students throughout the four years of the program, and then follow matriculated students to provide academic and emotional support once enrolled in post-secondary education. The recruitment of NJ LEEP program participants begins in the winter of each year when the Legal Education Director reaches out to and visits elementary, middle, and high schools located throughout Newark and the surrounding areas to meet with 8th grade students and continues through the end of the five-week long Summer Law Institute (SLI). The entire recruitment process requires four different touch

points with the students before they are officially accepted into the program. Much like

the program itself, the recruitment process is thorough and rigorous. Staff members of

NJ LEEP describe this arduous recruitment and application process as necessary to

ensure they are attracting the right kind of student who will be successful in the program,

and who meets the requirements of low-income or first generation. One staff member

described the necessity of the drawn out process a result of the specific type of student

they are looking for:

> We are looking for a certain level of hunger, and so by having four different touch points, you know the only way the person is getting to the individual interview is by having something, some level of go-getter-ness, that's really important. The other part is what we are looking for, from say, the group interview, to the individual interview. We're, one, looking to make sure the student is low-income or first generation… Then we're looking for things like grades, grades are a really good indicator of effort…And then from that, we're looking for that level of commitment, that level of openness, and ya know, the ability to take feedback, how hungry they are, things like that. What we are screening against is, we don't want people who are here looking to build their resume and looking like they are going to use us and just checking a box.

The initial presentation that the Legal Education Director makes in primary and

middle schools in the greater Newark area is the first step of the recruitment process. In

the 2016-2017 school year, the Legal Education Director reached out to over 50 schools

and was invited to conduct the recruitment presentation in 28 schools. During this

presentation, NJ LEEP staff members work with school administrators, faculty, and

students to bring awareness to the program by offering interactive experiences that allow

prospective students to get a sense of the opportunities they will participate in if they are

accepted to the program. The NJ LEEP team demonstrates the various facets of the four-

year curriculum, including mock trials, constitutional law debates, and collaborative

group experiences working with real criminal law cases, in an attempt to engage students

in the variety of learning experiences that take place at NJ LEEP. In order to help get

students excited about the program, the presentation includes teaching an interesting case,

described by one staff member,

> It's a famous case called *McQueen vs. Dudly and Stephens*. The kids love it
> because it has cannibalism and murder. It gets 8th graders excited about the law,
> right? So, I teach the case and we have a thinking activity, should so and so get
> punished and what should the punishment be and was it murder? What if I told
> you they needed to do it to survive? And so, we have this sort of critical thinking
> activity with groups ranging from as small as 10, and I've given this presentation,
> though I adapt for a size, to a class of about 300.

The recruitment presentations can vary greatly between schools. While some

schools invite NJ LEEP to come spend the day and present to each class or in small

groups, other schools may only allow a 30-minute presentation to an entire grade, which

can change both the format of the presentation and the interest they are able to generate in

the program.   Although the Legal Education Director reaches out to many schools across

the greater Newark area, including traditional public, charter, and private schools, one

staff member acknowledges that they do not always get an equal representation of all

types of schools because "anecdotally, the schools that are the most responsive tend to be

charter schools, and so I think there's a risk of over sampling from charter schools." Of

the 35 schools NJ LEEP visited in the past three years for recruitment, almost one-third

were charter, magnet, or alternative schools. While in-school presentations are the

primary recruitment method, NJ LEEP staff further recruits students into the program via

word of mouth, as well as traveling to community resource fairs to share information

regarding the program.

Following the recruitment presentations, any students who are interested in the

program are encouraged to apply by completing a pre-application during the site visit.

NJ LEEP invites all students who have completed a pre-application to participate in a group interview. The group interview is a time for both staff and current NJ LEEP program participants to gauge how students interact in a group setting, respond and adapt to challenges, and manage feedback. The group interview is a two-hour-long event where students participate in various group games that require the trust of teammates and critical thinking in order to succeed. Several staff members describe this step of the process as a way to identify who is and who is not a good fit for the program, "we just observe the students and write notes about like you know, ok, this person was really disruptive and really rude, and they probably shouldn't be accepted. This person was great, very engaging, asked good questions, we should, you know, take special interest," and "we kind of watch how they interact with people, like who only talks to their friends, who's in a corner, who's a natural leader." The staff members use these observation notes to help determine who to invite back for the individual family interviews.

Another essential component of the group interview is the parent meeting that takes place while the students are participating in the group activities. Parents are invited during this time to learn more about NJ LEEP from the Managing Director of Programs and to receive the full application that students are required to complete. This provides parents with an opportunity to learn about how NJ LEEP is run, the various components of the program, and to get a full understanding of the expectations of the program for both the student and family members. The parent meeting is a critical piece of the application process because parents are required to continue to be involved in the program if their child is accepted into NJ LEEP.

Following the group interviews, students are invited to complete a full application that includes two personal essays, short answer questions about student aspirations and educational activities, two teacher recommendations, a copy of the student report card, and a parent statement that describes their aspirations for their child and their commitment and involvement in their child's education. The application asks students to include information regarding demographics, parental educational attainment, and income. The full application requires that the student be highly motivated in order to complete all components and have the support of a parent and two teachers. All students who attend the group interview, appear to be a good fit, complete and submit the full application, and meet the low-income or first-generation requirement are invited to participate in a 30-minute individual family interview with NJ LEEP. During this interview, staff members are looking for students who are committed to being challenged, have a desire to deepen their educational experience, and demonstrate their dedication to participating constructively in the program. Based on the individual family interviews, NJ LEEP accepts approximately 50 rising 9th grade students to participate in the five-week long Summer Law Institute (SLI). The SLI is a criminal law course that serves as an opportunity to challenge students and introduce them to the academic rigor of NJ LEEP's program, while simultaneously providing a final chance for staff to determine which students are the best fit for the program based predominantly on student attendance, participation, and assignment completion.

While NJ LEEP is not exclusively looking for students who excel academically, they are looking for students who are committed to putting forth a diligent effort, working hard when challenged, and engaging productively with peers and staff.

Participating in the SLI is the final step of the recruitment and application process. Students who demonstrate these attributes are invited to join the four-year, college-bound program following the completion of the SLI. Each year, approximately 35 students from the Summer Law Institute are invited to participate in the full four-year program.   It is the goal of NJ LEEP to retain all students who enter during their 9th grade year until they graduate from high school in order to have the greatest influence on college enrollment and matriculation.

Freshman Year

Summer Law Institute. Rising 9th graders enter NJ LEEP through the Summer Law Institute, which is the final segment of the program application process and works to set the tone of a rigorous academic environment.   The purpose of this program is to introduce students to criminal trials and procedural law, while simultaneously challenging even the most advanced students. The class is set up in a lecture hall style classroom at Seton Hall Law School. Each student is assigned a seat and required to display a nametag, which helps the teachers and guest speakers get to know student names.

Of all of the summer programs, SLI is the most structured and rigorous in assignments, dress, behavior, and expectations in order to set a high standard for students entering the four-year, college-bound program. When students arrive, they are required to line up silently outside of the classroom prior to the start time of 9 am and proceed into the room in an orderly fashion. While the students slowly advance into class, the Legal Education Director stands at the door and welcomes each student with a handshake and a friendly greeting as he or she walks in the classroom, helping to model professional

salutations. If anyone talks or behaves inappropriately, all of the students must turn around and start over, which provides students the opportunity to hold each other accountable. When one student speaks out in line, mumbles and groans can be heard throughout the hallway as the Legal Education Director calls the students out of the classroom and has the line move back to start the process over again. The second time through, the students all manage to remain silent until each student is greeted by the instructor and filed into their seat. Although this can seem tedious each morning, the staff indicated that it helps to create a community within the students to hold each other accountable and to establish behavioral expectations.

One vital condition of this course is that all participants must dress business professional each day and maintain a professional decorum, which is intended to establish habits that students will need for their future careers. The young men come dressed in their best suits, or at least slacks and a button-down shirt, some with ties, some without. The young ladies are primarily clad in dresses or slacks and blouses. All students are also expected to sit up straight, face forward, and engage in respectful dialogue, requirements that are established in SLI and continuously reinforced throughout the rest of the program. The teachers of the course help to model these expected behaviors and attire each day through their own professionalism and dress.

During the five-week course, most classes begin with a guest speaker in the morning. Since the SLI course is predominately focused on criminal law, the guest speakers have historically been criminal lawyers, although they also bring in other types of lawyers including those who practice intellectual property law, finance and education law, and even law professors. Many of the lawyers come from NJ LEEP's corporate

partners, as well as local law firms and law schools. Other guest speakers include those who may have some legal training or experience, but do not practice law, including local politicians or school superintendents. These varied speakers provide students with the opportunity to hear directly from those working in and around the legal field what this profession entails. Students are encouraged to ask questions and dig deeper into the issues that the guest speakers discuss, which contributes to students' public speaking and networking skills that are a core component of NJ LEEP's curriculum.

The afternoon sessions of the course consist of direct instruction in criminal trial and procedural law, much of which is taught at a collegiate level, making the course purposefully very demanding for rising 9th graders. In these sessions, students regularly participate in public speaking, discussion of current events, vocabulary review, and weekly exams to check for understanding of the material. Just 10% of the students pass the challenging weekly exams; however, students also demonstrate knowledge through in-class questioning and written assignments. This five-week program culminates with a mock-trial presentation in front of local judges, where students are able to demonstrate their learning and understanding of criminal and procedural law.

In addition to having guest speakers and in class instruction on criminal and procedural law, the students also go on weekly field trips around the greater Newark Area. These trips are often centered on visiting the law offices or the law department of NJ LEEP's corporate partners. During these field trips, students get a first-hand perspective of the legal activities that corporations such as American Express, Prudential, Verizon, or Honeywell engage in on a day-to-day basis. Most visits include a tour of the space, meeting with members of the legal team, and participating in an activity that is

related to what the corporation does, such as a mock negotiation or a business efficiency exercise. These trips are intended to expose students to the real-world side of the law and introduce students to the many different career opportunities that are available under the umbrella of law, particularly those careers outside of the familiar courtroom lawyer jobs. Exposure, such as to new careers, is part of the NJ LEEP adage, described by one staff member, "We try to expose our students to professional fields…We have them go to corporation's law departments to get to see what professional work place is like. We also teach our kids things like networking skills, even in freshmen year, which is quite amazing." Since many of these corporations can be found right in Newark, these trips also serve to expose students to opportunities in their local community that they may not have been aware even existed.

Students regularly identified SLI as one of the most demanding components of the program, one student describing it as being "very structured and they were very strict at the beginning and they wanted you in professional attire, but the weeks, there was just so much work. I was like, this is a lot of work." Another student also appreciated the challenging, mature nature of the course, saying,

> I'm surprised that it definitely focused on the raw law, because I feel like they would lower it for a child, but it definitely reached out because it talked about battered woman syndrome, and that was really interesting to me that they didn't sugar coat anything. They didn't make it like a kiddie sort of thing, and that's what really stood out, that they think of us an adult.

The intensive course load and the high academic and behavioral standards for this course help staff members with the final stage of the interview process. The staff is not trying to merely select students who will effortlessly excel in all of the exams and course work in SLI, but instead they are looking to identify students who are able to commit to the program and try their hardest even when faced with challenges and failures.

Approximately 30% of students who began SLI end up dropping out throughout the course of the summer or decide not to apply to the four-year college bound program at the completion of the five-week summer program; however, almost all students who attend the complete SLI program and attend to their work diligently are invited to participate in the four-year college bound program.

Life Skills Class. The first course in the four-year, college-bound program is the freshmen life skills class. This class is offered one day per week after school from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm and is taught by a full-time NJ LEEP staff member. The freshmen class is split into two groups: half of the students meet on Wednesday, while the remaining half meet on Thursdays, making each class between thirteen and eighteen students. These classes are taught in a classroom space large enough to accommodate up to twenty students. On a typical day, the desks are arranged to fit the day's activity, with the lesson plan and objectives clearly detailed on the front white board for the students to see. The staff member leading the class will regularly be found waiting at the door, greeting the students as they arrive, inquiring about their day, and checking to make sure they've brought in their work. The small classroom setting, the low student to teacher ratio, and the positive student-teacher relationships help to create a feeling of a safe and caring environment. While the staff continue to model appropriate business attire, the students are dressed more casually for after school classes than they were for the SLI. Students come dressed to these classes in the regular school clothes, which for many is a school uniform.

Most classes begin with a "Do Now" that requires students to begin thinking about the material in the day's lesson. Although students come in and get right to work,

positive interactions between the students and the teacher are clearly evident as they discuss their day and week since they last met. Each class period follows a similar template that closely resembles that of a traditional classroom lesson, including a Do Now warm up, followed by homework or vocabulary review, direct instruction and class activities, a lesson closure, and a homework assignment. The staff member teaching the course has some flexibility in regard to lesson planning; however, most of the lessons and materials are clearly outlined in the life skills instructor's manual and appear to be carefully followed by the course instructors, who also supplement the lessons with their own materials.

The purpose of the life skills course is to help lay the foundation for the program and to empower students with the skills they will need to succeed in a rigorous academic environment. During this course, students are taught things such as important study and life skills, conflict resolution, resume writing, professional etiquette and attire, and college and career goal setting. The instructor's manual for the Life Skills class starts with the quote "In the midst of adversity, the ability to set and meet lifelong goals in the pursuit of our dreams demands life skills," which helps to encapsulate the purpose of this course. Life Skills is the introductory course of the college-bound program intended to inculcate students with the skills and habits that they will need to be successful in high school, college, and career. The goals for this course include:

> Practicing the most effective reading and comprehension strategies for college-level work, defining ambitious college and employment path towards personal career goals, strengthening knowledge and values used in sexual decision-making, learning to resolve conflict with consideration for the diverse perspectives involved, and establishing high standards of behavior for professional environments. (Life Skills Instructor's Manual, 2016).

 As a whole, the purpose of this course is to lay a foundation for students to increase their self-efficacy to succeed in personal, academic, and professional challenges.

The course is broken down into units that reflect the course goals and objectives. The first half of the year predominately focuses on establishing foundational skills and setting goals. Students begin the college-bound program by learning effective study and note-taking skills. These are important skills that students must learn as the rigor of academic work increases as students transition from elementary or middle school to a high school setting. Specific skills include learning how to study with the SQ3R method, creating an optimal study environment, and using and applying appropriate annotation skills such as outlining, highlighting, and underlining. For some students, these skills may be a review, but many students never receive explicit instruction in study and note-taking skills, which are essential for all students to excel in challenging academic work.

The next unit of study includes identifying potential college and career aspirations. Many students begin the course with limited knowledge about potential colleges, often only being able to identify local colleges, such as Rutgers, Montclair, William Patterson, or the Ivy's, according to several staff members.   This provides an opportunity for the students to learn about and research the plethora of other higher educational opportunities available and the requirements necessary to attend such schools, which lends to increasing student exposure to colleges and universities. The staff then work with the students to not only identify their future goals, but to establish the smaller goals and objectives that students must achieve to reach their long-term goals. Helping students identify the steps they must take to achieve their goals enables students to visualize how their short-term actions affect their long-term outcomes. These lessons

are scaffolded to build off of the skills in the previous unit, which helps to reinforce the need for and use of rigorous study skills.

The second half of the year focuses more on the relational side of skill development, including sex education and conflict resolution. The purpose of these units is to help students improve their emotional intelligence in dealing with peers, family members, and other adults, including teachers and authoritative figures. These lessons not only provide students with the skills to address the tough choices that adolescents face, but they also provide students with a safe place to practice implementing these skills through role playing, visualizing different perspectives, and peer collaboration on creation of alternative solutions. Many students identified these classes, particularly conflict resolution, as extremely helpful and relatable, one stating,

> Where we talked about conflict resolution, I can relate to a lot of the situations in there. So, it was easy for me to understand it, and give my insight on how I felt about it and other situations where I've been in where I've been made the victim or made the prime enemy.

Another student supported this response to these classes and described how these lessons helped outside of the classroom,

> Your day to day life, how you can make conflicts that you have with your peers and your parents, so you don't just burst out yelling or anything, you just try to come to a consensus and bring your conflict to like, make your conflict resolved in a better way. Yeah, I think that overall it just comes together and helps you in your life.

 Often times, adolescents have difficulty in appropriately expressing their emotions, commonly called emotional intelligence, and these classes seek to help students properly channel their feelings and responses to create more productive outcomes. Many of these skills are also not lessons that are explicitly taught in a traditional school setting, or even

at home, depending on the student's particular home environment, which allows NJ LEEP to help fill an educational gap.

The last unit of the year addresses skills in the areas related to exposure, including the art of conversation, networking, and professional behavior and etiquette. Each of these units helps students to learn valuable skills that they can apply to their personal, academic, and professional experiences to be both successful and feel at ease in new environments. During these lessons, students role-play meeting business professionals, develop strategies for effectively starting and appropriately ending conversation, and even engage in dinner etiquette practice. By the end of their freshmen year, students are intended to feel empowered to succeed in a professional internship placement in the summer before their sophomore year. Furthermore, the implementation of the skills and habits learned in the life skills course help students to create a strong academic foundation for their high school careers, which is intended to set students up for success when they begin their college application process.

Grammar Class. In addition to weekly Life Skills classes after school, freshmen students take a grammar and basic writing course. This course sets the foundation for writing skills and aims to bring struggling writers up to grade level through intensive grammar instruction. A part-time staff member teaches these classes, which run from 10 am until 2 pm, three Saturdays a month. Much like the weekly after-school classes, the freshman class is divided into two smaller groups of approximately fifteen to eighteen students. Similar to the life skills course, the Saturday grammar class closely follows a syllabus provided by NJ LEEP and based on the curriculum and syllabus originally developed by Legal Outreach. The syllabus for this course is based on two texts that are

a programmed course in grammar and usage, entitled *English 2600 with Writing Applications* and *English 3200 with Writing Applications.* This course meets for a total of 21 sessions throughout the school year, and an additional two days for grammar competitions. This course provides an additional 84 hours of grammar instruction a year to freshmen students on top of their regular school day writing instruction.

The instructors for this course are typically only employed for the course of one academic year by NJ LEEP, which requires new staff to be trained each year before the beginning of the Saturday writing sessions in September. While most of the instructors that have been employed in this position are not certified teachers and do not have a background in writing instruction, they do often have a passion for writing and a desire to work with youth. Prior to teaching this course, the instructor is required to attend an eight-hour training session with members of the full time NJ LEEP staff. During the training session, all Saturday Writing class instructors are given an overview of NJ LEEP, provided with details of data, attendance tracking, the curriculum, and given instruction on lesson planning and course requirements. The instructors are also given the instructor's manual and the two texts that the students use for the grammar course during this training. The writing instructors for sophomores, juniors, and seniors share similar characteristics as the grammar instructors and undergo the same training with their respective curriculum and data tracking.

Each four-hour grammar session is run following a very strict program timetable. When the students enter the class, they spend approximately twenty-five minutes focused on reviewing homework and a Do Now activity related to the previous weeks' instruction, and this regularly includes sentence diagramming. The next hour and a half

of the class, the students and the instructor work through the unit that is the focus of the day's lesson in their grammar text, which includes completing examples from the text, justifying the reasons for the correct responses, and checking for accuracy. Following a short fifteen-minute snack break, students return to the classroom to spend forty-five minutes reviewing the major concepts covered in the first half of class. The last forty-five minutes of class is spent taking an assessment on the grammar learned during the day's class. Any students who fail to pass the assessment with an 85% or higher are required to return to participate in a grammar review session and assessment after school on Tuesdays.

The texts used in this program are based on a programmed design that is intended to be self-taught and self-paced for students at a high school or college level. This means that grammar concepts, such as identifying a verb and its subject, the use of modifiers, and using pronouns correctly, are taught through repeated examples. The text describes the program as "self-pacing, self-correcting, thorough, and flexible. They are programmed to make the learning of grammar and usage a positive, success-oriented experience" (Blumenthal, 1998). As students work their way through each unit, they complete between twenty and forty "frames" or examples that are intended to lead the student towards the mastery of grammatical concepts. After each example, students are immediately provided with the correct answer, which is intended to offer immediate positive reinforcement. The overall goal of this course is to improve students' foundational writing skills through direct grammar instruction, which students' build on in the following years of Saturday writing classes through NJ LEEP. Numerous students who took the grammar course described it as helpful in improving their writing, such as

one who stated, "I feel that that class was very beneficial to me because it helped me improve my writing, helped me be able to find more mistakes in my writing, and just make my writing as a whole, better." Another student, who shared a sentiment described by several others, felt that this component of the program was incredibly challenging but did not indicate improvement in writing,

> I feel like not even college kids would learn this grammar that I learned, and it was just so much to memorize for these tests on Saturdays. I probably only passed like 4 tests, and I'd come in like every week to try and pass them and I never would because they always changed up the test on me.

Both of these perspectives, which were equally described by students, speak to the demanding nature of the course.

Sophomore Year

Internships. Rising sophomores participate in legal internships for a period of time between one and four weeks in July, depending on placement availability. Students are assigned to local law firms, corporate legal departments, or government legal departments and rotate through the various internship locations when possible. During this time, students are given practical legal assignments that expose the interns to various aspects of law and legal work and that are intended to help prepare students for the constitutional law debate review course in the upcoming year.

The internships serve several purposes that align to the NJ LEEP tagline of "habits, skills, and exposure." These external internships provide an opportunity for students to be exposed to the daily workings of local corporations and law firms. While the summer program is entitled "internship," it is more accurately described as a week-long job shadowing experience. These experiences serve to expose students to different opportunities related to law, particularly those careers that are outside of what students

may believe is a typical lawyer and courtroom experience. During these internships, students get to work with lawyers, corporate vice presidents, and others in high-level positions to get a first-hand understanding of legal professional careers. This provides ample opportunities for students to practice their networking and business etiquette skills that they honed during their freshman year life skills course. Furthermore, the internships are intended to reinforce many of the business professional dress and behavior habits that the students have been taught throughout their first year in NJ LEEP.

For many students in NJ LEEP, the internship experience was one of the most notable of their tenure in the program. One student described the experience as unforgettable, saying,

> I still remember it. It was my favorite. I loved it. Going to New York, going to Wall Street, walking there. Sullivan Cromwell gave us private cars to drive us home back to New Jersey. I was like wow…it was like so much they would give us and teach us about their firms, which was great.

Other students described some of the careers they experienced, such as one who had three internships including PSE&G, McCarter English, and Wyndham Worldwide, "We went there and met different people… different people you'd never think about. I didn't know that different companies not only had lawyers, but different types of lawyers who handled different types of things, which was fun to see." Another student described some of the work they conducted,

> One of the things we did is we got to pick our own presentation to do and we had those presentations in front of like vice presidents and the people who extended the offer to have LEEP students there. And, I did my presentations on the stereotyping of different Asian cultures. It was a really great experience and it was kind of scary having these vice presidents watching a rising sophomore doing these presentations in front of them, but I really appreciated that chance.

For many students, these internships provided them with a chance that they would otherwise not have had the opportunity to experience, and one that many other students their age in the greater Newark do not have. The internships help to provide an opportunity for students to put into practice the skills and habits they were taught during their life skills class and to expose them to new careers. This direct application following their 9th grade course helps students to immediately reinforce their newly developed skills, which they will continue to hone over the next several years in NJ LEEP.

Constitutional Law Debate and Mentor Program. Once in 10th grade, the constitutional law debate class builds upon many of the reading and writing skills learned in 9th grade. This course incorporates a direct law-education focus, while preparing students for legal debates and writing briefs, which is an essential component of NJ LEEP's curriculum and continues on through senior year. This program runs after school for all 10th grade students one day per week, from 4pm to 6pm. The 10th grade class is divided into two groups that meet on either Tuesday or Wednesday, which helps to keep the class sizes around fifteen students to one teacher. The Director of Legal Education, who holds a law degree, is responsible for teaching this course, and is typically assisted by one other full-time NJ LEEP staff member. This course runs from the beginning of the school year in September through the end of the school year in June, and also follows the Newark Public School District calendar.

The 10th grade constitutional law debate course meets in one of the smaller classrooms at NJ LEEP, with usually just enough desks for the students and no windows. Although the classroom space is tight, the students and staff seem at ease and comfortable in getting right to work. The students and staff engage in friendly greetings

and jokes are exchanged in the early moments of class while waiting for everyone to arrive. On a typical day, the lesson, objectives, and upcoming events and reminders are clearly written on the board for the students to review when they enter the class. The desks are generally arranged in several close rows facing the front board, but many times the desks are rearranged to best fit the day's activities. The students all have a debate binder where they have their materials for each class. With little direction, the students sit in their seats and pull out their materials, indicating that they are prepared for class. During the classes, students regularly engage in deep discussions about relevant issues, and spend time reading challenging texts. The pleasant student and staff relationships, positive peer interactions, and constructive engagement with the course material help to create a productive and supportive learning atmosphere in these classes.

The purpose of this course includes introducing students to constitutional law and debate, improving writing and speaking skills, and providing law-related education. Founding Executive Director of NJ LEEP, Craig Livermore, originally developed the curriculum for this course. Overtime, administrators have modified the curriculum to best fit the needs of the students. Currently, the course runs through three debate cycles a school year that last approximately twelve weeks. The course starts with four to five weeks of basic civics education, which one staff indicates is necessary because

> It's hard to discuss what the Supreme Court is doing if you don't know what the Supreme Court does. So, we start with branches of government, what is the role of each branch, then we get to the Supreme Court, then we talk about what is the role of law and then we talk about the Constitution. Then we have a chance to have, I think, some pretty broad conversations about what law is, to some really specific conversations of federalism and federal and state supremacy that I think get more advanced the more narrow they get.

After the initial introductions into law education and basic civics, the class moves into its first of three cycles with a debate preparatory session. These sessions are held in a large, open room so that all sophomores, juniors, and seniors can attend. While only sophomores attend the after-school debate course, all students from 10th through 12th grade write briefs and participate in the debates at the end of each cycle. During a debate prep session, the staff provides students with a wide view of the upcoming debate topic that includes going over the problem and related cases, presenting public policy concerns, and typically it also includes watching a video that covers the problem to be debated. The debate cycles are based on real problems, many of which are relevant to current events and the students' lives, such as issues related to censoring student speech in school, drone strikes in the Middle East, and affirmative action. For each cycle, the students are broken up into two groups. One group takes the side of petitioner, which is the person who is challenging the governmental rule, and the other group is the respondent, responsible for defending the rule. The students are not allowed to select their position on a topic, it is assigned to them, which often requires a student to argue against his or her own viewpoint. The students alternate between being petitioner and respondent for each debate cycle, which provides multiple opportunities to argue each side.

Following the debate prep, the sophomores participate in their weekly class that helps to prepare them for the constitutional law debate competitions. Each class normally begins with a challenging Do Now that is often a reading comprehension question, frequently taken from the LSAT, which is intended to provide them with a challenging passage that requires students to explain their reasoning. Most classes require the

students to complete complex reading and writing tasks that involve the use of reasoning skills related to the topics of the cycle's debate. The course curriculum for each cycle is focused around reviewing in great detail the cases related to the subject up for debate, during which time the instructor for the course works closely with the students to close read cases, legal documents, and other challenging texts that lend to increasing student understanding of constitutional law and the topic at hand. The students are also able to hone the reading and study skills that they developed during life skills while working with challenging legal texts.

In addition to the Director of Legal Education, attorney and law student mentors are available for the program participants to help them prepare for the debate competitions. The mentors usually work in the legal field in the greater Newark area and commit to volunteering their time throughout the year to one or more NJ LEEP student. NJ LEEP helps to match a mentor to a student participant at the start of the 10th grade debate course. Although some mentors do not work out, many end up working with their NJ LEEP student for the remaining three years in the program and beyond.

These mentors not only provide assistance for the debate competitions, but also regularly meet with students informally throughout the year as an additional adult support. The mentors work closely with their mentees to help them prepare their oral arguments and their written briefs prior to the debate competition, which are conducted at the end of each twelve-week cycle. For the debate competitions, students must submit a ten-page written brief and prepare a five-minute oral argument that they will present to a panel of attorneys and law students and also prepare for five-minutes of questioning. Preparing for the questioning is intended to build students' levels of preparation,

understanding, defending, and requires the ability to think quickly on their feet. The attorneys and law students act as judges for the oral argument and then are given five-minutes to question the students. Juniors and seniors participate in the law debate competitions and receive the mentorship of attorneys and law students as well.

Many students in NJ LEEP credit the debate program with being responsible for improving both their writing and public speaking skills and helping them become prepared for college. One student articulated: "Debate helped with my writing and my public speaking skills, which is very important for me, because I wasn't always a public speaker, it was actually quite hard for me, so that had to crack me out of my shell." Another student credits the debate program with helping to improve her self-confidence, saying,

> The first time I did it, I was really nervous. But it helped me gain self-confidence, just becoming more comfortable talking in front of people and things like that… And my first debate, writing the oral argument and having to say it wasn't the problem because it was something I prepared for beforehand, but saying it front of people and then having to get questions that I don't know if I know the answer to was really hard, but I won that debate and that was where I grew self-confidence. I can public speak now, like I'm ok talking to people.

Many other students shared similar sentiments, observing the benefits of participating in the debate program and having repeated opportunities to write legal briefs and public speak in front of judges and lawyers. One student particularly enjoyed the challenging requirement of having to consider alternate perspectives, saying,

> And one thing I really like about it is the fact that you don't have to choose which part you would want to argue, we are assigned. Then it's kind of like, it's challenging, because like, your mind is on the other side, but you really have to debate the side that's given to you.

While not all students shared that they enjoyed the debate program, many of the students indicated that it was beneficial in helping them improve writing and speaking skills, which is one of the primary goals of the course as identified by several staff members.

Expository Writing. In 10th grade, the Saturday writing class is focused on expository writing, and also includes vocabulary development. The central focus of this course is to improve students' writing skills for expository texts, which is an essential complement to the writing sophomores undertake in the constitutional law debate class. This course runs at the same time as the 9th grade grammar course on Saturdays from 10am to 2pm, however, the sophomores only meet two Saturdays a month. Part-time staff members teach this expository writing course. Much like the weekly constitutional law program, the expository writing class is divided into two smaller groups of approximately fifteen to eighteen students. NJ LEEP provides the course instructors with a detailed syllabus that works through seven major units of writing instruction including: unity, development, coherence, developing the thesis statement, developing an outline, special paragraphs, and revising. The classes spend approximately two, four-hour sessions on each unit. The course meets for a total of sixteen instructional sessions throughout the year and two additional sessions for vocabulary competition days, which provides an additional 64 hours of writing instruction to their sophomore year. Much like the grammar instructors for the freshman Saturday class, the instructors for this course are typically only employed for the course of one academic year by NJ LEEP and participate in the eight-hour training session with the expository writing curriculum.

The instructor's manual for expository writing provides a detailed breakdown of activities and assignments for each writing session. A typical expository writing class

begins with a current events quiz. Students have ten minutes to read a short passage on a

current event and take a quiz, immediately followed by five minutes to peer-grade.

Students then spend fifteen minutes working on a grammar exercise through a "Do

Now," followed by five minutes to review and correct their responses. After the

grammar exercise, ten minutes are allotted for the instructor to check student work for

completion, including vocabulary assignments and writing exercises. The homework

check is followed by a twenty-minute vocabulary quiz based on the week's assigned

reading. The second half of the class session includes a 30-minute lunch break, one hour

of direct instruction on the main points of the unit, and an hour and a half for writing

workshop where students can practice their new skills through writing exercises.

Although the instructors are provided with a detailed outline of the activities and material

to present each class, it is up to the instructor to determine how the materials will be

presented and which writing exercises to use in the class. Many of the instructors

supplement the curriculum with their own materials, including additional texts, writing

prompts, and media or videos related to the subject and content of the session.

　　　The organization of the weekly sessions for the expository writing course allows

the instructors to accomplish several objectives within one four-hour session. The current

events quiz requires students to practice reading comprehension skills and stay abreast of

currents issues, while simultaneously providing a topic for an expository writing prompt.

The weekly grammar "Do Now" is intended to help students remember and practice the

grammar rules and skills that they developed during their freshman year grammar course,

with weekly practice as reinforcement. Most of the vocabulary development is done

through weekly-required readings, which are generally short passages or chapters taken

from longer texts and novels. The students read the passages from their workbook for homework, answer comprehension questions, and provide the definition, part of speech, and synonym or antonym for approximately 20 vocabulary words per week. The students are encouraged to create their own definition of the word based on their understanding of the vocabulary word used in the context of the passage. Students are required to create flashcards for each vocabulary word, as well. Each week's vocabulary quiz assesses students on their vocabulary acquisition by asking the students to apply their understanding of the words to use them in a sentence, connect the word to a synonym or antonym, and to fill in the blank with a vocabulary word. The remainder of each class is spent teaching a new skill and allowing students time in class to practice using that skill through a writing workshop. The entire course culminates with a final writing assignment that requires students to synthesize and apply the expository writing skills that they practiced throughout the year into a final expository essay. The students are then assessed on their ability to apply each of the writing skills, grammar, and vocabulary used throughout the year.

The focus on expository writing aligns closely with the type and style of writing that the sophomores produce for their constitutional law debate course. Students focus on practicing skills such as avoiding plagiarism and learning how to cite, developing a clear and focused thesis statement, identifying and creating strong topic sentences and main ideas, and using specific evidence to support their ideas. All of these skills are essential to writing effective briefs for their debates. In addition, each of these skills aligns with 10th grade common core state standards for informative/explanatory writing. Furthermore, practicing expository writing skills is intended to begin to prepare students

for college level writing and high-stakes assessments, such as PARCC and the ACT or SAT.

Junior Year

Summer ACT Prep. The entire junior year is devoted to standardized test prep, beginning with the summer before junior year during a five-week ACT preparatory course that focuses on foundational skills, test taking skills, and the skills within the components of the ACT. In its early years, NJ LEEP focused on SAT prep; however, they switched to the ACT several years ago, primarily because the SAT exam changed its entire format and test prep companies had difficulty aligning test prep strategies. NJ LEEP felt more comfortable teaching strategies for the ACT, which had not changed since 1988. Furthermore, colleges and universities typically accept both ACT and SAT scores and NJ LEEP was advised that students of color typically perform better on the ACT. The program runs Monday through Friday from 9 am to 4 pm and includes the opportunity to take four, timed diagnostic exams during the five-week long course. Students in the junior class are divided into two groups based on skill level, as determined by the initial ACT diagnostic exam of the summer program. During the course of the week, students spend two full days of instructional time on diagnostic testing, test taking strategies, and practicing ACT samples in math, science, reading, and writing. An additional two days of instructional time are spent focusing on foundational skills in math, reading, and writing in order to supplement the ACT instruction. One a day a week is reserved for the juniors go on a field trip or have guest speakers.

Part-time instructors teach the foundational skills courses. These instructors are often college graduates and working professionals who are able to provide basic

foundational instruction in the areas of math or reading and writing. NJ LEEP contracts with an ACT test prep company, A-List, to provide the ACT diagnostic and test taking skills courses two days per week. These instructors are contract workers for A-List and often begin working with the students during the summer program and continue on with them through the course of their junior year during the after-school program.

The students are divided up by skill level in order to more specifically target instruction and pace to the level of the learners in each group in both the ACT and foundational classes. During the foundational courses, the student groups move through various review and practice sets of the different content areas tested on the ACT, for example pre-algebra and elementary algebra in math, and grammar and comprehension in reading. The foundational courses are intended to supplement the ACT prep that the students are receiving from A-List and to provide more individualized content related support. During these classes, students can practice reinforcing foundational level and content related skills, or review the content discussed in the ACT class.

The ACT diagnostic and test taking skills course, which is taught by a contracted A-List instructor, follows a very specific curriculum developed by A-List. Prior to teaching the course, the A-List ACT instructors participate in over 100 hours of test prep training in order to ensure they are fully qualified to teach the course to the company standards. This company has "developed our own extensively researched test prep materials that demonstrate the essential elements of mastering the ACT such as timing and question strategy" (A-List Education, 2018). Through the course of the summer program, the A-List curriculum has students take practice diagnostic tests under test-like conditions, examine their assessments to understand their mistakes, and practice ACT

specific test taking strategies, all of which A-List guarantees will result in improvement

in test scores, citing an average of a six-point increase across all its students (A-List

Education, 2018).

A primary purpose of this course is to provide students with consistent and

intensive ACT test prep with a specific goal of increasing students' ACT scores.

Improving ACT scores is a major goal for NJ LEEP participants because higher test

scores result in greater options for applying to more competitive colleges.   Many affluent

families invest significant amounts of money in programs and tutors for ACT or SAT

prep for their child, which in turn provides these students an advantage when applying for

higher education. According to several staff members, NJ LEEP includes this component

of its programing in its curriculum for free with the intention of leveling the playing field

for low-income and first-generation students who would not otherwise have access to a

test prep program, primarily because they are cost-prohibitive. Furthermore, improving

students' test scores lends to NJ LEEP's goal of enrolling students in high quality and

prestigious colleges and universities. Additionally, providing students with test-taking

strategies helps to prepare them for future high-stakes tests such as the GRE, LSAT,

GMAT, or MCAT.

After-School ACT Prep Course. Once the school year begins, the 11th grade

students continue to participate in the ACT preparatory program they began with A-List

in the after-school program two days per week from 4pm to 6pm. The junior class is split

into two smaller groups with between fifteen and eighteen students per class with each

class meeting on Monday and Wednesday or Tuesday and Thursday. Unlike the summer,

the after-school program is not split by level. Rather, they are placed in a section of the

class based on their schedules, since many of the students participate in other after-school activities and have conflicts.

Just like in the summer program, the after-school ACT preparatory course is taught by A-List hired and trained instructors. A-List created and implemented the year-long curriculum. The curriculum includes weekly diagnostic tests, which are administered and proctored by an NJ LEEP staff member during Monday and Tuesday sessions, and review of the content and instruction in test taking strategies and practice with the A-List instructor during the Wednesday and Thursday sessions. Students also take several full-length practice assessments throughout the course of the year to track improvements.

Even though an instructor outside of NJ LEEP teaches the ACT prep program, the students are able to develop a positive rapport with their instructors throughout the course of the summer and during the school year. The A-List instructors can regularly be found joking and having friendly interactions with the students. The ACT courses are taught in the largest room at NJ LEEP, which is made into two smaller classrooms with a collapsible dividing wall. The students sit at small, rectangular tables big enough for two students, making it easy for students to work in pairs. The tables are arranged in two rows with an aisle down the center, which allows the instructor to easily get to each student. Most class time is spent analyzing diagnostic tests the students have taken to determine why each response was or was not correct, with direct instruction on test taking skills and strategies. While most students are typically engaged in this course, it is not uncommon to see students nodding off during the sessions.

Each week, students in the ACT prep class can depend on a consistent pattern in instruction. Students always take a timed diagnostic practice section of the ACT during their first session, then review their diagnostic test, learn new test taking strategies, and spend time analyzing difficult questions and examples during the second two-hour session of the week. Students practice their skills in all diagnostic areas of the ACT, including English, math, reading, science, and writing. The consistent schedule and regular timed test taking experiences are intended to help ease test taking anxiety through repeated practice in low-stakes scenarios.

Many students have indicated that participating in the ACT program helped improve their scores, such as one student who said, "So I did the ACT prep program, which improved my score so far by 8 points, which is incredible," and another who said, "we also had ACT prep classes which were really great, that teacher was really cool. He really made studying it easy and thanks to him, like you know my scores were constantly improving and I really appreciated that chance." Other students did not enjoy the program as much, such one student, who suggested that the program became monotonous over the course of the year, saying,

> I think, with the ACT portion of the program, it could be a little bit repetitive, and I think especially after we took the first test. Because I feel like a lot of people were just losing steam after we took the first test in December. And I think if they changed it up, I think, I feel like there would be a better way to reinforce what we learned.

Persuasive Writing. The junior year Saturday writing class is concentrated on further developing the skills learned in the expository writing class and forming new persuasive writing skills. This course runs on the same schedule as the 10th grade expository writing course, two Saturdays a month, from 10am to 2pm, and is instructed

by two part-time staff members, who attend the eight-hour writing training session. The juniors are divided into two smaller classes of between fifteen and eighteen students. The course meets for a total of sixteen sessions throughout the year and also includes two vocabulary competition days and provides an additional 64 hours of writing instruction to their junior year. The persuasive writing curriculum is scaffolded to build on the expository writing skills that the students learned in 10th grade and further developed to instruct students to hone their persuasive writing skills.

The curriculum for persuasive writing is focused on the goal of ensuring that each student is "able to produce sound, logical arguments which he/she is able to defend in class," as identified in the instructor's manual. The curriculum is broken into two semesters. The first half of junior year the class is predominately focused on reviewing and practicing expository writing skills such as developing a thesis, and producing effective topic sentences, and learning new persuasive writing skills, such as defining persuasive writing, and understanding the basics of claims, evidence, and warrants. The second half of junior year, the students focus on applying their writing skills to three persuasive writing pieces that are developed, revised, and completed over the course of the semester. In addition to persuasive writing, the class also spends time each week on a current events quiz, a grammar "Do Now," and vocabulary in context, following the same timeline as the 10th grade expository writing course.

This course will seem very similar to the juniors who just recently completed the expository writing course. They follow the same weekly session timeline and are accustomed to the amount of work and the rigor of weekly readings, assessments, and writing. Students continue to reinforce the grammar skills that they learned in 9th grade

through their weekly grammar Do Now. Many of the 11th grade grammar Do Now's are based on the SAT or ACT grammar questions. These provide students additional practice responding to standardized test questions, a major component of the NJ LEEP junior year curriculum. Students also continue their vocabulary development in this course. The vocabulary in context curriculum from sophomore year is continued into their junior year. This curriculum requires students to read a passage for homework, answer comprehension questions, and provide a definition, part of speech, and a synonym or antonym, and create flash cards for approximately twenty vocabulary words per week. Many of the vocabulary words are college level and regularly seen on college acceptance exams such as the ACT and SAT.

The purpose of persuasive writing in the junior year curriculum is that it complements one type of writing required for the ACT, and it further expands on the skills developed during the sophomore year expository writing class. Students are able to continue to practice their basic writing skills, and add in a persuasive component, which is required on many ACT writing prompts. Furthermore, the skill of effective persuasive writing, including making claims, citing evidence, and providing warrants, is essential for college level writing. Since the classes are fewer than twenty students to one teacher, they are also able to receive more individualized feedback than they might receive in a traditional writing class at school where a teacher may have upwards of 100 students' papers to grade.

Senior Year

CAP Summer Program. Rising seniors participate in a five-week long summer program that prepares students for the primary goal of senior year at NJ LEEP: Applying

to and getting accepted into a competitive, four-year college or university. In addition to students beginning the college application process with the close support of staff members, they learn college study skills, and take a college level course. The seniors in the summer program are broken into two smaller groups of approximately thirteen to sixteen students per group. The seniors meet during the summer from 9am to 4pm five days per week, with a field trip or guest speakers one day per week. The remaining four days per week, the students divide their time between the College Application Process (CAP) program where they take their first steps to prepare to apply to college, a Western Philosophy course taught by a college professor, a study hall period, and a Study Skills for College Success (SSCS) where students learn study strategies and skills for effectively completing college level work.

The College Access Director, who is a full time NJ LEEP staff member, instructs the CAP course. This staff member is an expert on the process of applying to college in order to provide knowledge and support to the students and families during the often-confusing application process. The purpose of this course is to prepare students for the first steps they need to take to apply to colleges and universities. There are four primary deliverables that the students must complete by the end of the summer program: 1) devise a specific list of colleges and a corresponding budget, 2) write a personal statement, 3) complete an activities essay, and 4) develop a resume. This course takes place in a computer lab so that students can focus most of their time on researching colleges and writing. Although most of the class time is student driven, with hands on researching and writing, time is taken during nearly all classes to conduct mini lessons on

college related issues such as the real costs of college, applying for financial aid, and writing tips for applications.

During the time that the students are working independently, the instructors circulate the room to provide assistance and support. Often times, the students are looking for information about whether a college sounds like a "good fit" or feedback on an application essay that they have written. Students spend a significant amount of time learning about and researching different colleges since NJ LEEP encourages students to look outside of the local north Jersey schools. The staff members regularly work one-on-one with students to discuss what career they are interested in pursuing, what type or size of college feels right, and offer alternative ideas based on their knowledge of the student. Since the focus of the course is on applying to colleges, the staff members spend a substantial amount of time helping students identify the colleges that will be the best fit for the student. Most seniors have been with NJ LEEP for three full years when they begin the summer CAP program and know each other and the staff very well, which allows the staff to provide more personalized college recommendations to the students. Much of the class time gives off the feel of a busy workshop, with students operating autonomously towards a meaningful goal. When the instructors are presenting mini-lessons on topics such as the real cost of college and financial aid, students are attentive and engaged, as these topics are often brand new to the students and incredibly pertinent to their immediate future.

The senior students also take Western Philosophy, a college course taught by a seasoned professor from Seton Hall. The purpose of the students taking this course is to help prepare them for lecture style courses with the types of rigorous work and college

level readings they will encounter in higher education. As one student described the course, it is like preparation for college,

> We got to read really dense philosophical texts by Plato and Locke, so that was very interesting, and …it was like a transition …this is a class that you're going to have to take, and in college, and it's just like a preparation.

Unlike other NJ LEEP courses taught by staff who have established relationships with the students, this course is taught by a college professor, which changes the overall feel of the course. The students, particularly by their senior year, have developed such strong relationships with their peers and the staff members that many of the classes having a feeling of a safe and caring environment and a close-knit community. The Western Philosophy course has a much more formal atmosphere to it, similar to how the feeling of the Summer Law Institute before the students and staff got to know one another.

The seniors also Study Skills for College Success (SSCS) concurrently with the Western Philosophy course. Typically, two instructors, often college interns, some of whom are program alumni, teach this study skills course to the seniors. During this course, the two interns help lead the seniors through the readings for their Western Philosophy course, encourage discussion about the texts, and model how to implement various study and reading strategies to more effectively read and comprehend college level texts. These classes provide the students with specific reading skills and the opportunity to discuss texts and engage in critical thinking about assigned readings prior to their Western Philosophy course. At times, the class can seem very teacher centered, with the instructor asking questions about the text and the students responding; however, over time, as the students dig deeper, the questions require more critical thinking and

students begin to engage each other in discussion. Students can often be seen creating their own questions and leading discussions with a partner, a small group, or the whole class. The small class sizes result in the majority of the students being actively engaged in the discussions, which is an essential skill that students will need in college. SSCS also prepares the seniors for some soft skills that students will needs to use to successfully navigate the college environment. The class engages in conversations about how to approach a professor, which can feel like a daunting task, and ask for help. They also discuss where students can find academic help once on campus at the writing center. Staff members indicate that normalizing help-seeking behavior is a habit that is embedded throughout many of the courses in NJ LEEP and is described by one staff member as "making sure our kids feel comfortable going to the writing center, going to counseling center, things like that." Normalizing this type of behavior encourages students to seek out the support they need and promotes self-advocacy, a vital skill for college success.

After-School CAP and Senior Seminar. The after-school curriculum for 12th grade students is focused on college readiness and is split into two components. The first half of the school year is predominately focused on applying to colleges, while in the second half of the year the students attend college readiness seminars. For the first half of the year, students come in twice a week, Monday through Thursday after school from 4pm to 6pm to work on college application materials. Students are given assistance in researching and applying to multiple colleges, revising their personal statements for applications, composing supplemental essays, and completing financial aid and scholarship applications.

The CAP class is run as a student-led workshop period for students to address individual components of their own college applications as needed with the support of NJ LEEP staff members and their peers. At least one full-time NJ LEEP staff member is always present to support this class, although there is often a second staff member available during this time to provide additional support to students as they work on their applications. The hours for these sessions occur more frequently than twice a week and are regularly extend beyond the 6pm end time in the fall, as indicated by one staff member, "Once deadlines started rolling around, [students] came in more often, and sometimes we ran a lot later to get the applications in." As college application deadlines start approaching, students come in more frequently and stay much later to make sure all components of their applications are thoroughly completed. Many students described enjoying the workshop time and space because it provides a quiet and comfortable atmosphere for completing applications with the encouragement of supportive staff members who assist in revising supplemental essays, as one student described,

> College apps, I don't know how I would have done it, because I applied to 19 colleges, so I don't know how I would have done it without [my instructor], because he's the one who edited all of my essays, my personal statement, my scholarship essays, everything, so CAP and ACT prep were like the most important and significant programs to me.

After the first semester, most college application deadlines have passed, and the seniors anxiously wait to receive their acceptance letters. During this time, seniors transition from coming twice a week for CAP after school, to only coming once per week for senior seminar. This class is much more relaxed than the sometimes high-paced workshop atmosphere of CAP. Unlike the previous years' after-school curriculum, this is much more focused on pertinent socio-emotional topics and navigating the non-academic

side of college through the use of flexible discussions in a seminar style environment. As one staff member describes, these discussions are "where they talk about all of those transitional issues, so what is it like to be a person of color on a predominately white campus? What are factors that might inhibit your success on campus, financially, academically, and socially? And they talk about all of those holistic things." One student described the senior seminar curriculum as,

> More of like the personal and the sociological part of being in college, like the relationships, picking friends, how to choose classes, parties, even, like how to, decision making and what's the best choice for you, and morals and ethics, and a lot of stuff like that, that's really cool, just like, I guess on the non-academic side of it.

These discussions provide a safe space for students to discuss many of the sensitive issues that they will face once they arrive to college. During these discussions, students and staff members consider the reality of college life, and steps that students can take to address the issues they may face, including continuing to normalize help-seeking behaviors. NJ LEEP includes these discussions into the senior year curriculum because, as several staff indicated, they acknowledge that many of issues faced in college by low-income and first-generation students, especially students of color, are non-academic. These seminar classes are intended to empower students with the tools to face these challenges.

College Application and Research Writing. The senior Saturday writing class focuses on writing for college applications, including perfecting their application essays and personal statement. For the first half of the year, this course is very much a continuation of what the students are working on during their after-school CAP program. Students use the time in their Saturday writing class to continue to work on their college

application essay writing. The class meets in the computer lab so that students are able to work on their applications, most of which are submitted online. NJ LEEP students regularly apply to more than five schools, with some students applying to over fifteen schools. Since many schools require supplemental essays and often ask different questions, the students may end up having ten to twenty essays to complete during the entire application process. This course meets during the same weeks as the 10th and 11th grade writing courses, two Saturdays a month from 10am to 2pm. While a part-time instructor leads this course, it is pretty typical to find an additional full time NJ LEEP staff member in the class as well supporting the seniors on their applications. Since the course is run like a workshop during the application season, students are very self-directed in the work that they need to complete.

After students complete their college applications around December, the Saturday writing course shifts to a research paper focus. The students spend the remaining semester of the NJ LEEP Saturday writing class preparing to write a mandatory, college-level research paper. The purpose of this course is to arm the students with the "research and writing skills that will allow you to successfully complete lengthy term papers" (Senior Scholarship Research Paper Guidelines, 2017). In order to complete this assignment, students must respond to a writing prompt, such as one addressing free speech and create a plan to educate students and faculty on contemporary issues in freedom of expression in an eight to ten-page research paper. The requirements of the paper include using proper MLA formatting, citing a minimum of ten sources to be eligible for a writing award scholarship, writing an annotated bibliography, and having no more than one unexcused absence during the course.

Throughout the spring semester, the students build on the writing skills that they have learned in the previous years, and dig deeper into college-level, research writing. This class prioritizes issues of plagiarism, the genre of research writing, using quotations, using proper MLA formatting, and selecting scholarly citations. Students must successfully synthesize the skills that they have used in their previous writing classes with the new skills developed in this course to produce an effective research paper. Although the requirements for this paper are rigorous, the students are able to win scholarship money for college based on their writing. This intensive course on research writing with a focus on skills such as citations and avoiding plagiarism can help students more deeply understand these topics that are often not discussed as thoroughly as they should be in high school. It also provides the students with the opportunity to spend an entire semester focused on one major writing assignment, which is comparable to a college term paper.

Family Engagement Component

NJ LEEP recognizes the importance of family involvement in student academic success and socio-emotional stability, which both play a vital role in positive student outcomes. As a result, family engagement is an integral part of NJ LEEP model. The family engagement program is led by the Dean of Family engagement and implementation of this program begins prior to students being accepted into the program and continues through students' matriculation through college. The goal of this component of NJ LEEP is to create of culture of parental and family involvement in the entire education and college bound process in order to ensure that students are receiving support not only at school and after-school, but at home as well. The mission of this

program is guided by three crucial practices, including home visits to build trust in the

parent and educator relationship, empowerment workshops to work with parents on

becoming involved in the education of their child, and the use of non-traditional forms of

communication between parents and educators to make sure that family members are

kept abreast of their child's growth and development in the program.

The Dean of Family Engagement works to implement multiple components of the

program that engage families with NJ LEEP and their child's academic success and

college readiness preparations. A primary component is to conduct intake home visits

with the families of students who have been accepted into the program. During these

visits, the Dean of Family Engagement works with the families to develop student

outcome objectives and to set goals that the families and student understand and support.

These goals include academic and personal goals for both the student and the family.

According to one staff member, these meetings also serve as an opportunity to help

empower families with information that they need to work with schools,

> So, it's kind of bridging that gap, so it's the student and their family and then like
> empowering the family with tools and techniques to, if they ever do need to reach
> out to the school, what to do. So, if your child isn't placed in the highest-level
> classes they can be like, why? And so, this is how you talk to the counselor, this
> is how you request a translator if you go to a parent meeting, this is how you get
> on power-school.

Since many low-income and first-generation families and parents may not understand or

have experience working within the school system, NJ LEEP uses these family meetings

to provide an additional support and access to information that empowers parents to

become an active part of their child's education.

Parent communication is maintained in two primary ways throughout the course

of the program. Families receive individualized information through progress report

updates on their child and receive one-on-one visits one time per year with each family to discuss the students' progress towards meeting their goals. The second form of parent and family communication is through monthly parent meeting workshops. Monthly workshops are provided for families to present education and support on the college application and transition process, and to assist parents in identifying ways they can become more involved in their child's educational career. According to one staff member, these workshops are based on what NJ LEEP identifies as areas of needed parental education on planning for college,

> They usually are thematic based on what's happening around that time and I kind of let them organically develop based on what I see. So the first one's usually on the finances of college because we want all of our parents, even if you're a 9th grader or 12th grader, to kind of know the intricacies, the ins and outs of the hidden costs, that's the title of the workshop, because it's not just the application fees, which we at NJ LEEP are able to waive for the students, but sending out your scores, sending out your AP results, registering for the APs, the SAT 2s, and then visiting schools is a cost, and when you're on campus, books, dorm supplies, so that they are able to be fiscally responsible and to save for those things because we would hate to reach senior year and be like, I can't send my scores because I don't have $100, I don't have $120.

These workshops are intended to start educating parents on specific steps that they can take to prepare for and support their child's education. Attendance data is used to track parental behavior and participation, and meeting notes are used to track family outcomes and goals for student progress, and to facilitate discussions with families on how they can best support their child in reaching their goals. Additionally, formal surveys are given to parents throughout the year in order to provide feedback to NJ LEEP staff.

Family engagement also supports families of program alumni, including one-to-one meetings with families of students enrolled in college or university as needed on an ad hoc basis, and by offering workshops for alumni and their families during winter and

summer breaks. Each of these components are intended to help ensure that students and their families are receiving ample support to set and meet their goals of achieving in school and successfully transitioning to and thriving in higher education.

Alumni Support Program

A primary objective of NJ LEEP is to help low-income and first-generation students not only get into a four-year college or university, but to also successfully graduate from college or university within four years. Currently, there are no formal alumni support programs or protocols in place; however, this is a major component of the five-year strategic plan, and a necessary addition in order to meet longer-term program objectives. Several staff members said they do attempt to remain in contact with program alumni through text messages and email; however, this is on an ad hoc and informal basis, as indicated by one staff member,

> I outreach to students on a fairly, like sporadic basis. I wish it was more regular, but in the beginning of the year, I started doing like a, hey how you are doing, how are you settling into school? During midterms, I send them, like good luck, or like, hope you're studying.

Several of the alumni interviewed also acknowledged that the staff at NJ LEEP is supportive, if the student takes the initiative to reach out, one stating "I think that, I mean, there is one thing that I wish that they could do, and it's because I don't really feel like that way, unless I take the initiative, I wish that they could sometimes reach out a little bit more." Another alumnus supported this sentiment, "I do wish that LEEP reached out to us more, or had a better alumni connection because I feel like, after they, after we leave some of us still stay in contact, but if we don't stay in contact, then it's like, ok, bye." When alumni do take the steps to reach out to NJ LEEP, they have indicated that they

have a support system available to them, one alumni specified this is available even after graduating undergrad,

> I think in college it was more on my part that I didn't reach out to them, like this is what I'm doing, do you have any advice? But now that I'm at this stage and I'm reaching out to them and they're like, helping me and they're giving me advice, I think that they're a very great support system, because I'm the first in my family to go to college and law school, and I didn't realize how big they were. Like how big of a support system they are. So I didn't lean on them that much in college, but now I am leaning on them in law school and it's been really helpful.

The staff at NJ LEEP acknowledges this as a vital component of the program that is missing and recognizes the need to take action in this area, which is part of the strategic plan. One staff member stated, "I think part of what we need to do is focus also on who the alumni are and track them a lot better, and I think that's part of the process, that's part of the strategic plan is to focus on alumni a lot more." In the upcoming years, NJ LEEP intends to roll out a more comprehensive alumni component that will work to reach out to and connect with its alumni in a more systematized and consistent fashion. Currently, the details of this alumni support plan are still being established and have not yet been fully implemented.

Summary

The New Jersey Law and Education Empowerment Project strives to serve traditionally underserved low-income and first-generation adolescents in grades 9-12 in Newark and surrounding areas. The primary goal of this organization is to prepare students to enroll in and persist through higher education in order to graduate prepared to establish a successful career to help break the cycle of poverty in the local Newark community. NJ LEEP is working to achieve this goal by providing both academic and social-emotional support to participants, participants' families, and program alumni

through after-school programing, Saturday writing classes, summer programs and internships, and family and alumni engagement. Each of these components is intended to build off of each other over the course of four years to scaffold student learning and improve academic achievement and socio-emotional outcomes. The role of this program is especially significant in the Newark community where many students come from low-income backgrounds and have multiple risk factors that limit opportunities to enroll in and graduate from higher educational institutions.

Chapter 5: Program Theory Evaluation Findings

Program Theory Evaluation Overview

The program theory evaluation component of this research was focused on helping the key stakeholders of the program identify and clarify the primary goals and objectives of NJ LEEP. The purpose of this component of the research was to articulate and examine the effectiveness of the program theory because a program with a weak or faulty conceptualization can result in an inability for a program to achieve its desired or intended results. Developing a clearly articulated program description that identifies how the program is intended to be implemented and its anticipated outcomes, as well as to assess the plausibility of the program theory's effectiveness were the primary goals of this component of the research. Prior to the start of this research, NJ LEEP had only developed an implicit program theory, where the theory was inherent in the program, but it was not overtly stated. The assessment of NJ LEEP's program theory was based on an analysis of program documents and interviews with 57 stakeholder representatives and included an examination of vital components of the articulated program theory.

Throughout this component, the researcher worked closely with key program stakeholders to formulate clear, concrete statements of the program's goals and objectives, as well clearly articulated accounts of how the desired outcomes are expected to result from participation in the program. This included multiple meetings with three program administrators, and one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with these program administrators, as well as 10 additional full-time staff members. The program evaluation theory conceptual framework guided the evaluation of the program theory. The result of this component was the development of a detailed change model (casual processes that

must occur to reach the desired outcomes), action model (actions or interventions in a

program that produce the desired outcomes), and logic model (Chen, 2006). The findings

for this component of the research were identified through in-depth, one-on-one, semi-

structured interviews with key program stakeholders, including the program CEO and

other program administrators and staff, as well as program participants and family

members, and through an examination and analysis of program documents. The

interview questions (Appendix A) were used to help key stakeholders identify and

articulate the central goals and intended outcomes of each program component, as well as

how each service was intended to produce the described outcomes. This phase of the

research included member checking to ensure the detailed outcomes (action model,

change model, and logic model) were described as the stakeholders envisioned. The

agreement of the key stakeholders on program theory served as an essential step to

verifying that the theory description exemplified their understanding of how the program

is intended to function.

Articulated Program Theory

A primary purpose of developing an articulated program theory, which is "an explicitly

stated version of program theory that is spelled out in some detail as part of the program's

documentation and identity," is to clarify stakeholders' implicit and explicit assumptions

on what actions are required to solve a problem and how the problem will respond to the

actions (Rossi et al., 2004). Prior to this study, NJ LEEP had an implicit program theory

that lacked a precise definition of how program services were intended to produce clear

and specific outcomes. Developing an articulated program theory through the use of

questioning, document analysis, and feedback from key stakeholders addressed question

one in Component 1 of this research study: What do key stakeholders identify as the primary goals and objectives of NJ LEEP? In order to answer this question, action and change models were developed (Figure 3), which in turn lead to the development of the program logic model (Figure 4).

The program theory conceptual framework underlying this research asked two general questions: 1) Why does the intervention affect the outcomes (change model)? and 2) How are the contextual factors and program activities organized for implementing the intervention and supporting the change process (action model)? (Chen, 2006). The action and change model were created through in-depth document analysis, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and member checking to assure the model matched their understanding of how the program is intended to function. These steps lead to the initial development, clarification, and revisions of the model, which helped to create a change model that describes the program interventions (program activities that work to change determinants and outcomes), the determinants (mechanisms that mediate between the interventions and outcomes), and the outcomes (the anticipated effects or results of participation in the program).

Change Model. Constructing the change model was essential to articulating the program theory because it assumes that the effective implementation of the program intervention and activities will directly influence the determinants that will in turn produce the desired outcomes. In this model, the interventions include services for program participants in grade 9-12 including after-school educational programs, Saturday writing classes, five-week long summer programs, parent workshops and outreach, and the alumni support program. The determinants, which mediate between the interventions

and the outcomes, include active and regular student and parent/guardian participation in program services throughout the course of high school, and during post-secondary education, as well as the implementation of effective curriculum, curricular resources, and efficient delivery and instruction. The anticipated outcomes of the change model include improved academic outcomes through increased GPA, ACT, writing, and debate scores, as well as improved soft skills, such as professional behavior and networking, followed by enrollment into and graduation from a four-year post-secondary school with a bachelor's degree. Specific program details for the change model are summarized in Table 4.

Resources

Environment: Greater Newark Area

Action Model

Implementing Organization: NJ LEEP

Associate Organization and community partners: Seton Hall Law School, local law offices, and corporations

Intervention and service delivery protocols: The curriculum for each program

Implementers: NJ LEEP CEO, full time and part-time staff members, mentors, volunteers

Ecological Context: The classroom spaces for each program and the time and duration of the program

Target Population: Low-income and/or first generation HS students in the greater Newark Area

Change Model

Interventions*

Interventions include services for participants in grade 9-12 including after school educational programs, Saturday writing classes, five-week long summer program, parent workshops and outreach, and alumni support programs

Determinants*

The determinants includes 1) active and regular student and parent/guardian participation in program services throughout the course of high school, grades 9-12, and during post-secondary education and beyond. 2) Implementation of effective curriculum, curricular resources, and effective delivery and instruction

Outcomes*

Improved academic outcomes including improvements in GPA, ACT, writing, and debate scores. Improved soft skills such as professional behavior and networking skills. Enrollment into and graduation from a four-year postsecondary school earning a bachelor's degree.

*additional details in Table 4

Figure 3: NJ LEEP Change Model (after Chen, 2006)

Table 4. *Change Model Details*

Intervention	Determinants	Anticipated Outcomes
Summer Law Institute	The students attend and actively participate in the program for the time and duration of the five-week summer session. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Staff will identify students who are a good fit for the program and invite them to join the four-year college bound program. Students will have a foundational understanding of criminal law and will have become integrated into the culture, behavior, and expectations of NJ LEEP.
9th Grade Life Skills program	The students attend the program one day per week after school from 4:00 to 6:00 pm for the duration of the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	The students have a foundation of both academic and soft skills and habits they will need to succeed in a rigorous academic environment and a professional workplace.
9th Grade Saturday grammar class	Students attend and actively participate in the Saturday grammar classes from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm for 21 Saturdays throughout the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students improve their foundational writing and grammar skills through repeated and intensive grammar instruction and practice.
10th Grade Summer Legal Internships	Students attend and actively participate in a summer internship placement for the time and duration assigned. The internship placement and accompanying assignments and activities promote learning and networking opportunities and expose students to professional environments	Students are exposed to different professions and students are able to practice their networking and communication skills.
10th Grade Debate and Mentor Program	Students attend the program one day per week after school from 4:00 to 6:00 pm for the duration of the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective. Students are assigned a mentor to support them in the debate cycle process.	Students' reading comprehension, writing, and speaking/debate skills will improve. Students will have a foundational knowledge of constitutional law. Students also gain comfort with handling an increased workload and managing priorities. Students develop positive and supportive relationships with their mentors.
10th Grade Saturday Expository writing class	Students attend and actively participate in the Saturday writing classes from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm for 16 Saturdays throughout the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students' writing scores on the writing rubric will improve by the end of the year.
11th Grade Summer ACT Prep	The students attend and actively participate in the program for the time and duration of the five-week summer session. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students' improve in test taking skills and improve foundational skills in math, reading, and writing. Students' ACT diagnostic test scores improve.
11th Grade after school	Students attend the program two days per week after school from 4:00 to 6:00 pm for the duration of the school year. The	Students' ACT scores improve.

ACT Prep	curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	
11th Grade Persuasive Writing	Students attend and actively participate in the Saturday writing classes from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm for 16 Saturdays throughout the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students' writing scores on the writing rubric will improve by the end of the year.
12th Grade Summer College Application Process	The students attend and actively participate in the program for the time and duration of the five-week summer session. The delivery and instruction are effective.	Students will have completed a college level Western Philosophy course and will know study strategies and skills for completing college level work. Students will complete a list of colleges and corresponding budgets, write a personal statement, complete an activities essay, and write a resume. Students will develop a working knowledge of the college application and financial aid process and will have a heightened sense of comfort navigating the intricacies therewith.
12th Grade after school College Application Process	Students attend and actively participate in the program two days per week after school from 4:00 to 6:00 pm until December. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students will complete the college application process applying to multiple four-year, competitive colleges and universities. Students will have applied for scholarships, grants, and/or financial aid, where applicable.
12th Grade Senior Seminar	Students attend and actively participate in the program one day per week after school from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm from January to the end of the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective.	Students will have discussed and understand strategies for dealing with socio-emotional issues related to transitioning to post-secondary education and navigating the non-academic side of college. Students will be accepted to and enroll in a post-secondary institute with a clear understanding of financial support and responsibility.
12th Grade Saturday CAP and Research Writing	Students attend and actively participate in the Saturday writing classes from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm for 16 Saturdays throughout the school year. The curriculum, curricular resources, and delivery and instruction are effective	Students will complete all required essays for all components of their college and scholarship applications. Students will write an eight to ten-page research paper using proper MLA formatting and citations based on a given prompt.
Parent Outreach Programs	Parents attend and actively participate in the parent workshops and programs throughout the duration of the school year. The support, resources, and delivery of parent outreach material is effective.	Parents know, understand, and are empowered to participate in and support their child's academic career

Alumni Support	Alumni are able to be contacted and participate in alumni services. Alumni services, resources, and delivery are effective.	Program alumni graduate in four years from a post-secondary educational institute with a bachelor's degree.

Action Model. The action model, which identifies the systematic plan for implementing the components that will make the change model most effective, goes hand in hand with the change model, and its development also aided in articulating the program theory (Figure 3). Developing the action model consisted of identifying and clarifying the implementing organizations (the organization responsible for the organization of staff, resources, and activities needed to implement the program), program implementers (the people responsible for providing or delivering the resources, such as the staff, teachers, mentors, etc.), associate organizations and community partners (outside partnerships and organizations with whom the program works and collaborates with to implement the program), the ecological context (the environmental components that directly interact with the program), the intervention and service delivery protocols (the steps taken or curriculum implemented to deliver the intervention), and the target population (the group of individuals the intervention the program is intended to serve). Developing the specific components of the action model was a necessary step for evaluating program theory, and in turn for providing a holistic assessment of the program in order to provide rich information about how and why NJ LEEP reaches or fails to reach its intended outcomes during the process and outcome evaluations.

In NJ LEEP's action model, the primary implementing organization is NJ LEEP, with the CEO, full and part-time staff members, mentors, and volunteers responsible for delivering the services to the program participants through the implementation of the

program activities. The associate organizations, which programs often rely on for additional support and collaboration, include Seton Hall Law School, which provides classroom space for the summer programs, and over 150 local law offices, corporations, and community partners who contribute time, resources and financial support towards implementing the program services. The ecological context of the program includes the direct environmental factors that influence the effectiveness of the program implementation, which includes the physical spaces and time and duration of each program service. Currently, the ecological context for NJ LEEP includes two primary sites where service delivery takes place, Seton Hall Law School, and NJ LEEP headquarters, both located in Newark, NJ. The time and duration of the program includes four years of programming through high school and four years of support services for alumni. The intervention and service delivery protocols for NJ LEEP are the individual program curricula and resources used to deliver instruction. Each program service within NJ LEEP has specific curriculum guidelines that the implementers are responsible for following for the duration of the program services. The target population intended to receive the services provided by NJ LEEP were identified by 100% of the key stakeholders as low-income or first-generation students attending grades 9-12 in the greater Newark area.

Logic Model

The logic model (Figure 4) developed with NJ LEEP summarizes their articulated program theory and change model. The goal of implementing this program in Newark, NJ is to academically and socio-emotionally prepare low-income and first-generation high school students from the greater Newark area for success in college so that 100% of

its program participants enroll in four-year post-secondary institutions and graduate within four years with a bachelor's degree. This model includes a description of the problem statement that NJ LEEP is addressing with the implementation of their program: Because low-income and first-generation students are demographically underrepresented in postsecondary educational settings when compared to their white, more affluent peers, predominately as a result of specific social justice barriers to access and success in college, and there is an increasing demand for highly skilled workers and a documented need of higher educational attainment for middle class employment, effective programs are needed to prepare under-represented students for college and career.

Throughout the interviews with key stakeholders, providing academic and socio-emotional services that prepare students to enroll in and graduate from college were consistently identified as the primary goals of the program, which was succinctly described by one staff member, "to help low income and first-generation students from the greater Newark area to succeed in high school and go to college and graduate from college." All staff members interviewed shared this goal, and all indicated that preparing students to enroll in and graduate from college is NJ LEEP's primary mission. This consistent agreement among stakeholders confirms that the articulated program theory does, in fact, represent their understanding of how the program is intended to work. This logic model is based on three major tenets of NJ LEEP's program theory: 1) more low-income, first-generation students would enroll in and graduate from college if they were more academically and socially/emotionally prepared and had more opportunities to practice networking, public speaking, and other communication and professional skills, 2) more low-income, first-generation students would enroll in and graduate from college

if they had support in how to apply to, finance, and plan for college, and 3) more low-income, first-generation students would enroll in and graduate from college if they have parental and adult mentor support, before, during, and after their enrollment in post-secondary education.

Program Theory. A well-defined, articulated program theory not only describes what the program anticipates happening, but it describes why these outcomes will occur. NJ LEEP's articulated program theory holds that if the program participants regularly receive additional academic services then their academic achievement will improve, which will in turn academically prepare students to enroll in and succeed in college. In addition to academic interventions, the program services and interventions provide socio-emotional skill development and instruction in professional behavior and expectations. The program theory assumes that if students receive services that develop these non-academic skills, students will then be further prepared for both college and career. The program theory also holds that providing supplemental services and support in the college application and enrollment process will help first-generation and low-income students overcome college access barriers, which will in turn result in their ability to apply to and enroll in college. The last component of NJ LEEP's articulated program theory indicates that providing a strong support system through parental outreach programs and workshops and providing program alumni support while in college will result in greater student success during high school and in their post-secondary education.

Problem Statement: Low-income and first-generation students are demographically underrepresented in postsecondary educational settings when compared to their white, more affluent peers, predominately as a result to specific barriers to access and success in college. The increasing demand for highly skilled workers and the documented need of higher educational attainment for middle class employment requires effective programs to prepare under-represented students for college and career.

Goal: The NJ LEEP four-year, after school, college bound program has been implemented in Newark, NJ to academically and socio-emotionally prepare low-income and first generation high school students from the greater Newark area for success in college, resulting in 100% of its program participants enrolling in four-year post-secondary institutions and graduating within four years with a bachelor's degree.

Long-Term Outcomes

- Students remain in college consistently and graduate in four years
- Students have a support system and network connections that help student find a job following graduation

Intermediate Outcomes

- Student's GPA's and ACT scores improve
- Students are increasingly socially and academically prepared for college
- Students apply to and enroll in four-year post-secondary institutions
- Students have a strong support system with family and NJ LEEP mentors

Initial Outcomes

- Program participants regularly attend program services and actively participate
- Students begin to improve in academic skills
- Students begin to develop soft skills and networking skills
- Students begin to think about and plan for college and career
- Students begin to develop positive mentor relationships with caring adults

Outputs

- Services and programs are conducted effectively to meet the need of the program participants
- Low-income and first generation students from the greater Newark area attend for the duration and frequency of the program

Activities

- Saturday Writing Classes
- Summer Programs
- 9th grade academic skill and networking skill development
- 10th grade debate education and communication skill development
- 11th grade ACT test prep
- 12th college application program
- Parental outreach and alumni support programs

Resources/Inputs

Faculty/Staff
- Program administrators
- Teachers
- Volunteers
- Mentors

Classroom and office space

A curriculum and curricular resources for each program

Funding
- Grant and public funding
- University Partnerships
- Private Funding

Partnerships:
- Local Law offices
- Seton Hall
- Community

Program Theory

- More low-income, first generation students would enroll in and graduate from college if they were more academically and socially/emotionally prepared and had more opportunities to practice networking, public speaking, and other communication and professional skills

- More low-income, first generation students would enroll in and graduate from college if they had support in how to apply to, finance, and plan for college

- More low-income, first generation students would enroll in and graduate from college if they have parental and adult mentor support, before, during, and after post-secondary education

Figure 4. NJ LEEP Logic Model

Each component of this articulated program theory is supported by the research literature. It has been well documented that a student's academic readiness has an explicit influence on both college access and post-secondary persistence and that academic preparedness is one of the greatest predictors of success in college, particularly for urban students (Backstrand et al., 2014; Boboc & Nordgren, 2013; Conley, 2012; Schwartz & Washington, 1999; Stewart et al., 2015). NJ LEEP's program theory that providing additional academic support to increase skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as preparing students for college entry exams, is grounded in valid, research-based findings about post-secondary access and persistence.

The second component of the program theory, supporting students through the college application, enrollment, and financial aid process, has also been supported by research as a means to improving college access and persistence for low-income and first-generation students (ACT, 2004, 2010; Cabrera et al., 2005; Holcomb-McCoy, 2010). These studies, in particular the report by American College Testing (ACT), found that understanding of and access to finances and college application awareness have a significant influence on students' post-secondary attrition and persistence. NJ LEEP's program theory that providing individual services and supports, including waiving fees for college entrance exams and applications and providing financial counseling for college, aligns closely with the research that indicates these are significant barriers to college access, particularly for individuals from a low-socioeconomic background.

Research also supports the component of the program theory that indicates that providing education and support to parents and families members of student participants can directly affect a students' academic achievement and persistence in higher education.

Multiple studies have demonstrated that a parent's support and encouragement can have a powerful influence on a students' academic success and persistence (Harper & Harris, 2012; MacLeod, 2008; Morales, 2010). This suggests that program services that target parental involvement and education on how to academically and emotionally support a child through the college process can result in greater persistence for these students.

Resources and Inputs. The logic model also articulates the indispensable resources and inputs that are needed to address the problem and for the program to achieve its goals. One of the most essential resources identified by the key stakeholders is having an effective staff, including program administrators, teachers, volunteers, and mentors. During interviews, eleven out of thirteen staff members identified having an effective staff as the most important resource for effectively implementing the program, which was described by one staff member who said,

> I think that one of the things that makes us most successful is our one-on-one relationships with the students, and so I think that the programming staff is really key to that. And not just the people who are on the front lines of programming, but any staff member who interfaces with students.

Another resource that key stakeholders identified as essential for effective implementation of the program included providing adequate classroom space, particularly as the program continues to develop and grow. Although over half of the staff members identified adequate space for programing as an essential resource, several staff indicated concern about the current space limitations of the program. One staff member described the need for adequate space as an essential component of creating a comfortable learning environment, saying, "It's hard to have an effective class when it's too hot in the room or people are too cramped, and I had 22 kids in my room the other day and I was running out of desks, so more space so people can work and feel comfortable."

Implementation of effective curricula across all programs was also identified by over half the staff as an integral resource to successful program implementation. The staff overwhelmingly indicated that an effectual and rigorous curriculum is essential to improving academic outcomes. One staff member indicated the need for an effective curriculum in order to better prepare students for college, saying,

> I think that would help better prepare them for college and beyond. So, if our curriculum was ramped up more in terms of involving more reading and more writing, like not just excerpts of texts, but like, let's read whole books, let's discuss them, let's mimic more of that college experience.

Since each after school, Saturday writing class, and summer program has its own unique curriculum, it is essential that these resources be effective in order for the program to meets its goals of preparing students to enroll in and graduate from college.

Other resources identified by key stakeholders also include the ongoing need for funding, as well as the collaboration with outside partnerships, many of which contribute to program funding. Since NJ LEEP is a non-profit organization, it is constantly seeking additional funding resources to help sustain and implement its services and programs. While they do rely on public educational funds and grants, a major source of its funding comes from private funding and donations. The program funding is necessary to pay for adequate program space, hire and retain effective staff members, and cover the cost of curriculum and resources. Partnerships with community organizations, corporations, and local universities also help contribute to ensuring the successful implementation of the program by offering both funding and additional resources such as providing space for summer programs, hosting students for internships, and connecting students to additional mentors and volunteers.

Activities. Working with the key stakeholders of NJ LEEP revealed that many of their activities are grounded in the belief that there is no quick fix to preparing disadvantage students for college and career readiness. NJ LEEP's articulated program theory demonstrates that preparing low-income and first-generation students for college and continuing to provide them with support until they graduate from college, necessitates systemic investments, multifaceted approaches, and collaborative efforts to help students overcome barriers to college access and success through a variety of activities. The NJ LEEP program logic model identifies each of the program service activities that are comprised of academic and non-academic skill training through the Saturday writing classes, the five-week long summer programs including the Summer Law Institute (SLI), legal internships, ACT prep, and the College Application process (CAP) program, the after-school programs including 9th grade life skills (academic and networking/professional skill development), 10th grade Debate, 11th grade ACT prep, and 12th grade CAP. The other program services include both the parent outreach and workshops, which seek to educate about and involve parents in their child's educational and college aspirations, and the alumni support program, which seeks to provide support to students during their time in post-secondary institutions.

Outputs. The outputs component of the logic model describes what is necessary to mediate between the activities and the anticipated outcomes. In the NJ LEEP model, the outputs needed include that the services and program activities are conducted effectively to meet the needs of the program participants. This includes ensuring that the time and duration of each program service is appropriate to produce the desired outcome, and that the resources used are effectively implemented. An additional output is the

participation of the target population, low-income and first-generation students from the greater Newark area for the duration and frequency of the program. If students are not from the target population, or if they do not participate for the duration and frequency of the program, then it is unlikely that the program will achieve its intended goals.

Outcomes. The last three columns of the logic model identify the anticipated initial, intermediate, and long-term outcomes associated with participation in the program. The first outcome column, initial outcomes, describes the immediate impacts or results of participation in the program activities. The immediate results of the implementation of program activities typically refer to changes in skills, knowledge, and awareness. NJ LEEP has identified the initial outcomes to include an initial improvement in academic skills, non-academic soft skills, and networking skills. Students will also begin to develop an awareness and knowledge about college and college planning. Furthermore, after initial participation in the program, students will begin to develop positive adult and mentor relationships and begin to understand the importance of these positive relationships. The second outcome column describes the intermediate outcomes anticipated from participation in the program activities and includes the identifiable behavioral changes that result. The anticipated intermediate outcomes if the initial outcomes occur are improvements in academic outcomes, including an increase in GPA and ACT scores, demonstrating college readiness both socially and academically, applying to and enrolling in a four-year college or university, and having a strong support system of both family and NJ LEEP mentors. The final column describes the long-term goals that are anticipated if the initial and intermediate outcomes occur, and often have a greater community impact. In the NJ LEEP model, the long-term outcomes include

student persistence and graduation from a post-secondary institute with a bachelor's degree and the ability to use a support system and networking to find employment following graduation. These long-term goals reflect the desire to alleviate the problem statement that NJ LEEP is addressing through the implementation of its program services, which is preparing low-income and first-generation students to enroll in and graduate from college in order to decrease the educational achievement gap.

The logic model identifies a theory of change. This articulated program theory asserts that if NJ LEEP provides academic training, socio-emotional support, experts to support students in college applications and enrollment, and positive adult mentors and supports for students and families, the students will be academically and socially prepared to enroll in, succeed in, and graduate from post-secondary education, helping to decrease the academic achievement gap and overcome social justice barriers to college access and persistence.   This model creates a shared understanding of how and why the program is expected to work and it creates a framework to guide the program process evaluation and works hand in hand with the Program Action Model and Change Model (Figure 3).

Assessment of Logic and Plausibility

Assessing the logic and plausibility of the program theory was the final step in the program theory evaluation. The assessment of NJ LEEP's program theory was based on an analysis of program documents and interviews with 57 stakeholder representatives and included an examination of vital components of the articulated program theory.

Are the program goals and objectives well defined and feasible? The assessment of the program theory demonstrates that the overall mission and the goals

articulated by NJ LEEP are clear, with agreement and consistency among stakeholders, including those involved in implementing the program and those receiving the program services. In addition, the goals and objectives are well defined and measurable, which allows them to be evaluated to determine whether or not the goals and objectives have been obtained. The program goals are feasible and involve conditions that NJ LEEP are able to implement and carry out in a meaningful way and are grounded in research-based approaches to increasing college access and persistence for low-income and first-generation students. The nature and scope of the goals and objectives, including improving academic and socio-emotional skills, providing support in college access and enrollment, and educating and supporting parents and alumni, are reasonable objectives based on effective implementation of the program as detailed in the change model, action model, and logic model.

Are the characteristics of the target population well defined? The program theory clearly articulates the target population of program participants to include low-income, as defined by NJ LEEP as students from families making less than $70,000 for a family of four, or first-generation, as defined by NJ LEEP as a student whose parents do not have a post-secondary degree obtained in the United States. The characteristics of the target population are further defined to include only participants who live in the greater Newark area, which includes Newark, the Oranges, Irvington, Belleville, and Elizabeth and are rising 9th through 12th graders. These characteristics of the target population were 100% agreed upon among the key stakeholders in the implementing organization. These characteristics are also clearly articulated in program documents. There is, however, a lack of clarity regarding additional characteristics of the target population that permit a

student to be accepted into the program. Statements from key stakeholders in the

implementing organization about personal characteristics the participants should possess

ranged from "highly motivated," which was a characteristic identified by over 50% of the

staff, to other statements, which included students being "independent," "driven," or

"open to feedback," and "demonstrating willingness to grow." Each of the additional

characteristics beyond low-income, first-generation, and residing in the greater Newark

area are equally difficult to define and measure and are judged on a much more

subjective scale through the recruitment process.

Is there agreement about the services provided and their intended effects?

There is agreement across all key stakeholders that the academic, socio-emotional, and

college-bound skill building activities and services contribute to increasing access to and

success in college. Program implementers and participants, as well as family members,

agreed that participation in the program results in increased academic achievement,

public speaking and networking skills, and planning for and achieving success in college.

There was also agreement between the program implementers and program participants

about the specific outcomes associated with specific program activities, for example, key

stakeholders in both groups indicated that participation in the ACT prep course

significantly boosts ACT scores, participation in the writing classes leads to an

improvement in writing skills, and participation in the debate program leads to an

improvement in public speaking skills, all of which align closely with the program theory

and change models.

Summary

Overall, the articulated program theory was determined to be logical and plausible. The program theory is addressing the problem statement by providing services that assist its target population, first-generation and low-income students, to overcome the major barriers to college access and persistence through academic, socio-emotional, college enrollment, and parental and alumni support programs. The findings of this component of the research indicate that the logic and plausibility of the program, if implemented as intended, will likely address the significant barriers that low-income and first-generation students face in college access and persistence. The program relates in an appropriate manner to the nature and circumstances of the social conditions of the problem statement by providing targeted interventions to a specific population in need. In addition, the program theory is clearly articulated to provide an ideal program objective including identifying a specific target population (low-income/first generation high school students in the greater Newark area), a specific direction of the change (positive academic and socio-emotional change to prepare students for college), a specific magnitude (100% of program participants enroll in college and graduate in four years), a specific time frame (four years to graduate from college, and four years in the high school program), and measurable outcomes (100% of program participants enroll in college and graduate in four years). Furthermore, the basic assumptions of how the program services are intended to result in the anticipated program outcomes are grounded in evidence-based research that demonstrates that academically preparing students for college, providing support services for college access, and creating a support system with family and adult

mentors all contribute to increasing college access and persistence to low-income and first-generation students.

Chapter 6: Process Evaluation Findings

Program Process Evaluation Overview

The program process evaluation component of this research was focused on evaluating how NJ LEEP's program services have been implemented. Assessments of program process and implementation are used to assess the fidelity and the effectiveness of the implementation of a program. This portion of the evaluation examined the various services provided by NJ LEEP to ascertain how well the program is operating in accordance with its program theory. The primary purpose of a program process evaluation, in Schieirer's words, is that it "verifies what the program is and whether or not it is delivered as intended to the targeted recipients" (Rossi et al., 2004). Within the conceptual framework of Program Theory, a process evaluation seeks to examine the primary determinants that mediate between the program interventions and the anticipated outcomes. In the case of NJ LEEP, the primary determinants are the effective implementation of the program services, the use of effective curriculum and curricular resources, and providing services to the intended target population.

Prior to beginning the process evaluation, the researcher met with three NJ LEEP program administrators to develop a framework for this component of the evaluation, which helped to determine both its purpose and scope. These discussions identified two major goals of the process evaluation in regard to how the NJ LEEP program services have been implemented: 1) to assess the quality of NJ LEEP program services and implementation, and 2) to evaluate how the program structures and activities align with the program theory and goals established through the program theory evaluation. The scope of this evaluation was predominately focused on the after-school programs and

Saturday writing classes, which were determined by the program administrators to be the areas of greatest importance. It was determined through these discussions that the alumni program, although a major component of the program logic model and imperative to achieving the long-term outcomes of the program, would not be evaluated because this component of the program is still in the process of being developed. The parent workshops and summer programs were also observed to provide details for the rich, thick program description and understanding of the program; however, these were excluded from the scope of this process evaluation. The program process evaluation conducted lends to answering the research questions in Component 2, which ask:

How has the NJ LEEP program been implemented?

1. Do aspects and characteristics of the program provide evidence of quality?
2. How do program structure and activities align with the program theory and goals?

The primary goal of this component of the research was to assess how the program has been implemented, and if it demonstrates characteristics of a quality after-school program. For the purpose of this component of the evaluation, "program quality" was defined by the degree to which the five domains of out-of-school time best practices were evident in the program services through the use of the Out-of-School Time Observational Instrument (Appendix C). These five domains used in the evaluation were recognized in previous research of after-school programs that identified key characteristics of high-quality, after-school programs, which found that "positive outcomes occur when adults deliberately create opportunities where activity content and instruction processes are both knowledge and youth centered and when adults use both structured and unstructured teaching strategies to promote learning and mastery" (Pechman et al., 2008). The five domains of effective after-school practices include: 1)

youth relationship building, 2) youth participation, 3) staff relationship building, 4) staff instructional strategies, and 5) activity content and structures. These results were corroborated by an analysis of program documents, including a review of the service delivery protocols (the program curriculum and curricular resources) and with interviews with program staff, participants, alumni, and family members to provide their perspectives on the program implementation. The triangulation of data for analysis of this component of the research allowed for a more holistic assessment of the quality of the program, its implementation, and the program structures.

Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument Overview

A primary component of the process evaluation consisted of conducting observations of the various activities provided by NJ LEEP to evaluate program quality. The Out-of-School Time (OST) Observation Instrument was used to record consistent and objective data about the quality of NJ LEEP's programs. This instrument was selected because it allowed the researcher to unobtrusively observe staff and program participants engaging in after school program activities while concentrating on the "strategies that staff employ and the instructional and interpersonal interactions that occur among youth participants and between participants and staff" (Pechman et al., 2008).

The OST Observation Instrument was developed and grounded in research regarding high-quality after-school programs that have demonstrated that effective programs are not happenstance, but rather are the result of the effective employment of "activity content and structure, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the degree to which activities focus on skills development and mastery, all factors that encourage positive youth outcomes" (Pechman et al., 2008). The OST Observation Instrument is

not intended to provide a quality score to specific activities within an after-school organization, but rather to provide overall objective evidence that can indicate whether the program is characterized by specific academic, enrichment, and youth development qualities that have been demonstrated by research to promote positive outcomes in program participants.

The OST Observational Instrument uses specific indicators to identify characteristics of the five domains of youth development (Table 5). Based on the conceptual design of the OST Observation Instrument, within domains, some indicators will occur frequently within a high-quality program, whereas other indicators are likely to happen less frequently and only in applicable situations, even though they are still significant to confirming high-quality learning and developmental opportunities. Indicators such as youth being friendly to others and staff using positive behavior management are expected to occur routinely, whereas giving youth meaningful choices or encouraging youth to work together are less likely to occur repeatedly, even in high-quality programs, but should still be evident throughout the observations.

Each indicator within the five domains was rated on a scale from 1 to 7 (Figure 5), in which a score of 1 means that the indicator was not evident during an observation period and a score of 7 means that the indicator was highly evident and consistent (Pechman et al., 2008). Additionally, the OST Observation Instrument required supplementary notes to be taken during each activity to provide descriptive details to validate the selection of a score for each indicator. Overtime, through repeated observations, the indicator scores may vary, but in general, the five domains will be rated between a 5 and 7 for a high-quality program.

Table 5. *OST Domains and Indicators*

DOMAIN	INDICATORS
Youth relationship building	Youth… • Are friendly and relaxed with one another • Respect one another • Show positive affect to staff • Assist one another • Are collaborative
Youth participation	Youth… • Are on-task • Listen actively and attentively to peers and staff • Contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions • Have opportunities to make meaningful choices • Take leadership responsibility/roles
Staff relationship building	Staff… • Use positive behavior management techniques • Promote the participation of all • Show positive affect toward youth • Actively listen to and/or observe youth • Encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content of the activity • Engage personally with all youth • Guide peer interactions
Staff instructional strategies	Staff… • Communicate goals, purpose, and expectations • Verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments • Assist youth without taking control • Ask youth to expand on their answers and ideas • Challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency • Employ varied teaching strategies • Plan for/ask youth to work together
Content and Structure	Activity… • Is well organized • Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically • Involves the practice/a progression of skills • Requires analytic thinking

—1—	—2—	—3—	—4—	—5—	—6—	—7—
Exemplar is not evident		Exemplar is rarely evident		Exemplar is moderately evident or implicit		Exemplar is highly evident and consistent

Figure 5. OST Indicator Scoring Scale

Observation Findings

To answer the first program process evaluation question, the OST Observation

Instrument, an after-school program evaluation tool, was used to assess program structure

and quality. This instrument was used to collect qualitative data and assign ratings to five

evidenced-based best practices in after-school programs. For this evaluation, the

researcher observed multiple program activities, including all four after-school programs

(Life Skills, Debate, ACT Prep, and CAP), as well as the four Saturday writing classes

(Grammar, Expository, Persuasive, and CAP/Research writing). Each activity was

observed for three, fifteen-minute periods, and an additional five-minutes for scoring, for

a total of eight hours of observations across all eight program activities. Observations

took place over multiple sessions in order to monitor a variety of activities for each

program service. The researcher coded and recorded contextual information, took

descriptive notes, and rated the quality of the five domains of best practices on a 7-point

scale for each activity being observed, using the OST Observation Instrument manual

rubric with exemplars as a guide. Additional details regarding program structure, such as

the content of the activity, skills targeted, type of classroom space utilized, number of

participants, and types of staff were also recorded during each observation. Qualitative

notes regarding specific examples of activities, quotes of youth and staff comments, and

descriptions of the environmental context were documented on the OST Observation Instrument to provide additional context.

After completing a total of 24 observations, individual scores were calculated for each indicator within each of the five domains by taking the mean of the sum of the indicator scores observed across all activities. Individual domain scores were calculated by taking the mean of the sum of each of the indicators within each domain. Lastly, the mean of the individual best practice domain scores provided an overall program quality score. NJ LEEP received an overall program quality rating of 5.24 out of 7 (Table 6). According to the OST Observation Instrument manual, a high-quality program will receive a score between 5 and 7, indicating that, generally, NJ LEEP does demonstrate aspects of the qualities and characteristics of a high-quality after-school program.

Youth Relationship Building. NJ LEEP received a rating of 5.28 for youth relationship building. This rating captures youth-directed relationships, with a higher rating indicating that youth participants are supportive and respectful of one another and of the programming staff, and that the youth participants assist one another and are collaborative. Overall, the student participants consistently appeared comfortable interacting with staff, other adults present, and their peers. Students participants were regularly observed socializing informally, smiling, laughing, and joking with their peers throughout the program activities. The students demonstrated respect for their peers by considering each other's viewpoints, providing constructive feedback during class discussions and activities, and supporting another learner's development when working together. In one instance during a class discussion, a student shared that she felt "unable to grow personally when I'm under a lot of pressure," to which several other students in

the class offered positive suggestions for her to deal with stress, such as "try taking deep breaths when you feel overwhelmed," and "maybe you could try meditation to relax." These types of interactions demonstrated program participants willingness to help their peers think about and figure out how to work through a problem.

Table 6. *Out-of-School Time Observation Instrument Findings*

Domain	Indicators	Mean Indicator Score	Mean Domain score
Youth relationship building	Youth are friendly and relaxed with one another	5.58	
	Youth respect one another	5.63	
	Youth show positive affect to staff	5.79	
	Youth assist one another	5.17	
	Youth are collaborative	4.21	5.28
Youth participation	Youth are on task	6.04	
	Youth listen actively and attentively to peers and staff	5.67	
	Youth contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions	5.83	
	Youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices	3.29	
	Youth take leadership responsibility/roles	3.46	4.81
Staff relationship building	Staff use positive behavior management techniques	5.96	
	Staff promote the participation of all youth	6.08	
	Staff show positive affect toward youth	6.63	
	Staff actively listen to and/or observe youth	6.42	
	Staff encourage youth to share ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content of the activity	6.33	
	Staff engage personally with all youth	5.96	6.10
	Staff guide peer interactions	5.29	
Staff instructional strategies	Staff communicate goals, purpose, and expectations	5.96	
	Staff verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments	5.83	
	Staff assist youth without taking control	5.75	
	Staff ask youth to expand on their answers and ideas	6.04	
	Staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency	5.33	
	Staff employ varied teaching strategies	3.88	
	Staff plan for/ask youth to work together	3.50	5.18
Content and structure	Activity is well organized	5.46	
	Activity challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically	4.58	
	Activity involves the practice/progression of skills	4.67	
	Activity requires analytic thinking	4.58	4.82
OVERALL PROGRAM SCORE			5.24

The highest indicator score within this domain was "youth show positive affect to staff," which received a mean rating of 5.79. Evidence of this indicator was frequently observed and consistent as students were often seen smiling at and engaging in good-natured joking with staff members throughout most program activities. This specific indicator correlates closely with one of the articulated program goals that seeks to develop positive adult and mentor relationships as a means to foster a nurturing support system for the students, which research indicates can have a powerful influence on a students' academic success and persistence (Harper & Harris, 2012; MacLeod, 2008; Morales, 2010).

The indicator that received the lowest score within this domain is "youth are collaborative," which received a mean rating of 4.21, indicating that this exemplar is only moderately evident in the program activities. Over the course of the 24 observations, collaboration between students, which the OST Observational Instrument defines as "youth work together/share materials to accomplish tasks where youth are equal partners in the work" was seen infrequently (Pechman et al., 2008). This low rating is likely the result of most of the program activities' structures, which were frequently observed to be teacher-centered and teacher-led discussions. While students were regularly observed providing assistance to their peers by reaching out to help or mentor a peer through a task, there were very few observed instances of opportunities for peer collaboration to complete a task. The rating for this indicator could be improved through instructional planning that intentionally provides opportunities during program activities for students to collaborate, which research indicates results in significant social, behavioral, and

academic benefits for students (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013). One

study found that "students who engage in collaborative learning are significantly more

likely than students who do not learn collaboratively to persist to the 2nd year of college"

(Loes et al., 2017).   This research closely aligns with NJ LEEP's program goals and

therefore suggests collaborative learning should be implemented as an essential

component of the program's activity structure.

      Youth Participation.   NJ LEEP received a rating of 4.81 for youth participation.

This domain represents participation in program activities where youth exhibit

engagement in the activity, have opportunity for input and leadership, and appear to

enjoy the activity content. The rating NJ LEEP received for this domain reveals that,

overall, the indicators within this domain do not demonstrate aspects and characteristics

of high-quality after-school programming.

      Within in this domain, NJ LEEP received high-quality ratings for three of the five

indicators including "youth are on task," "youth listen actively and attentively to peers

and staff," and "youth contribute opinions, ideas, and/or concerns to discussions," which

received ratings of 6.04, 5.67, and 5.83 respectively. Overall, for these three indicators,

the youth participants were observed to be focused and attentive, interested in what others

had to say, and actively shared their ideas and opinions during program activities,

demonstrating students were engaged in the program activities. In general, students were

observed being engaged at a level that was suitable to each activity. Participants were

frequently seen following directions, turning to look at their peers or program staff when

they were speaking, and raising their hands to contribute ideas or to make connections to

what they were learning, all indicative of active participation. Students also

demonstrated active engagement through positive body language such as sitting up straight, facing forward, and actively taking notes when appropriate. Only occasionally were students observed being actively disengaged in the program activities. In two instances, students were observed falling asleep during class discussions, and in several other instances students were observed off-task by engaging in side conversations unrelated to the class activities. In each of these instances, staff were observed attempting to redirect students back on task.

The indicators that received the lowest scores in this domain were "youth have opportunities to make meaningful choices" and "youth take leadership responsibility/roles," which received ratings of 3.29 and 3.46, respectively and were the lowest ratings out of the 28 indicators across all five domains. In over 25% of the activities observed, these indicators received a rating of 1, which means that the exemplar was not evident. These indicators exemplify opportunities for students to choose what they do, how they do it, and with whom they collaborate, and that they have the opportunities to lead or direct some part of an activity. Low ratings on these indicators are likely the result of the structure and planning of the program activities that do not allow for opportunities for student decision making and leadership. Much like the role of collaboration in student learning, creating opportunities for students to make decisions and take leadership roles is essential in preparing students for success in college and career (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017). Scores in these indicators could be improved by creating structural changes in the implementation of program activities to create opportunities for students to not only passively participate

through staying on task and contributing ideas, but to also engage in meaningful decision-making and leadership roles.

Staff Relationship Building. NJ LEEP received a rating of 6.10 for staff relationship building, the highest score out of the five domains. This rating captures instances of staff-directed relationships, with a higher rating indicating that "adults provide guidance and emotional support and take an interest in youth and their ideas" in a highly evident and consistent manner across all observed activities (Pechman et al., 2008). Overall, the staff were consistently observed interacting in friendly ways, using caring tones, positive language, and frequently smiling, laughing, and engaging in good-natured jokes with the youth participants. The staff succeeded in making students feel welcome and comfortable in the classroom by addressing them by name, using upbeat tones, and positive body language (e.g. smiling, shaking hands, making eye contact). NJ LEEP staff also regularly worked to include all youth in activities and discussions by encouraging participation and involving students who appeared to be isolated or disengaged. Throughout all activities observed, it was evident that the staff demonstrated positive affect towards the youth participants, such as by actively listening when they spoke and engaging personally with the students as individuals. The staff consistently remained calm and showed respect to students by listening to their opinions, ideas, and concerns, and earnestly responding. During class discussions and activities, the staff frequently encouraged participants to think for themselves and used positive reinforcement language such as "That's a great idea, what more can we add," "Thank you for sharing your ideas," and "Great thinking!"

Behavior management was rarely necessary across the observed activities; however, when it was required, NJ LEEP staff regularly used positive behavior management techniques that corrected and redirected student conduct and demonstrated high expectations to create a safe and constructive classroom environment. In one instance, several students laughed at another student who was taking a long time to respond to a question. The NJ LEEP staff member leading the activity responded by communicating clear expectations for behavior and respect in the classroom, saying "Hey, let's give her a sec. Sometimes we all need a sec. There is no shame in needing more time." The staff member went on to directly address the student responding, using encouraging language, "Ok, take your time, why don't you share the first idea that popped in your head?" When the student responded, the staff continued to provide reassurance and positive feedback, saying, "That's a great start! Let's help her out. What else can we add?" This interaction, along with other similar situations observed, demonstrated the staff's ability to redirect student behavior in a constructive manner, encourage positive interactions, listen and respond respectfully, all while refraining from using unnecessary threats or anger.

Staff instructional Strategies. NJ LEEP received a rating of 5.18 for staff instructional strategies. This rating depicts the staffs' use of strategies that "are geared towards encouraging youth to push beyond their present level of competency" (Birmingham et al., 2005). This score indicates that, overall, the instructional strategies employed by NJ LEEP staff members had clear goals, purpose, and expectations, were varied and differentiated, and encouraged students to exceed beyond their current level of acuity. Within this domain, NJ LEEP received high quality ratings for five of the seven

indicators, including: "Staff communicate goals, purpose, and expectations," "staff verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments," "staff assist youth without taking control," "staff ask youth to expand on their answers and ideas," and "staff challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency" (Pechman et al., 2008).

Overall, for the activities observed, the goals, purpose, and expectations were made clear to the participants. Staff frequently displayed the agenda on the board, including indicating what the students were expected to accomplish within the activity period. Staff used the agendas to make clear the value and purpose of the days' activities and to help keep students on task. In addition to the visual cues displayed in the classroom, staff were frequently observed verbally making goals and expectations clear such as saying, "Remember, we want to sit up, so we don't go into sleep mode," and "We can answer in a paragraph form or question by question, but we want full sentences, not just bullet points." These direct and clear statements serve to both keep students on task and to set well-defined expectations of both behavior and outcomes for the class activity.

Throughout the observed activities, staff consistently provided verbal recognition for student participants' efforts and accomplishments, and frequently challenged them to move beyond their current level of competency. When students responded to questions or participated in class discussion, staff regularly replied by thanking the students for sharing and providing positive feedback that encouraged students to elaborate, such as saying, "That's an interesting perspective, can you give us a specific example of what you mean?" When students were unable to further elaborate on their response independently, staff were often observed employing scaffolding techniques to help

students to formulate a response on their own. Staff used effective questioning

techniques such as asking, "why do you think that is?" or "how else might we use that

example?" to get students to expand on their ideas, better clarify their thoughts, and

further articulate the ideas they shared in class in order to empower student learning.

Within this domain, NJ LEEP did not receive highly-rated scores for two

indicators, including "staff employ varied teaching strategies" and "staff plan for/ask

youth to work together," which received scores of 3.88 and 3.50, respectively. Fewer

than 35% of the observed activities employed varied teaching strategies or planned for

and asked students to work together. The overwhelming majority of activities observed

were staff led and directed, with most instructional strategies focused on direct

instruction with staff leading with questions and students responding. This indicates that

there is very limited differentiated instruction occurring during NJ LEEP activities, which

limits the opportunities to engage students and reach those with different learning styles.

Furthermore, the teaching strategies rarely incorporated opportunities for student

collaboration, which is an essential skill needed for success in college and in career.

Content and Structure. NJ LEEP received a rating of 4.81 for content and

structure. This domain represents how well activities are planned and organized, that the

challenge level is appropriate to the age, and that there are opportunities for problem

solving. The rating NJ LEEP received for this domain reveals that, overall, the indicators

within this domain do not demonstrate aspects and characteristics of high-quality after-

school programming. Within this domain, only one indicator, "activity is well

organized," received a highly-rated score of 5.46. The majority of the activities observed

did demonstrate a clear organization and lesson flow that had specific goals and

objectives with a clear lesson plan with tasks that could be conducted within the time frame available. All necessary materials and supplies needed for activities were regularly observed to be prepared and available for use.

Although the structure of the activities was well organized, the content of the activities did not always demonstrate characteristics of high-quality after-school programming. The activities observed did not consistently challenge students intellectually, involve a progression of skill development, or require analytic thinking that required students to think about and solve meaningful problems. While some activities observed demonstrated some of these characteristics implicitly, the majority of activities observed were teacher led questioning and discussion style activities, which provides fewer opportunities to engage and challenge students in higher order, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Often times, students were asked to read and respond to specific texts, or answer questions based on a foundational reading, but there were few opportunities for students to synthesize multiple readings or apply their learning to a new context.

Environmental Context. The environmental context of the OST Observation Instrument was rated on a yes/no scale indicating whether or not appropriate environmental characteristics were or were not evident. The environmental context includes indicators that describe having the appropriate level of adult supervision, having an appropriate work space for the activity type, and providing the necessary materials in an adequate supply. For all activities observed, the environmental context was observed to appropriate. These indicators were found to be consistent and evident across all 24 observed activities.

Observation Findings Summary

Based on the OST, overall, NJ LEEP demonstrated aspects and characteristics of a high-quality after-school program. The greatest strengths observed were in the youth and staff relationship building domains. These highly-rated domains indicate that the youth are supportive and respectful of one another and of the staff and that the staff effectively provide guidance and emotional support, as well as take an interest in the student participants and their ideas. The areas that were observed to not meet the standards for high-quality after-school programming were all related to a similar vein: content and structure of program activities that allow for student collaboration, leadership, and incorporate differentiated teaching strategies to engage a variety of learners. This suggests that while the structure and organization of the program activities are well defined, and the staff and student relationships are positive, there is significant room for improvement in the instructional strategies and curriculum content used in order to add value and effectiveness to the implementation of NJ LEEP's program activities to achieve its articulated goals.

Service Delivery Protocol and Document Analysis Findings

A second crucial component of process evaluation is to examine the service delivery protocols used in the program services. In the case of NJ LEEP, the service delivery protocols include the curriculum and curricular resources implemented across the different program activities. The implementation of an effective curriculum is a primary determinant between the intervention (NJ LEEP's program services) and the anticipated outcomes (student academic and socio-emotional growth). For this phase of the process evaluation, "curriculum quality" was defined by the degree to which the program service

delivery protocols met four domains of curriculum quality standards identified by research on what makes a quality curriculum (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008; Stabback, 2016). High-quality curriculum is defined as addressing the aspects and characteristics of the following four domains: 1) values each child and holds that every child matters equally, 2) is comprised of high-quality 'content' (up-to-date and relevant, suitably demanding, appropriately sequenced and progressive, balanced, and integrated), 3) is well-organized, structured, and focused (clearly documented and comprises a number of inter-related components expressed in consistent and coherent documents), and 4) is underpinned by a set of theoretical and philosophical beliefs that are research based regarding best practices for how children learn (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008; Stabback, 2016). A meta-analysis conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project on the impact of after-school programs further supported these identified characteristics of high-quality curriculum, finding that effective after-school programs all had implemented curriculum that was sequenced (uses a sequenced set of activities designed to achieve skill development objectives), active (uses active forms of learning to help students develop skills through differentiation), and focused (explicit activities that target academic and social skills grounded in research based learning) (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008). Evaluating the curriculum for these four characteristics that research has demonstrated supports positive outcomes in after-school programs allowed the researcher to present a more holistic assessment and understanding of the quality of the service delivery protocols selected and implemented by NJ LEEP and provide a more in-depth analysis of the process evaluation.

For this phase of the research, curriculum documents, including instructor manuals, syllabi, curricula resources utilized, and supplementary materials, were gathered for each of the after-school and Saturday writing course programs.   The documents and materials were meticulously reviewed, qualitative notes were taken, and indicators of the four domains of high-quality curriculum content and implementation were identified as highly evident and consistent (evidence found across all curricular resources consistently), moderately evident and inconsistent (evidence found across the majority of the curricular resources), or infrequent and absent from the materials (evidence absent from the majority of the curricular resources or very limited). Qualitative assessments were then summarized and articulated for each of the four areas of evaluation for program curriculum quality (Table 7).

Table 7. *High-Quality Curriculum Indicator Findings Summary*

Indicator	Definition	Qualitative Rating	Evidence
Values Each Child	Provides opportunities for fairness and an understanding that each child has different interests, aspirations, histories, and preferred ways of learning including: inclusivity, differentiation, and varied teacher roles with student-centered learning	Moderately Evident	• Curriculum and recourses allow for and support incorporating feedback to support students from diverse backgrounds • Moderate evidence of differentiation, with more opportunities in Life Skills and limited differentiation in writing courses • Teacher-directed rather than student-centered learning is the primary instructional strategy across program services
High Quality Content	High-quality curriculum content is defined as being up-to-date and relevant, suitably demanding (rigorous), and appropriately sequenced and progressive	Moderately Evident	• Curriculum is relatively engaging, rigorous, relevant, and progressive across most program services • Some curriculum is out-of-date including the Life Skills course materials with outdated references and allusions • The grammar course uses instructional practices, materials, and resources that teach grammar in isolation, an approach that is outdated
Well Organized and Structured	A high-quality curriculum is carefully and clearly documented with a clear structure and alignment between various components	Highly Evident	• Curricular framework is detailed, organized, and demonstrates a progression of skills • Resources and curricular materials are clearly structured with a detailed vision for anticipated outcomes aligned to each program service
Research Based	A high-quality curriculum that is underpinned by a set of principles about how children learn and is evidenced based consists of materials and practices that have been vetted through rigorous research	Moderately Evident	• Inclusion of research-based writing instructional practices such as prewriting, planning, summarizing, revising, and editing • Vocabulary and grammar curriculum and instructional practices are not research based • Direct instruction of academic skills (reading strategies, note-taking skills, test taking skills, public speaking), non-academic skills (networking, conflict resolution, etc.), and applying to college supported by research

Values each child. A high-quality curriculum that demonstrates its ability to value each child provides opportunities for fairness and an understanding that each child has different "interests, aspirations, histories, and preferred ways of learning" (Stabback, 2016). Within this framework, high-quality curriculum implemented in a program must allow inclusivity (assisting all students, regardless of ability, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, or socio-economic status), differentiation (incorporation of a variety of teaching and learning strategies that meet the needs of a diverse set of learners and learning styles), and promotion of new roles for the teacher (the teacher as an enabler of effective learning with a student-centered approach). Overall, NJ LEEP's curriculum received a qualitative rating of moderately evident for valuing each child. Generally, the curriculum materials selected and implemented throughout NJ LEEP's program services demonstrated highly evident characteristics of inclusivity. The nature of the program with a small student-to-teacher ratio allows for more personalized feedback and encouragement of students, which was urged throughout the instructors' manuals for the program services. The goal of the curriculum, as indicated through the various curricular materials, syllabi, and instructors' manuals, and the articulated program theory, is for students to demonstrate increasing growth in learning and achievement, rather than meet specific benchmarks to receive services or participate in the program. Across the writing programs, students are regularly assessed, provided feedback or re-taught the material in make-up sessions, and given the opportunity to revise or retake assessments. Regardless of student academic achievement or performance in the program, students are provided opportunities to grow and improve their academic skills, and effort is valued over ability, which the program materials

articulate consistently throughout its resources. Embedded within the instructors'

manuals are frequent statements that demonstrate inclusivity, such as "students will show

growth in learning over time," "lesson plans will be facilitated to reach, inspire, and

mobilize high school students with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and

knowledge/skills," "praise effort, not ability," and "use pre-tests to determine where

students need the most support." These various statements documented throughout the

curricular resources and staff training materials demonstrate a component of NJ LEEP

culture that seeks to encourage staff to be inclusive and supportive of all students,

regardless of their background or ability.

In addition to being inclusive, a high-quality curriculum facilitates and supports

differentiated learning. A differentiated curriculum provides space for teachers to adapt

the content, process, and product to meet the needs of the individual learners within the

classroom. Differentiation allows opportunities for a variety of learning styles to be

successful within a curriculum by providing chances for teachers to be flexible in how

they deliver the material and how they permit students to demonstrate learning.

Opportunities for differentiation were moderately evident throughout the NJ LEEP

curriculum and curricular resources. The content of the curriculum does allow for

moderate differentiation in several of the program services. The grammar course allows

for differentiation of content by providing opportunities to reteach students who need

additional support and exempting the students who demonstrated mastery of the material.

The instructors' manuals for the other Saturday writing courses also encourage

instructors to supplement materials with additional content; however, this is most

effective if they are trained in pedagogy and writing instruction. Within the College

Application Process (CAP) program, students self-select which colleges and universities they will apply to and which supplemental answers are most fitting for them to write, providing students some autonomy over the application process. Attempts at purposeful grouping are made for the ACT prep courses to allow for faster and slower paced instruction based on diagnostic assessments to best meet the needs of the students. Within the debate program, students are introduced to constitutional law issues in a variety of ways including watching videos, reading articles, and engaging in whole and small group discussions on the topics. Although there were some opportunities for content differentiation, it was not found to be consistently evident. Opportunities for differentiation could be increased by selecting more texts at varied reading levels to meet the varying needs of the students, providing supplemental, scaffolded, supporting materials, and using diagnostic assessments across all of the program services to identify specific areas of student strengths and weaknesses for purposeful grouping. Furthermore, since the curricular materials and resources are provided to instructors with the option of bringing in their own materials to differentiate, it is essential that all instructors are provided training in how to differentiate content, particularly since currently none of the staff have educator or pedagogical training.

Examples of differentiated process and product were less evident throughout the service delivery protocols. Process in a curriculum is defined as "how the learner comes to make sense of, understand, and 'own' the key facts, concepts, generalizations, and skills of the subject," predominately through a task or activity (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). An effective differentiated task or activity provides various options at differing levels of difficulty or based on student learning style and interests and includes providing

varied levels of teacher support based on student need and ability. Although instructors have some flexibility in lesson planning, overall, the service delivery protocols follow very specific structures that limit the amount of differentiation in process that is permitted. In general, throughout the curriculum, all students, regardless of skill level, prior knowledge, learning style, or interest, are required to undergo the same process to practice skills and demonstrate understanding, many of which are teacher-centered. The 9th grade life skills course, more than the other programs offered, includes a variety of hands-on, student-led opportunities through conflict resolution role-playing, networking and communication practice, and other active engagement activities that allow for differentiation. Opportunities to increase differentiation in the curriculum of the other programs could include responding to student readiness by providing a variety of learning choices at different levels of difficulty, allowing more student choice and collaboration based on student interest, and addressing a variety of learning styles by creating a learning environment that allows for flexible spaces, grouping, and options. Providing instructor training on how to differentiate process and product could help to increase the use of differentiation throughout these program services.

Promoting new roles for the teacher, which is described as creating personalized, learner-centered education was moderately evident in the curriculum and curricular resources. The curriculum instructors' manuals overwhelmingly call for teacher-directed and teacher led instruction. This was particularly evident in the Saturday writing classes where teachers are instructed to direct and control very structured, teacher-led lesson plans. The debate and ACT programs are also more teacher driven and focused, providing students with information, asking questions, and leading discussion. The life

skills course demonstrates multiple opportunities throughout its unit to have student-led, hands-on activities with the instructor as facilitator. The CAP program is also student driven, where students identify and select their colleges and universities and the instructors facilitate the process of researching and applying. Shifting the focus from teacher-led to student-centered dominated activities will provide more opportunities for inquiry, collaboration, and leadership roles for students, which research has demonstrated increases college and career readiness (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017).

Although NJ LEEP's curriculum does demonstrate evidence of valuing the individual student through inclusivity, differentiation, and teacher roles, there are areas where value could be added to provide more opportunities for growth and learning to help enable each program participant to achieve his or her greatest potential. Many of the characteristics within this component could be improved by refining the curriculum to allow for more flexible lesson planning based on individual student needs and providing professional development for NJ LEEP staff to use the resources more effectively to engage all students, no matter their learning style, background, or ability.

Comprised of High-Quality Content. High-quality curriculum content is defined as being up-to-date and relevant, suitably demanding (rigorous), and appropriately sequenced and progressive (P. M. D. Little et al., 2008; Stabback, 2016). In the 21st century, curriculum content can no longer simply be comprised of providing facts for students to learn or memorize, but must instead consist of instruction in specific skills, habits, and attitudes that are important for college and career and can provide opportunities for cognitive and social growth. Furthermore, the nature of the changes and

challenges in the current job market require the need for students to develop skills in communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and learning how to learn. Based on this framework for high-quality content, NJ LEEP's curriculum, overall, received a qualitative rating of moderately evident.

In general, the after-school curriculum and curricular resources demonstrate some aspects and characteristics of high-quality content, including being up-to-date and relevant, rigorous, and progressing. The constitutional debate program curriculum is focused on topics that are highly engaging and relevant to students today. This curriculum allows for the instructors to bring in current event topics that help the students to connect to the issues being debated and that are relevant to their lives, timeless, and engaging, as one staff member described,

> There are still some things that are pretty timeless, things like affirmative action, or censoring student speech at school, things like that that I think are particularly relevant to our students because they're going to be going to college and so affirmative action matters to them and they're going to be in school and potentially exercising their free speech, and so what are their rights. And so those things I think are timeless constitutional issues…We had one on the 4th amendment and searching your cell phone and the kids really loved that because they all have phones and have seen people get stopped. Like can the officer look at your phone, can they look at your instagram, like that's an important question because maybe on insta you did something you didn't want the police to see, so it's that kind of stuff. I think it helps capture the kids a little bit.

Furthermore, this curriculum requires students to read and write at advanced and often college level, to synthesize various materials in order to prepare for and defend a position, both in writing and orally, demonstrating a high-level of rigor.

The ACT program also has an up-to-date and relevant curriculum. This curriculum, which is provided and implemented by an outside test prep company, A-List, ensures that the materials, diagnostic tools, and content are "extensively researched test

prep materials that demonstrate the essential elements of mastering the ACT such as timing and question strategy essential elements of mastering the ACT such as timing and question strategy" (A-List Education, 2018). Although the program curriculum may not necessarily meet the standards for rigor, it does teach specific testing taking skills in a sequenced and progressive manner.

The College Application Process (CAP) program also demonstrated aspects of high-quality content. Although there is no specific curriculum for CAP, the instructors stay up-to-date with trends, information, and resources necessary to support students through this process. The course begins in the summer program where students focus on the foundational writing pieces that they will need to successfully apply to and enroll in college such as their personal statements, resumes, and supplemental activities essays. The course is progressive and sequenced to help ensure that students are able to complete and submit all necessary college application and financial aid documents within their deadlines.

In the life skills course, the curriculum content is relevant, rigorous, sequenced, and addresses many of the academic and socio-emotional skills the students will need to be successful in high school, college, and their careers; however, the content was not found to be up-to-date. Many of the resources and texts used in the student handbook are highly outdated and frequently make allusions to topics, events, and people that are likely unfamiliar to current program participants. Since a primary focus of this course is career preparedness, it is integral that the curriculum aligns to current trends in careers and employment; however, many of the resources within the student manuals completely omit relevant job opportunities and characteristics and focus on more traditional

employment such as becoming a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Furthermore, much of the content does not integrate opportunities for technology that are necessary in the 21st century as a foundation for learning and career even though technological proficiency is a necessary skill for most careers. Revising this curriculum to include current information, resources, and technology could help to significantly improve the content of this program service.

The content of the Saturday writing course curriculums and resources were also, in general, found to be up-to-date and relevant, rigorous, and sequenced. The 10th grade expository, 11th grade persuasive, and 12th grade CAP/research writing courses included opportunities to read and respond to current events, write about current and engaging topics, and read and respond to excerpts from various texts, all while developing and practicing progressing writing skills. The curriculum addresses common writing issues such as developing effective thesis statements, avoiding plagiarism by using appropriate citations, and providing supporting evidence, and provides practice for applying various writing skills that are sequenced and scaffolded. Unlike the other writing courses, the 9th grade grammar course focuses exclusively on grammar instruction using the grammar books *English 2600 and English 3200 with Writing Applications: A Programmed Course in Grammar and Usage* (1994). These books were written and developed over 20 years ago, during which time, extensive research has demonstrated that grammar instruction taught in isolation is highly ineffective and even detrimental to writing growth, indicating that although the books are sequenced and progressive, the curriculum and curricular resources for this course are both out-of-date and ineffective (Cleary, 2014; Graham, 2007; Graham et al., 2012; Hillocks Jr., 1984).

Well-organized and structured. A high-quality curriculum is carefully and clearly documented with a clear structure and alignment between various components. Within this feature, an effective program should have a curriculum framework that has a detailed vision, includes requirements for implementation and assessment, and provides guidance to instructors, and provides planned syllabi aligned with appropriate materials, teacher guides, and other supporting materials. Overall, NJ LEEP's curriculum receive a qualitative rating of highly-evident and consistent for organization and structure.

NJ LEEP's curriculum framework begins with the initial Summer Law Institute (SLI) program the summer before 9th grade, and progresses through a series of after-school, Saturday, and summer classes through the end of their 12th grade year (Figure 6). Each year of courses builds on and further develops both the academic and non-academic skills from the previous years in order to scaffold learning and ready students to be prepared for college or university. The curriculum documents demonstrate a clear structure that is organized to progress from one program to the next with opportunities for students to practice and apply their skills. Within the after-school courses, the students begin the program with life skills as the foundational course. An examination of the curriculum and curricular resources for this course revealed a progressive sequence of instruction in reading and study skills, goal setting, adolescent social and emotional topics, and career and networking skill building. As a primary course in the program, Life Skills sets a foundation to prepare students for success in the subsequent programs. In the ensuing program services, students are able to apply the skills they previously learned. The summer internships require students to apply and practice networking and communication skills. The debate program provides opportunities for students to apply

and practice the study and reading skills learned to high-level texts. The ACT and CAP

courses require students apply the study skills for test taking and the college and career

awareness preparation to select and apply to post-secondary institutes. This detailed, and

organized progression of skills that builds upon the previous program services helps to

direct students towards a path to be prepared both academically and socio-emotionally for

college.

9th Grade
- **Summer Law Institute**: introduction to program culture, habits, skills, and exposure to the legal field, foundational understanding of criminal law
- **Life Skills**: Develop foundational academic and study skills, socio-emotional skills, practice communication, networking, and setting goals for college and career, prepare for internship and higher level reading and writing
- **Grammar**: Develop and improve foundational grammar and writing skills

10th Grade
- **Summer legal or law related internship**: Exposure to different professions and practice networking and communication skills developed in Life Skills
- **Debate**: Practice and improve reading, writing, and speaking skills. Develop knowledge of constitutional law, and exposure to increased workload and practice with time-management skills developed in Life Skills
- **Expository Writing**: Practice and improve expository writing skills

11th Grade
- **Summer ACT Prep**: Practice foundational reading and math skills, develop test taking skills
- **ACT Prep**: Continued improvement in ACT scores and test taking skills
- **Persuasive Writing**: Practice and improve persuasive writing skills

12th Grade
- **Summer College Application Process (CAP)**: Practice and apply college level study skills, develop working knowledge of college application and financial aid process
- **CAP**: Complete college applications
- **Senior Seminar:** Discuss and understand strategies for addressing socio-emotional issues related to transitioning to post-secondary education
- **CAP and Research Writing**: Complete all required writing for college applications and research and write a college level research question

College
- Be academically and socio-emotionally prepared to remain in and matriculate through college and find employment post-graduation

Figure 6. NJ LEEP Curriculum Framework

Much like the after-school services, the Saturday writing courses build on the

previous years' writing skill development, introduce new skills, and provide opportunities

for additional writing practice. The writing curriculum each year scaffolds instruction to

address specific writing skills and apply those skills through various writing opportunities with instructor feedback. Each Saturday writing curriculum includes organized resources that helps students progress through the various writing stages developing an outline, creating an operational thesis statement, providing supporting evidence to create a strong paragraph, writing effective introductory and concluding paragraphs, editing, and revising. The skill levels progress each year from foundational writing skills in grammar, to expository, then persuasive writing, and finishing with a term-long research paper intended to mirror a college-level writing assignment.

Overall, the curriculum framework, materials, and resources are organized in a manner that clearly demonstrates a progression of skills instruction and practice. The documents within the curriculum were found to be clear, with specific instructor and student manuals and resources. Each individual program service curriculum is organized into specific units of study that provide opportunities for students to apply the skills they have developed. Although this was highly evident and consistent across all the resources used within the curriculum, it could be further improved by aligning the curriculum to specific college and career readiness New Jersey Learning Standards. The mission of the New Jersey college and career readiness standards is that "21st century life and career skills enable students to make informed decisions that prepare them to engage as active citizens in a dynamic global society and to successfully meet the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century global workplace" ("New Jersey Student Learning Standards: 21st Century Life and Careers," 2017). A high-quality curriculum that is intended to prepare students for college and career should be aligned to a framework supported by state and national standards. Taking time to align the curriculum to state

and national standards could further help to ensure that the structure and organization of NJ LEEP's program is addressing essential aspects of evidenced-based college and career readiness benchmarks.

Research Based. A high-quality curriculum that is underpinned by a set of principles about how children learn and is evidenced based consists of materials and practices that have been vetted through rigorous research. Within this framework, a high-quality curriculum that is planned, designed, and selected for instruction should align with educational standards and research regarding how students learn. Furthermore, the curriculum selected and implemented with a research-based approach should align materials and instruction to anticipated outcomes. Overall, NJ LEEP's curriculum received a qualitative rating of moderately evident for implementation of research-based resources and practices.

There has been substantial research on best practices for how children learn and what types of curriculum and instruction help or hinder academic performance and development of non-cognitive skills (Cleary, 2014; Daniels et al., 2007; Fang, 2012; Graham, 2007; Hillocks Jr., 1984; Kelly, 2012; Nicholl et al., 2013; Perin & Graham, 2007; Vesely & Gryder, 2009). Overall, the writing curriculum used for the 10th grade expository, 11th grade persuasive, and 12th grade research writing courses demonstrated highly-evident aspects and characteristics of several research-based writing practices. Within each of these courses, the curriculum includes resources and instructional practices in writing strategies, such as planning, revising, and editing, summarization and text structure instruction, and prewriting activities, all of which are supported by research to be effective practices at significantly improving adolescent writing skills (Daniels et

al., 2007; Graham, 2007; Perin & Graham, 2007). These types of writing practices have consistently been demonstrated by research to improve adolescent student writing outcomes, which is an essential goal of NJ LEEP's writing programs and a necessary skill for college and career readiness. One research-based writing skill that has been identified as an exceedingly effective writing practice that was not found to be highly-evident and consistent throughout the curriculum was peer assistance, which is defined as peers working together to plan, draft, and revise their writing composition (Graham, 2007). Incorporating more opportunities for peer review and peer assistance within the writing programs in addition to the current curriculum and practices could further improve the effectiveness of the program participants' writing skill development, as well as provide additional opportunity for collaboration, which is a student-centered practice supported by research to increase college and career readiness (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017).

Although many of the writing skills and instructional practices outlined in the curriculum are research based, the grammar and vocabulary instructional components of the curriculum were found to be ineffective and not supported by research. Currently the NJ LEEP utilizes a self-guided grammar instructional course as the 9th grade Saturday writing program, with *English 2600 with Writing Applications* and *English 3200 with Writing Applications* as the primary texts. This program provides in-depth grammar instruction through a programmed course that focuses on teaching grammar in isolation, which ample research has demonstrated is not only ineffective, but can produce adverse effects on writing skill, motivation, and performance (Cleary, 2014; Graham, 2007; Hillocks Jr., 1984; Perin & Graham, 2007). This research has overwhelming indicated

that instead of teaching grammar in isolation, particularly at the secondary level, students benefit much more from grammar instruction through writing and writing instruction. Much like the grammar curriculum and resources embedded in the writing courses, the vocabulary curriculum and instructional practices outlined within the instructors' and students' manuals demonstrated evidence of ineffective practices that are not supported by research. The current practices for vocabulary instruction in NJ LEEP's curriculum call for students to read words in context, provide a definition, and identify part of speech, as well as synonyms and antonyms. This vocabulary instruction is the followed by assessment asking students to match words to definitions or use vocabulary words to complete sentences. Research has demonstrated that this approach to vocabulary instruction and assessment is ineffective and does not promote long-term vocabulary acquisition (Beck et al., 2013; Flanigan et al., 2012; Mountain, 2015; Vesely & Gryder, 2009). Rather, highly-effective vocabulary curriculum and practices should include robust vocabulary instruction that is "vigorous, strong, and powerful in effect… and involves directly explaining the meanings of words along with thought-provoking, playful, and interactive follow-up" (Beck et al., 2013).

The after-school programs including life skills, debate, ACT Prep, and CAP also demonstrate aspects and characteristics of research-based curriculum. The curriculum for life skills focuses one component on providing instruction in study and reading skills such as using the SQ3R study method, using annotation for taking effective notes, and organization skills. Similarly, the ACT test prep course provides explicit test-taking skill instruction. Direct instruction in these types of skills has been demonstrated by research to play an important role in the improvements of students' academic and test-taking

performance (Bowker & Irish, 2003; Hassanbeigi et al., 2011; Renzulli, 2015; Zywica & Gomez, 2008). Research has also found that race differences on test scores can be partially mitigated by test-taking skills interventions, which suggests that providing instruction in this area to low-income, first-generation, minority students could potentially alleviate the achievement gap in high stakes, college entrance exams (Dollinger & Clark, 2012). Other academic skills such as reading, writing, communication, text analysis, and public speaking, and non-cognitive skills such as conflict resolution, networking, and goal setting that are embedded in each of these after-school program curricula and supplemental resources are supported by research to improve the related academic and socio-emotional skills and help prepare students for college and career (Kidron et al., 2014; Merrill et al., 2015). The CAP program curriculum, which is focused on supporting students through the college application process through college advising, financial aid support, and guidance in completing applications and supplemental essays has been supported by research to help improve college enrollment rates for low-income and first-generation students (Castleman & Goodman, 2015; Stephan, 2013). This research shows that when low-income and first-generation students are provided intensive support in the steps that lead up to applying to and enrolling in college, students are more likely to attend and persistence through college than students who did not receive these additional supports.

Service Delivery Protocol and Document Analysis Findings Summary

Overall, the analysis of the service delivery protocols and supplemental documents found moderately evident support that NJ LEEP's curriculum and curricular resources demonstrate aspects and characteristics of a high-quality after-school program.   The

greatest strengths observed in the curriculum and curricular resources were found in the organization and structure of the program that included a curriculum framework that has a detailed vision, includes requirements for implementation and assessment, provides guidance to instructors, and provides planned syllabi aligned with appropriate materials, teacher guides, and other supporting materials. The structure of the program, as well as the progression of skill development throughout each year of the curriculum was evident throughout all of NJ LEEP service delivery protocols. Evidence for valuing each child, high-quality content, and research-based practices and materials were found to be moderately evident. Evidence for these three areas was found in some aspects of most of the curriculum and curricular resources; however, it was not found to be highly-evident and consistent across all areas of the curriculum.

The areas that were found to be lacking evidence of high-quality within these domains include the grammar and vocabulary curricula, which were not supported by research to be best practices, out-of-date materials and resources, particularly in the life skills course, and limited opportunity for differentiation, collaboration, and student-centered learning across all program curricula. This suggests that while the structure and organization of the program activities are well defined, there is significant room for improvement in the curriculum content, resources, and implementation strategies in order to add value and effectiveness to the implementation of NJ LEEP's program activities to achieve its articulated goals. These findings closely align to the observation findings.

Key Stakeholder Perspectives

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews with program staff, students, alumni, and family members were conducted in order to more fully comprehend how NJ LEEP's program

services are being implemented and the process through which change occurs as a result of participation, which can lend to a deeper and more holistic understanding of the program process. In total, 57 face-to-face and phone interviews with 13 program staff, 9 program alumni, 28 current program participants, and 7 family members were conducted over the course of several months between April and October 2017. After the research participants provided IRB consent, all interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for content analysis. The interviews lasted between approximately 15 and 60-minutes each. Research participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy. Interview data were analyzed through the qualitative data analysis software program NVivo, which was used to help organize data and identify themes and categories throughout the data collection process. The themes emerged from the data analysis and were not pre-determined. The interpretation of the data for this component of the research included an analysis of the data for both themes and issues related to how the after-school program prepares students for success in higher education, and how the program is being implemented. The questions were designed to help the researcher identify how key program stakeholders perceived the program and how they perceived the program services help to prepare students for college and career. Four central themes emerged from the qualitative interview data including 1) academic skill development (reading and study skills, writing, speaking, critical thinking, and test-taking skills), 2) non-academic skill development (goal setting, networking and communication, professionalism, time-management), 3) relationship building (positive peer, staff, and mentor relationships), and 4) exposure (introduction to people, careers, colleges, and opportunities) (Table 8).

Table 8. *Key Stakeholder Perspective Findings Summary*

Theme	Description	Key Findings/Evidence
Academic Skill Development	Writing skills, test-taking skills, public speaking skills, critical thinking and analytic skills	• 100% of the current and past program participants interviewed identified growth in at least one academic skill area as a result of participation in the program • Over 90% of current and former program participants interviewed indicated significant growth in writing skills as a direct result of participation in NJ LEEP • 95% of participants interviewed who took the ACT/SAT prep course saw improvements in standardized test scores • 55% of students interviewed identified growth in public speaking skills • 51% of students indicated the program improved their critical thinking and analytic skills and described the program as more challenging or rigorous than their school work
Non-Academic Skill Development	Goal-setting, networking and professional skills, and time-management	• 65% of current or past program participants interviewed identified at least one area of non-academic skill development as a result of participation in NJ LEEP • 100% of interviewees articulated goals by describing specific plans for their future • 65% of current or past program participants interviewed identified developing networking and communication skills and time-management skills as a direct result of participation in the program
Relationship Building	Developing positive peer, adult, and mentor relationships	• 73% of program participants interviewed described having positive relationships with staff members who help to provide a support system • 68% of program participants interviewed identified developing positive and academic focused peer relationships as a result of participation in NJ LEEP • Only 40% of program participants interviewed who had been assigned a mentor indicated having a strong and supportive mentor/mentee relationship
Exposure	Exposure to careers and colleges	• 62% of program participants and alumni interviewed described learning about new jobs and careers as a result of participation • 43% of program participants and alumni interviewed identified learning about new colleges that they never heard of previously through research and discussion at NJ LEEP

Academic Skill Development

Academic skill development is one of the primary goals of participation in NJ LEEP's

program services as identified in the program theory logic model. Appropriate academic

preparation is also one of the greatest predictors of college persistence. Research has found that pre-college academic performance is a stronger predictor of college persistence than any other factor (Knaggs et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2015; Vandell et al., 2007). This indicates that a crucial key to preparing students for college success is taking steps to ensure that students are academically prepared prior to entering college.   During interviews, key stakeholders, including current program participants, program alumni, and parents/guardians of participants, identified improvements in multiple academic areas as one of the primary reasons for continued participation in the program and as one of the greatest perceived effects as a result of participation. Furthermore, 100% of the current and former program participants identified improvements in at least one academic skill area such as writing, critical thinking, test-taking, reading, or public speaking as a result of participation in the program.

Writing Skills. Over 90% of the current program participants and program alumni interviewed identified improvements in writing skills and abilities as a result of participation in NJ LEEP.   Throughout the four years of after-school, Saturday, and summer programs offered by NJ LEEP, students regularly participate in writing skill-building activities. A student who participates in NJ LEEP from the start of 9th grade through the end of their senior year will receive an additional 276 hours of writing instruction and practice through the Saturday writing classes on top of any writing instruction that they receive during the regular school day. Students spend a significant amount of time in the other NJ LEEP programs such as debate and CAP working on writing skills, as well. Consequently, the majority of student participants interviewed identified improvements in writing skills and abilities as the area of greatest academic

growth as a result of participation in NJ LEEP, including 100% of the program alumni.

One program alumnus emphasized how integral the writing practice across all program

services was to success in college saying,

> Writing. It's so much writing. Debate briefs, writing classes, grammar classes.
> And I think, I don't know where I would be or how my grades would be if I didn't
> get those writing skills because you really need to know how to write for college.
> That's super important. So, I think writing is one of the biggest ways it helped
> me.

Another program alumna supported this impression, and further emphasized how much

more individualized writing support NJ LEEP staff was able to provide than was

available during regular school stating,

> So, I definitely think that it prepared me a lot more than my high school did. NJ
> LEEP was the first place where I had to actually write a well written paper that
> was more than 3 pages long. And what sticks out to me more than most was the
> senior writing project, and that was basically a project that we had to write as
> graduating seniors with a scholarship incentive and the person who graded that
> assignment was basically I think the best English teacher or writing teacher that I
> had in high school and I only saw him once a week. Basically, he would go
> through my paper every single time, every iteration of it, and he'd cut through it
> and stick holes in my argument and walk me through how to make it better. And
> so, I think that that definitely prepared me for the rigors of college, so I knew how
> to write a better paper more than most people who would have come from my
> own background and I just felt a lot more prepared for rigorous work.

Many of the program alumni interviewed indicated that the rigorous writing requirements

at NJ LEEP helped to not only improve writing skills, but also helped to prepare them for

the intense writing workload required once in college. This was particularly beneficial

because several stated that they did not feel they received enough rigorous writing

instruction during the regular school day. The small class sizes of the program allow for

a smaller student to teacher ratio than can be found in the majority of the schools that

program participants attend, which could contribute to the capacity for more

individualized writing support.

The majority of current program participants also identified improved writing skills as one of the areas of greatest academic growth as a result of participation in NJ LEEP. One student believes that the writing skills with help ease the transition to college, stating,

> The essay writing skills especially, I find over the years that writing longer essays and longer papers has become a lot easier and just looking for information and like the different websites they taught us. So, I know that I can apply those skills in college. It will be an easier transition from senior year in high school to freshman year in college.

Several other current program participants interviewed described how the writing skills practice in the program has already helped to improve their grades in school, one saying, "It's just like, a lot of these skills have, especially in my English class, and just any assignments I have to do writing wise, I've seen a major boost in my grades compared to my peers' grades on writing assignments," and another sharing,

> It just changed the way that I write even normal essays, persuasive essays, argumentative essays, and so then my grade went up. I have now an A in my English class, and even my teacher noticed. She was like, oh, is it because of that program? And I'm like, yes, it is.

While all students interviewed indicated that the writing intensive focus on NJ LEEP helped to improve their writing skills, not all students agreed upon whether or not they benefitted from participating in the grammar course. Although almost half of the students interviewed described the grammar course as helpful, and beneficial, equally as many students described the program as not being helpful to improving their writing. One student who felt the grammar class was not effective said,

> So, the grammar didn't help me speak better. It didn't help me write better. It just was kinda, like for me, it was a not an obstacle, not even a burden, but just like this little weight on my back of learning something, and their reason is that it will help me, but it didn't really help me that much.

Another student who felt the grammar program was beneficial stated,

> We would practice grammar skills. It would be very simple at first, like just subject and verbs, and then it started getting more complex with commas and punctuation, clauses, things like that. I feel that that class was very beneficial to me because it helped me improve my writing, helped me be able to find more mistakes in my writing, and just make my writing as a whole, better.

These two perspectives were shared equally between the students interviewed, representing the differing perspectives of the program participants on the benefits of the grammar course.

The feedback regarding the improvements in writing skills and abilities suggests that, overall, the time and consistent emphasis on writing instruction in the program curriculum is perceived by both current and past participants to have a positive influence on their writing. These statements credit NJ LEEP with improvement in writing skills and acknowledge that NJ LEEP's staff and curriculum taught them these skills, which participants were then able to apply in their high school and college courses.

Test-Taking Skills.   Ninety-five of program participants interviewed who had taken the SAT (prior to 2014) or ACT prep course identified growth in standardized test scores as a result of direct instruction in test-taking skills through NJ LEEP's curriculum. The students interviewed who saw growth in their test scores reported that the test-taking skills benefitted them in their college application plans because they were able to apply to better schools than they might have without the test prep.

> I have a lower GPA, but because of NJ LEEP's ACT program, I can now look at the schools I want to. I can look at schools actually higher than I thought I would be, much higher than my peers, so now I'm looking at schools like Swarthmore, or not necessarily Ivy Leagues, but schools that compete pretty well.

Other students indicated that without NJ LEEP providing test prep, they would not have been able to afford it on their own, nor would they be likely to receive this service at their school. One student said,

> ACT is just really helpful for us. We need it. If we were in high school, they try to give us practice, but at my school they said that they have only one-month practice for us. They had another program come into our school, but I didn't do that because I already had NJ LEEP for it, and that cost to0 much money and this one is free.

Another student also described the benefit of the program saying,

> I would never be able to afford going to a tutor. I have never had a tutor in my life and having a person like Adam come in every week and review with us and go over test-taking skills. And I feel like if I was alone with that, I would never have scored a 26, or I would have been in the teens if I did it alone because I didn't have the stamina to do it by myself.

Overall, the program participants interviewed who had participated in the ACT or SAT test prep programs indicated that they benefitted from receiving these services and were able to apply the skills learned and improve their test scores. Test prep courses can often cost families thousands of dollars, which for the majority of NJ LEEP's participants is prohibitive. Although most colleges and universities look at student applications holistically, meeting a minimum score on a college entrance exam such as the ACT is a typical requirement. Each of the students interviewed who took the ACT prep course indicted that their scores improved as a result, which suggests that these students could potentially apply to more selective schools than if they had not participated in the test prep programs.

Public Speaking. Throughout the course of NJ LEEP's program, participants are required to regularly participate in debate cycles that necessitate public speaking in front of their peers, teachers, and outside adults, such as local judges and lawyers. Fifty-five

percent of the students interviewed described improved ability in public speaking and confidence in speaking to others as a result of participation in the debate program. Many of these students described having anxiety about speaking in front of others before participating in NJ LEEP and acknowledged that the opportunity to practice this skill helped to improve their ability and confidence speaking in front of others. One student shared,

> I really liked the constitutional law debates because with that it actually helped me get more help with public speaking and it kind of helped me a little bit with my stuttering because whenever I get nervous I always stutter. And with my, I start like breaking, like breaking down a little and I start getting a little anxiety. So, it kind of helped me with trying to improve on my shyness and speaking louder and it mostly improved on my confidence.

The program alumni who described growth in public speaking skills indicated that the confidence they gained has helped to improve their ability to succeed in college. One program alumna shared how the experience with NJ LEEP has led to confidence to present in college saying,

> It taught me how to speak, actually like public speaking because of the constitutional law debate. So, before I wouldn't have been able to stand in front of judges and stuff, or a room full of people and talk for 10 minutes, but now in college we had to do a presentation for two of my classes, and it was minute thing and everyone else was kind of worried and stressed, but then I was like, I've done this before, so yeah. I just did it.

In general, the program participants who expressed that they improved in public speaking indicted that prior to NJ LEEP they had confidence issues in speaking in front of others. Many of these students also acknowledged that they did not have many opportunities to practice public speaking during the traditional school day and, although they did not always enjoy the public speaking requirement at NJ LEEP, they recognized that the repeated practice helped to improve their skills and confidence.

Critical Thinking and Analytic Skills. Just over 50% of the students interviewed described improved academic growth in their critical thinking and analytic skills, often as a result of the rigorous and challenging workload. Many low-income and first-generation students who struggle during their first years of college do so because they have not received an academically challenging and rigorous course load during high school (Boboc & Nordgren, 2013; Radcliffe & Bos, 2013; Stewart et al., 2015). Furthermore, several of the students who indicated that they improved their critical thinking and analytic skills through participation in NJ LEEP also described not being challenged by the course work while at high school, such as these two current program participants, one who said,

> I feel like I needed that kind of, the amount of rigor in the academic work because I didn't get it from my school. But yeah, I was getting more work from, more work and more challenging work from LEEP than I was from my high school.

Another student shared,

> So, my school wasn't challenging at all. It was not challenging, but NJ LEEP definitely helped me with my writing. My writing wasn't college ready at all. But my school wasn't challenging, my school wasn't helping me with my writing. I was just getting A's, and it was just like, I never knew what, I knew my writing wasn't good either, but I never had anyone tell me, your writing isn't good, it was just like, ok, you wrote something, I'm going to give you an A. But when I went to NJ LEEP, they were like, well your writing is good, but you can do this, that, and a third, to improve, so that's what I was always looking for.

The rigorous nature of the program, which often requires students to manage additional weekly papers for their after-school and Saturday classes on top of their regular school work, resulted in over half the students interviewed describing being challenged, and often asked to think outside of their perspectives, particularly in the debate course. Several students indicated that this course specifically helped to improve

their critical and analytic skills because they were not able to choose the side they would

debate, which was described by one students as especially thought-provoking,

> I really like about it is the fact that you don't have to choose which part you would
> want to argue, we are assigned, then it's kind of like, it's challenging, because like,
> your mind is on the other side, but you really have to debate the side that's given
> to you.

Research has demonstrated that providing students with a challenging and

rigorous curriculum can help to academically prepare students for college persistence

(Boboc & Nordgren, 2013; Radcliffe & Bos, 2013). Low-income and first-generation

students are more likely to come from high schools that are less academically rigorous

than their more affluent peers attending suburban schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010;

Duncan & Murnane, 2014; IV et al., 2015; Rafazar, 2011). Furthermore, research has

shown that first-generation students are less likely to enroll in rigorous courses during

high school than students whose parents attended college, suggesting that even if a school

offers more challenging curriculum, these students may not access these courses

(Gewertz, 2018). Providing program participants with a challenging and rigorous

workload could help to better prepare these students for college persistence, particularly

if they are not receiving a challenging curriculum during school.

Non-Academic Skill Development

Helping students to develop non-academic skills such as goal-setting, networking and

communication, time-management, and professional behavior skills is a vital goal in NJ

LEEP's program theory, which seeks to develop these skills in addition to academic

skills. Research has shown that non-academic skill development, in addition to academic

preparedness and achievement, can play a significant role in college persistence (Milner

IV et al., 2015; Ramsey, 2008; Sedlacek, 2011). This suggests that integrating services

that address supporting students in developing non-cognitive skills while also supporting

academic development can have significant positive benefits, which could help prepare

students for success in college, particularly for low-income, first-generation students who

might otherwise not receive this support. During interviews, key stakeholders, including

current program participants, program alumni and parents and guardians, identified

developing non-academic skills as one of the greatest perceived influences resulting from

participation in NJ LEEP, second only to academic growth. While 65% of the current or

past program participants identified at least one area of non-academic skill development

as a result of participation in NJ LEEP, 100% of the students interviewed articulated

goals and aspirations for college and career, many of which were specific plans

developed through discussions with NJ LEEP staff.

Goal Setting: College and Career Aspirations. Throughout the course of the

interviews with current program participants and program alumni, the theme of setting

clear college and career goals emerged, with 100% of interviewees describing specific

plans for their future. Starting during the 9th grade life skills program, participants begin

researching colleges and careers and engage in discussions with staff about student

interests and best fit. Discussions regarding college continue throughout the four years of

the program with program staff regularly encouraging students and their families to think

about and plan for college. One student described how NJ LEEP and its community

helped to make her aware of all the options for her future, saying,

> So, my goal is to get into Columbia University and I think last year I was looking
> at a board where all the seniors basically listed all of the schools that they got
> into. I'm not going to say the person's name, but he basically got into the majority
> of the Ivy Leagues, and that was my goal to basically achieve what he did. And
> for me, I think that's the most important thing that you can gain from this program
> because a lot of minorities, a lot of people outside of this program don't know

much about going into Ivy League schools or top state schools, they're more like, oh yeah, I'll just settle for whichever school accepts me, or I'll just take a different path and not go or go to trade schools. So, I think the thing about NJ LEEP, it just opens your eyes and allows you to see that there are a variety of choices you can make.

Another student also clearly articulated goals for college and career that have changed over time as a result of exposure through NJ LEEP:

Before [NJ LEEP], I'd been considering programing as a career and going to a place that might have a degree in that, like NYU for example, but now that I've gone to more colleges and heard about more colleges because of this program, I'm now at least reconsidering that and maybe just thinking maybe I should try reaching out for something else instead and try it.

A different student, who has not yet decided on a specific career, still credits NJ LEEP with helping to identify the types of college that may be a good fit:

So, for college, I've been looking a lot. My parents have been helpful in getting me to visit schools, and NJ LEEP has given me, like, oh here's some schools I think you'd look at because they know the kind of schools I'm looking at. I'm interested in Smith College for example in Massachusetts. Career wise, I'm still not entirely sure because I'm still not sure what I want to study in college. This program introduced me to intersectional property law. There's also psychology I'd want to try out and different things like that.

Several other students also described how part of their plans included working hard to bring up their ACT scores to help them get into the college of their choice, such as one student who stated:

So, the ACT class really helps because I started with a 20 something and I'm hoping to bring it up like 10 points, which some people already did. So, if I study a lot and do all my work here in the ACT prep, it would help it bring it up so I can get into MIT.

Each of the students interviewed were able to articulate specific aspirations for the future, whether related to a potential college they were interested in attending, or a specific career or major they were interested in studying. Furthermore, many of the students were able to express the steps that they need to take to achieve their goals, such

as improving their college entrance exam scores or considering how different colleges and careers may be a better fit based on their interests, individuality, and financial resources. Research has indicated that there is a potential relationship between student academic success and setting positive goals for the future that involve attending college, selecting a career, and understanding the steps required to achieve these aspirations (Athanases et al., 2016; Harper & Harris, 2012; Morales, 2010; Vasquez & Buehler, 2007). Through the course of these interviews, the majority of the students made clear that the discussions with staff and participation in NJ LEEP's programs helped them to set future college and career goals, identify colleges and careers that would be a good fit, and identify the necessary steps, such as working to improve GPA or ACT scores, to achieve their goals. This suggests that the goal-setting focus of NJ LEEP's programs could contribute to future college and career success for program participants.

Networking and Professional Skills. Of the current student participants and program alumni interviewed, 65% described learning valuable networking and professional skills through participation in NJ LEEP. In addition to academically preparing students for college, one of NJ LEEP's goals is to help prepare students for future success in their career. The majority of the interviewees indicated that this component of the program was influential and effective at helping them to develop and improve these skills. Furthermore, program participants were often able to articulate how learning and applying these skills has helped them to achieve goals and find success outside of NJ LEEP.

One program alumna described an account where she was able to apply the skills she acquired through NJ LEEP in order to secure a job in college. She articulated that the

skills and habits she gained while participating in NJ LEEP have created a mentality of

being prepared saying,

> We were having a work study fair, and I was the only student who got dressed up in professional attire because that's what LEEP always says. And I had my resume and my business cards, and everyone was really impressed, and I'm like, it's because of LEEP where I had the mindset that I have to be prepared all the time.

Another student explained the repeated opportunities provided by NJ LEEP to practice

the skills learned during the program services outside of NJ LEEP were particularly

helpful:

> I feel like, networking is hard, for me at least, because when I see someone who's of a higher rank or like status, I get intimidated. But we're put into the gala and all these opportunities where we get to keep practicing how to talk to people, how to introduce yourself, and then how to end it, because I have trouble with that too, because like how do I end a conversation with someone because I don't want to be like ok bye! So that helped a lot.

Furthermore, several students indicated that developing networking and professional

skills was particularly valuable because they would not have the opportunity to learn

these skills in school, such as one student who stated:

> Because at school it's math, English, science, extra-curricular, gym, then you go home. They never brought in professionals to actually see or do anything that any professional does and I feel like a lot of my peers have been let down in that area where it comes to, they don't know how to dress professionally, or how to present themselves, or how to speak properly in front of people, in groups …But yeah, a lot of them aren't privy to the world of professionals, and I feel like that's where my school lacks, and a lot of schools lack, they don't have classes of like how to be a professional. But NJ LEEP did provide me with that opportunity to meet people and understand how the world works from the outside. I feel like that's extremely beneficial for us.

Many low-income and first-generation students in urban areas are also unlikely to

have parents that work in business professions where they would have opportunities to be

exposed to the appropriate types of behaviors, attire, and communication styles essential

to middle and upper-class employment. In addition to NJ LEEP teaching students about networking and professionalism and modeling these behaviors, the student participants made clear through their statements that the opportunities to apply and practice these skills were an essential influence in improving these skills. This demonstrates aspects of middle and upper class social capital (helpful social networks) and cultural capital (the knowledge, habits, skills, and certain way of thinking related to social class) that many low-income and first-generation students do not have and often do not have access to and which can have a profound effect on academic achievement (Bourdieu, 1986; MacLeod, 2008; Taggart & Kao, 2003).   Research has found that greater social and cultural capital results in increased academic achievement and increased opportunity for upward social mobility and also implies that if educational institutes are able to assist low-income and first-generation students in cultivating social and cultural capital, they could have a greater chance of achieving academically and improve potential for success in higher education and later career opportunities (Bankston, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986; Miller, 2012)

Time-Management.   In addition to developing networking and communication skills, 65% of current program participants and alumni identified cultivating time-management skills as a result of participation in the program. Many of the participants described at first feeling overwhelmed by the workload required by NJ LEEP in addition to their school work; however, they explained that NJ LEEP staff works to help them learn to manage their time, which many described as something they believe will be an essential skill needed to succeed in college. As one student described, learning time-management was challenging, but improves over time:

> Well, I feel like ever since I got into NJ LEEP, they helped me manage my time, because now I have extra work to do, it's not just school work and sports, it's all of

> it, so I have to put it into a calendar, and they taught me how to separate my time and manage everything.

Other students supported this response articulating how learning how to organize helped to improve time management, such as one student who said:

> NJ LEEP basically teaches a lot about time management and organization and I guess that's something that will really help me a lot in the future, because personally I have a really difficult time just organizing everything and I know that gets really stressful, so I'm basically thinking, with NJ LEEP, I'll know how to manage my time, I know how to organize myself. And if I'm feeling out of place in the future I can always call up one of the NJ LEEP faculty and they'll help me out a lot.

NJ LEEP begins instructing program participants in time-management skills through the life skills after-school program during freshman year. During this course, organizational and time-management skills are explicitly taught and continuously encouraged by staff. Effective time-management can be a struggle for first-year college students as they transition from long school days with regular and consistent bells and daily interactions with their teachers to the more open schedule with limited interaction with professors that students face in college. Research has indicated that having strong time-management and organizational skills can be a significant factor in college persistence while procrastination has been identified as one of the most salient factors in preventing undergraduate students from reaching their goals (Renzulli, 2015; Stelnicki et al., 2015). Furthermore, this research supports teaching time-management and organization directly as study skills, which can help improve academic outcomes of underperforming students, particularly for low-income students who have higher college drop-out rates than their more affluent peers. This suggests that preparing students with time-management skills during high school could potentially increase college persistence and future academic achievement outcomes.

Relationship Building

One pillar of NJ LEEP's logic model is focused on the development of a strong support system for program participants. Throughout the interviews conducted with current program participants and program alumni, the theme of developing positive relationships with staff members, peers, and mentors emerged. Overall, the majority of program participants indicated that they have developed positive relationships that have helped support their academic achievement, emotional growth, and personal development. Research has indicated that after-school program participants are more likely to achieve the positive outcomes associated with program participation if they are able to develop positive relationships with the program staff (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008; Weiss et al., 2009). Furthermore, research has demonstrated the significant influence peer relationships can have on academic achievement and that developing positive peer friendships can play a significant role in continued program participation (Strobel et al., 2008).

  Staff Relationships. Of the program participants interviewed, 73% described developing positive relationships with at least one staff member. Many of the current and former program participants also described the staff like a second family who helped to provide a strong support system in high school and in college, such as one alumna who said:

> I feel like LEEP is family. I remember first year after, after first semester, and even this past year every time I had a problem, I would text Mr. Feinstein or Ms. A. or like cry to them and I feel like that's just really helpful because again, having mentors and having people that you know that there's always a place you can go back to when you know that something is going on. That for me is really comforting, so I think personally LEEP really helps me grow as a person because I know that they're there for me if I fall.

Other students shared similar positive feelings about the staff, who were regularly

described as supportive, encouraging, and caring, including one student who said,

> I really liked the community that NJ LEEP provides because I feel like everyone is a mentor and like we kind of suffer through the work together. And I love Ms. A., and Mr. Feinstein, and Mr. Crawford. And Ms. A. is like my NJ LEEP mom. She's considered the NJ LEEP mom because regardless of what the issue is, she's always there for us, and Mr. Feinstein, too. I just love how whenever I have an issue, I can come up to them and they're openly available and if they're not, they'll be like, ok I'll get back to you on it. So, they kind of build this foundation of comfort and support, which is something that I feel like students need in order to grow as a person and student.

Overall, the program participants clearly articulated positive feelings towards NJ

LEEP staff members. They described relationships that supported both their academic

and socio-emotional growth, which also contributed to consistent program participation.

According to research, the quality of the program's staff and the relationships they are

able to foster with program participants is one of the most crucial factors in achieving

positive student outcomes in after-school programs (Deschenes et al., 2010; P. M. D.

Little et al., 2008; Weiss et al., 2009). The positive response students provided when

describing relationships with staff members suggests that NJ LEEP is effective in

fostering supportive and caring staff and student relationships, which can in turn

contribute to more positive student outcomes.

Peer Relationships. In addition to developing strong, supportive relationships

with caring adults, 68% of program participants and alumni described developing

positive peer relationships as a result of participation in NJ LEEP. Overall, the students

described making new friends within the program, many of whom shared their passion

for learning and dedication for success. Many of the students described making some of

their closest friends at NJ LEEP, such as one student who described the feeling of

community and family at NJ LEEP, saying,

> My favorite thing about NJ LEEP has to be the community. Because, like I said
> before, I say it all the time. I have a second family and NJ LEEP is my second
> family. They've seen me through the good times and the bad and I love walking
> into a place and knowing that I honestly am walking into a room of people who
> actually love me. And it's different than my friends at school because we haven't
> been outside of school working this hard with each other, doing extraordinary
> things, visiting Goldman Sachs, like I never would have had that opportunity.
> And I would have never chose a different group of people because they all love
> and appreciate and support each other in so many different ways. And we're all
> from different schools and it's magical how we formed bonds over the year.

Several students also described benefiting from making new friends at NJ LEEP who

shared and supported their educational goals, such as one student who said,

> They kind of guided me towards having better friends. To have friends that are
> just like me because having friends that are like, who want to go to college, who
> are all about their school work are in NJ LEEP, so that's where most of our friends
> came from and it kind of steered me away from the friends that weren't about
> school or didn't want to go to college.

Research has consistently demonstrated that peers can play a significant role in a

students' academic achievement and that the development of positive relationships with

supportive peers who also value education can improve academic outcomes (Harper &

Harris, 2012; MacLeod, 2008). The majority of participants interviewed described

making new friends with fellow NJ LEEP participants, all of whom are dedicated to

academic achievement, which suggests that these relationships are helping to provide

another positive academic influence on program participants and could further contribute

to improved academic outcomes.

Mentor Relationships. Only 40% of program participants and program alumni

who were interviewed and had been assigned a mentor identified relationships with

mentors as a positive outcome of participation in NJ LEEP. Each NJ LEEP student is

assigned a mentor during their sophomore year debate program as an additional support in preparing for and arguing their debate position. While many students did have positive relationships with their mentors, some of whom have maintained relationships long after graduating high school, equally as many students indicated that their mentor was frequently unavailable or completely unresponsive, leaving the student without a mentor. Other students also described feelings of frustration as they noticed all of the mentors available "are the same," implying the diversity of mentors was lacking.

One alumna who described a positive relationship with a mentor explained that even now after graduating college, they have maintained their relationship, which has provided a strong support system as the alumna continues to receive help through the job-hunting process, saying, "I've stayed in touch with my mentor. She's helping me right now, she was invited to my sweet sixteen and stuff and she's helping through the job process and helping me find and prepare for interviews coming up."

Other students described receiving additional academic support from their mentors that helped to improve their grades in school, such as one student who said,

> This program has given me my mentor. He has the highest expectations for me, and I see him as a close friend of mine. Where, now, he was the number one reason why I was able to go, to raise my GPA 3 points this year, which is a lot. Him and NJ LEEP have stood by my side to provide the tutoring hours. You need help pre-calculus, do you need help with this, help with any subject I mean. I know I have my friends I can rely on, and so having those resources available, my mentor who inspired me to perform at highest honors this year, really helped me advance.

Other students did not have a positive mentor relationship such as one student who described only meeting her mentor one time in three years, saying,

> I had a mentor from sophomore year to junior. My mentor got pregnant and I was very upset. I'm like, no, I'm priority. So, she got pregnant, and then I feel like she just forgot about me. And like, she would text me on different days, randomly

> every three months or so. Even though I would text her like every other week.
> She would just text me every three months, she's like, we definitely have to meet.
> I met my mentor once. That was at the gala sophomore year.

Several students also described feeling troubled by the lack of diversity among the

mentors and staff, which was described by one student who said,

> It's weird because I feel like for a program that has a lot of low-income, minority
> students, they don't really have that representation among the mentors and the
> staff at times. And that is something that I noticed as a mentee, during one of our
> debate competitions, where I looked around and I'm just like wait, everyone here
> is sort of, all our mentors are the same, and I don't know, I just find that kind of
> different. I don't know if like, I mean it could be because most of the people that
> LEEP has connections with are of one race potentially, but I don't know.
> Effective mentor programs can be a significant way to improve student outcomes

by creating close bonds between students and supportive adults. According to research,

in order for mentor programs to be successful, mentors and mentees should be carefully

matched, mentors should be well trained, and the mentor-mentee relationships should be

monitored and nurtured through programmatic supports (Merrill et al., 2015). While

some students did describe beneficial and supportive mentor relationships that have

added value to their experience at NJ LEEP, many students also articulated feeling

abandoned by their mentor and not receiving the support they hoped for and needed.

This suggests that the mentor program could be an advantageous component of NJ LEEP

and is valuable when the mentor-mentee relationship is strong; however, the

implementation and monitoring of mentor-mentee relationships could be improved to add

greater value to the program and to ensure all participants are receiving the benefits of

having a supportive mentor.

Exposure

A final theme that emerged from analysis of the qualitative interview data was the

perception that participation in NJ LEEP exposes participants to new careers and colleges

that students may otherwise never have considered. Exposure, which NJ LEEP cites in its tagline, "Habits, skills, and exposure," was described by 62% of the program participants interviewed as one of primary outcomes of participating in the program. This aligns with one of NJ LEEP's goal, which hopes to introduce participants to new careers and colleges through its various programs such as life skills where students research careers and college, summer internships where students work in various legal-related offices, and the College Application Process (CAP) program where staff works individually with participants to research and apply to numerous schools that would be a good fit for the student.

Careers. Sixty-two percent of the program participants and alumni interviewed described learning about new careers through several of the program services offered at NJ LEEP. Many of the students were not aware of the multitude of careers available to them after high school because they had never been exposed to these different opportunities. One student described exposure to various jobs and people as one of the greatest benefits of participating in NJ LEEP saying,

> I would say the exposure, definitely exposure, because as a high school student who kinda went in blind, I didn't like everything that I had to do, but I always appreciated meeting lawyers and going to court rooms, and having judges come in, like I always appreciated that aspect of NJ LEEP.

Other students supported this belief and described learning about and becoming interested in new careers they never previously considered, such as one student who described becoming interested in majoring in intersectional property law after learning about this career though her internship experience. In general, the program participants and alumni described learning a great deal about new careers they never would have

known about if they had not participated in NJ LEEP. This suggests that NJ LEEP is meeting its goal of exposing students to new careers.

Colleges. Forty-three percent of students interviewed articulated that they learned about colleges that they never would have considered as a result of participating in NJ LEEP. Many of these students also described that without NJ LEEP, they most likely would have ended up at a local college or a 2-year community college because most guidance counselors in their schools only provided these options to students. One alumna described how her high school did not know about many colleges, saying:

> And also, a lot of kids at my school, they all go to the same place. They all go to Montclair, or Farleigh Dickinson, and Rutgers, and they're all good schools, but people don't really go out past that, and I feel like people just don't know about other schools. Like me, I wouldn't know about other schools outside of NJ if it weren't for LEEP.

Many students also felt that the close relationships they developed with staff during their years at NJ LEEP enabled the staff to provide better recommendations and support for a good fit for college that their guidance counselors or parents could not provide, such as one student who said:

> I was telling Mr. Feinstein that during the CAP process, I wanted, my dream school was Columbia, and it was like Columbia or nothing, right? And with my SAT score, Columbia was a very high reach, so I was very stubborn, so I stuck with Columbia, and then we were going through other colleges and I had PACE and Hunter and CUNY school and SUNY schools, and Mr. Feinstein was like why do you have that, and I was like because I want to be in the city. And he didn't really yell at me, but he kind of gave me a lecture, of like, looking beyond the city, and he was like, let us help you because you can get into better schools than Pace and stuff, and he was like, let us do our job and it really shows me how much they care and how much they know their students, for them to recommend different schools, because, obviously Mr. Feinstein saw that I can do better than Pace, not trying to be like, conceited or anything, but that Pace wasn't my type of school, so he wanted me to do better. So yeah, the fact that they know each of their students and they know where they are academically, they can kind of personalize the college list and everything.

Many low-income and first-generation students may struggle with college persistence if they are not in a college that is a good fit (J. Smith et al., 2013). The individualized support program participants receive from NJ LEEP staff members can help to expose them to and match them with a college that is a best fit for the student. The relationships the students develop with staff allows for more personalized guidance than a student might receive from a guidance counselor who is working with hundreds of students. This suggests that the exposure to colleges and the ability to work closely with students through the college application process could play a significant role in college persistence and matriculation.

Key Stakeholder Perspective Findings Summary

Interviews with the key program stakeholders revealed that, in general, participants perceive participation in NJ LEEP supports development and growth of academic skills such as effective writing, public speaking, test-taking, and critical thinking skills, improved non-academic skills such as networking, setting goals, and time-management, helps to build positive relationships with peers, staff, and sometimes with mentors, and exposes students to colleges and careers. These findings reveal that participants do perceive they are benefiting in multiple academic and non-academic ways from attending NJ LEEP. Current program participants and program alumni were able to articulate clearly which programs helped to develop specific skills, which, overall, aligned with the program theory and intended program outcomes. The greatest area of perceived influence as a result of participation in NJ LEEP's program was in academic skills growth, particularly in improvements in writing. These findings aligned closely with the observational data and document analysis findings that suggest that the implementation

of the program is aligned to the program theory, participation in the program will help

improve academic achievement and develop important non-cognitive skills for college

and career readiness and help to create a strong support system for program participants.

Target Population

A primary determinant in the effective implementation of a program is that the intended

target population is receiving the program services. NJ LEEP administrators and staff

have clearly articulated the intended program target population to include low-income

(defined by NJ LEEP to be an income of $70,000 or less for a family of four) or first-

generation (defined by NJ LEEP as a family in which parents do not have a college

degree obtained in the United States) and attending 9th through 12th grade in the greater

Newark Area. An analysis of the program documents revealed that in the past three years

an average of 96% of incoming program participants met the target population criteria

defined by NJ LEEP. In the previous six years, NJ LEEP administrators and staff

acknowledge that they did not make as concerted an effort to recruit participants who met

the low-income and first-generation requirements and averaged only 77% of the

participants meeting the characteristics of the target population. This suggests that while

historically the program did not always recruit participants who met the low-income and

first-generation qualifications, NJ LEEP is making an effort to ensure that incoming class

participants do meet these characteristics.

Although NJ LEEP defines low-income as a family of four with an income of

$70,000 or less, this does not align with the recommendation of low-income determined

by Housing and Urban Development (HUD). According to HUD, in 2017, a family of

four earning $68,000 (an adjusted 80% of the median family income) qualifies as low-

income (Housing and Urban Development, 2017). Adjusting for this income level did

not significantly alter the findings the of the percentage of the target population in NJ

LEEP; however, aligning the program recruitment characteristics in the future with the

income level identified by HUD could help to ensure that the intended population is

receiving the program services. Given that the greater Newark area is an area of high

poverty, NJ LEEP should set for its goal to provide program services to participants who

100% meet the target population requirements.

Program Process Evaluation Findings Summary

Overall, the program process evaluation was implemented effectively. The

implementation of the program was found to align closely to the program theory with the

majority of program components being implemented in a manner that helps to generate

the intended outcomes, and in the past three years, NJ LEEP has recruited students who

predominately meet their target population criteria. The intersections between the

observational data, document analysis, and key stakeholder perspectives reveal that the

program is being implemented as intended and described through the program logic

model.

Although the overall implementation of the program is effective, the process

evaluation revealed areas where NJ LEEP could improve aspects of its program to align

more closely to research based best practices. The document analysis and the

observational data revealed that there is minimal integration of differentiation,

collaboration, and student leadership, which research has indicated can increase college

readiness, persistence, and matriculation. The observation data and document analysis

also indicated that the program has implemented a grammar program that is not grounded

in effective research based best practices. The program participant perceptions regarding the grammar program supported this finding and revealed that while approximately half of respondents felt they benefitted from participation in the grammar program, equally as many students felt as though it was not beneficial and did not help to improve their writing or turned them off from enjoying writing, suggesting NJ LEEP should take steps to identify a research-based writing curriculum for the 9th grade writing program.

The process evaluation findings also revealed that the program appears to effectively help to develop positive peer, staff, and mentor relationships, which was supported by the observational data and which research indicates promotes positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes. Although many students did feel they benefitted from positive mentor relationships, other students indicated that their mentor was non-responsive and did not provide the support they needed. This finding suggests that NJ LEEP could work to make systemic changes to the mentor program to ensure that all students have a beneficial mentor-mentee relationship. The process evaluation findings further revealed that several aspects of the curriculum implemented in the program use out-of-date content, ineffective vocabulary practices, and limited inclusion of collaboration and leadership opportunities; however, it is likely that program participants will still see growth as a result of the small student-teacher ratio, and intentional direct instruction in academic and non-academic skills.

Overall, the program implementation aligns to program theory. The key stakeholder perspectives further support this alignment. Students and alumni identified specific skills (academic and non-academic) that were developed as a direct result of participation in specific programs. Many of these skills closely aligned to those detailed

in the program theory logic model.   A meta-analysis of after-school program evaluations conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project revealed that having a structured program, strong staff relationships, and specific academic goals will most likely result in producing positive student outcomes (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). The process evaluation revealed that NJ LEEP's program services do meet these minimal criteria; however, value could be added, and the positive outcomes could be even greater if NJ LEEP improved the curriculum to include research based best practices, provided more professional development on pedagogy to improve teaching practices, updated the curriculum to be current and relevant, and carefully monitored the mentor program. Furthermore, moving forward, NJ LEEP needs to continue to work towards ensuring it is providing services to participants who meet its target population requirements.

Chapter 7: Program Outcome Evaluation Findings

Program Outcome Evaluation Overview

The program outcome evaluation component of this research was focused on assessing

the effectiveness of NJ LEEP's ability to produce the program's intended outcomes.

Assessing a program's ability to affect change is one of the most critical aspects of an

evaluation because a program cannot be deemed effective unless it is able to bring about

a certain degree of positive change as a result of its services and interventions. A

program outcome is defined as "the state of the target population or the social conditions

that a program is expected to have changed" (Rossi et al., 2004). This portion of the

evaluation examined the various outcome measures that were identified through the

program theory evaluation and the development of the program logic model.

Within the conceptual framework of Program Theory, an outcome evaluation

seeks to examine the effects or results of participation in a program. In the case of NJ

LEEP, the primary proximal anticipated outcomes are increased academic achievement

and socio-emotional college readiness. In outcome evaluation research, proximal

outcomes are the easiest to affect. If proximal outcomes are not affected, it is unlikely

that the most distal outcomes, which in the case of NJ LEEP includes college

matriculation and middle-class employment, will occur. Although the distal outcomes

are of significant importance, a program typically has less direct influence on these

outcomes. Furthermore, at this point in time, NJ LEEP has not collected data on distal

outcomes limiting the ability to evaluate the program's capacity to influence college

persistence, matriculation, and employment. Therefore, it is important to identify,

describe, and evaluate the proximal outcomes that can reasonably be anticipated to occur

from participation in the program in order to understand if it is possible to have an influence on the more distal outcomes.

Prior to beginning the outcome evaluation process, the researcher met with three NJ LEEP program administrators to discuss the secondary outcome data available for evaluation. These discussions identified two major areas of possible outcome assessment, 1) academic achievement and 2) college readiness. The primary academic achievement variables used for measurement were high school grade point average (GPA) scores for 9th grade when the students started the program and 12th grade when students completed the program, ACT scores measured by a pre-test diagnostic and the completion of the ACT standardized assessment, and college enrollment, including college type (2-year or 4-year), public or private, in-state or out-of-state, and ranking. The primary measure of college readiness was assessed through the completion of the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire, which was taken by the seniors (n=18) in the graduating class of 2017. Other data, including demographics such as gender, low-income, first-generation, ESL, and high school type attend, were collected to provide descriptive statistics for the program participants.

The outcome evaluation used statistical analysis of secondary data collected by NJ LEEP to examine the following overarching question: to what extent has NJ LEEP achieved its objectives in terms of student achievement in the areas of academic outcomes and socio-emotional outcomes?

The overarching research question for Component 3 was addressed through the analysis of the following questions:

a. How does the program affect the academic achievement (as measured by GPA) of student enrollees?

b. Do students who participate in NJ LEEP have significant improvements in their college entrance exam scores (as measured by the ACT) before and after the program intervention?

c. Which types of colleges and universities are most attended by NJ LEEP participants?

d. Do students who participate in NJ LEEP demonstrate *college readiness* (as indicated by the Non-Cognitive Questionnaire)?

Program Participant Demographic Data

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, demographic data that were previously collected by NJ LEEP throughout the program history were analyzed to provide a detailed description of the primary characteristics of the program participants. NJ LEEP has historically collected data regarding participants' gender, race/ethnicity, low-income, first-generation, and ESL status, and high school type attended. NJ LEEP has complete and valid data for these demographic variables for 233 students including both current program participants and program alumni from the graduating cohort classes of 2012-2020. Demographic and outcome data for the first NJ LEEP graduating class of 2011 were excluded from this research due to the incomplete data set available. The first stage of data analysis consisted of descriptive (univariate) analysis summarizing the frequencies and proportions of the categorical demographic variables. The demographic data analysis summary for NJ LEEP program participants (n=233) is found in Table 9.

Table 9. *Frequencies and proportions of demographic categorical variables from 2012-2020 Graduating Class Cohorts (n=233)*

Variable	Value	N	%
Gender	Male	81	34.8
	Female	152	65.2
Race/Ethnicity	Non-Hispanic Black	130	55.8
	Hispanic	73	31.3
	Non-Hispanic White	9	3.9
	Asian/Pacific Islander	6	2.6
	Mixed Race	15	6.4
Low-income	Yes	157	67.4
	No	76	32.6
First-Generation	Yes	175	75.1
	No	58	24.9
Both Low-Income and First-Generation	Combined low-income and first-generation	129	55.4
ESL	Yes	65	27.9
	No	168	72.1
High School Type	Public	93	39.9
	Charter	33	14.2
	Selective-Magnet	78	33.5
	Parochial	29	12.4

The gender composition of program participants is overwhelmingly female, who consist of 65.2% of the program population, while males make up only 34.8% of the program participant population. Interviews with the staff revealed that while they make a concerted effort to recruit males into the program, females are much more likely participate in NJ LEEP. One staff member described the additional efforts made to recruit males into the program, saying,

> We try very, very hard to go to and recruit from places with high concentrations of young men, Eagle Academy, My Brother's Keeper, asking guidance counselors that we have good relationships with to really refer to us boys and students in

general. We make a very concerted effort towards this goal, it's just very, very

difficult.

Previous research on after-school programs has found that females are more likely to

participate in after-school programs than males, with a national average of 20% of

school-aged females enrolled in after-school programs compared to 17% school-aged

males (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). The disparity in male versus female participation in

NJ LEEP is, however, much greater than the national average, indicating that while NJ

LEEP may make attempts to recruit males, the recruitment and retention process should

be further examined to assess areas that could help to reduce this significant gender

participation gap.

The demographic data for NJ LEEP program participants reveal that the student

population, particularly for non-Hispanic black (55.8%) and the Hispanic (31.3%)

populations, closely mirrors that of the city of Newark, New Jersey. The racial makeup

of the city includes 52% black or African American, 34% Hispanic, and 12% white,

many of whom are immigrants from southern Europe, Portugal, and Brazil, while the

remaining 2% of the population include individuals who identify as other races or two or

more races (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). This suggests that NJ LEEP does an efficient

job of recruiting participants who represent the racial and ethnic demographics of the city

in which it is located.

The majority of NJ LEEP program participants are either low-income (67.4%) or

first-generation (75.1%), with 55.4% of the participants classified as both. A primary

condition for program participation is that students must meet either the low-income

(defined by NJ LEEP as a family of four income of $70,000 or less) or first-generation

(defined by NJ LEEP as parents who do not have a college degree in the United States)

criteria. Although the majority of participants meet these criteria, an analysis of family

income levels reveals that NJ LEEP program participants on average, have a significantly

higher median income than families with children in Newark (Table 10). This finding

suggests that although the median income level for program participants is still below the

poverty level, NJ LEEP program participants, on average may come from families with

significantly higher levels of income than individuals who do not participate in the

program. Furthermore, the income data collected by NJ LEEP reveal a significant range

in income levels for program participants, with the lowest reported income at $1,400 and

the highest reported family income at $275,000 (Table 11).   The data reveal that

although the majority of participants classify as either low-income or first-generation,

setting a maximum income level for all program participants could help to ensure the

most in-need students are receiving the services of through NJ LEEP. Furthermore, this

indicates that the the participant income level could skew any of the academic outcome

data, since research has found that achievement on standardized tests is significantly

linked to socio-economic status.

Table 10. *NJ LEEP vs. Newark Families with Children Median Income*

	Median Income	Source
NJ LEEP	$43,500	NJ LEEP program records
Newark-families with children	$27, 038	(ACS, 2015)

Table 11. *NJ LEEP Program Participant Family Income Frequencies*

N	Valid	220
	Missing	13
Mean		53,428.00
Median		43,500.00
Minimum		1,400.00
Maximum		275,000.00
Percentile	25	26,000.00
	50	43,500.00
	75	70,151.50

NJ LEEP also serves a large population of students who speak a language other than English as their first or home language (ESL), which comprises of 27.9% of its program participants. Newark Public School District data indicates that only 11.8% of its student population are classified as ESL (Newark Public Schools, 2016). NJ LEEP's high population of students who do not speak English as the first language indicates that additional resources may be needed to better support these students; however, the process evaluation did not reveal additional curriculum supports or staff who specialize in working with ESL students. This suggests that making a concerted effort to implement resources and employ staff who are trained to address the needs of ESL students could help to improve academic outcomes for these students, who comprise of a significant population of NJ LEEP program participants.

NJ LEEP's program participants attend a variety of high school types including comprehensive public, charter, selective- magnet, and parochial schools. Of NJ LEEP's participants, 39.9% attend public high schools, 14.2% attend charter high schools, 12.4% attend parochial high schools, and 33.5% attend selective-magnet schools. Although the number of students enrolled in magnet schools who attend NJ LEEP may seem high,

according to the Superintendent of Newark Public Schools (NPS), Chris Cerf, 36% of the

NPS high school student population attend selective-magnets, which indicates that the NJ

LEEP student population mirrors that of the public schools (2017). Furthermore, 31% of

NPS students attend charter schools, while only 14.2% of NJ LEEP participants attend

charter schools (Cerf, 2017). The high school type that students attend can have a

significant influence on academic achievement, particularly for students attending

selective-magnet schools, which require meeting specific criteria for acceptance into their

program and which often implement more rigorous curriculum than is used in traditional

comprehensive public high schools. Additionally, students attending magnet, charter, or

parochial schools are likely to have smaller class sizes than students attending traditional

comprehensive high schools. Research has shown that smaller class sizes can increase

student engagement, teacher-pupil interaction, and improve academic outcomes

(Blatchford et al., 2011). It is important to note that the students' schools, in addition to

participation in NJ LEEP can have a significant influence on academic achievement over

the course the four years in high school, which could further skew the academic

achievement outcome data.

Academic Outcomes

Prior to the start of the outcome evaluation component of this research, interviews

with key stakeholders, including three key administrators, were conducted to develop the

program impact theory. The program impact theory was useful in identifying and

organizing specific measurable intended program academic outcomes including high

school GPA, ACT scores, college enrollment, and college type. Additional academic

outcome data including individual NJ LEEP program pre-and post- test scores were

examined; however, an analysis of these data revealed that the available outcome data for these services were inconsistent and incomplete, making it not viable for valid statistical analysis. Evaluating academic outcomes related to program participation is essential to evaluating program effectiveness because improved academic achievement is the primary goal of NJ LEEP's program services. Furthermore, if the program is able to achieve proximal program outcomes, it is more likely that distal outcomes could be achieved.

GPA Outcomes. Since improving student academic achievement is a primary goal of NJ LEEP, this variable was measured multiple ways. High school GPA is a common identifier of academic achievement. GPA is scored on a scale from 0.0-4.0 with a higher GPA indicating greater academic achievement. In this study, GPA scores were analyzed as a continuous variable. A paired samples *t* test was used to compare student GPA during the first year of participation in NJ LEEP (9th grade) and the last year of participation (12th grade). A paired samples *t* test compares two means that are from the same individual and represent two different times. The purpose of this test was to determine whether there was statistical evidence that the mean difference between the paired observations on a particular outcome (GPA) was significantly different from zero. Prior to using the paired samples *t* test, the data passed the four assumptions required for a dependent t-test and it was determined that this was an appropriate statistical measure for this data analysis.

Table 12 shows descriptive statistics for the 9th and 12th grade GPS for the paired sample (n=40). It is important to note that the limited number of participants' data (n=40) is a result of NJ LEEP's incomplete data throughout its program history. The post-test 12th grade GPA mean was higher (3.3105) than the pre-test 9th grade GPA

(3.0990). The standard deviation for the pretest and posttest were fairly close together

(.080 and .074). Table 13 shows the results of the paired samples *t* test. The findings of

this test reveal that there is statistically significant difference between 9th grade and 12th

grade GPA, with academic growth demonstrated by improved GPA (p=.005). The results

of the data analysis reveal that over the course of participation in the four-year college

bound program, participants are likely to see improved academic achievement as

measured by high school GPA. The growth in academic achievement measured is

statistically significant, indicating that the intended proximal outcomes of supporting

students in improving high school GPA are occurring, potentially as a result of

participation in NJ LEEP. Other factors not measured through this analysis could also

have significant influence on improved academic achievement, including family income

level, the high school program participants attended, and any other additional academic

support outside of NJ LEEP or school that the participants may have received.

Table 12. *Descriptive statistics for 9th grad and 12th grade GPA*

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	GPA9thGrade	3.0990	40	.50601	.08001
	GPA12thGrade	3.3105	40	.46555	.07361

Table 13. *GPA Paired Samples Test*

			Paired Differences						
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	
Pair 1	GPA9thGrade - GPA12thGrade	-.21150	.45112	.07133	-.35577	-.06723	-2.965	39	.005

Research has found that pre-college academic performance is a stronger predictor of college persistence than any other factor (Knaggs et al., 2015; Stewart et al., 2015; Vandell et al., 2005). Furthermore, research has found that high school GPA is more predictive of college success than other academic achievement measures, such as scores on college entrance exams, indicating that supporting students in improving their academic achievement and high school GPA could have the potential to result in greater college success (Hodara & Cox, 2016). During interviews, 100% of program participants indicated they observed improvements in academic achievement as a result of participation in NJ LEEP program services, which is corroborated by these outcomes findings that demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference in GPA from 9th grade when students begin the program to 12th grade after four years of participation.

ACT Outcomes. In order to apply for most colleges and universities, students must take a college entrance exam including either the SAT or ACT. The SAT critical reading and mathematics composite score is scored on a range from 200-1600 and the ACT is scored on a range from 11-36. Students are only required to take one of these college entrance exams, and therefore not all students will have scores for both. As a result, the College Board releases concordance tables to demonstrate comparable scores no matter which test a student takes (Table 14). For the purpose of this study, all college

entrance scores were converted to the ACT single composite score and analyzed as a

continuous variable ranging from 11-36. Writing scores for both the ACT and SAT were

excluded from this research as many universities do not require submission of the writing

score and the ACT writing assessment is optional to take, which could result in

incomplete data if this score were included. The College Board developed the SAT and

ACT and are routinely analyzed for validity and reliability.

Table 14. *ACT and SAT Concordance Table. Source: College Board www.act.org*

Concordance between ACT Composite Score and Sum of SAT Critical Reading and Mathematics Scores

SAT CR+M (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score	SAT CR+M (Single Score)
1600	36	1600
1540–1590	35	1560
1490–1530	34	1510
1440–1480	33	1460
1400–1430	32	1420
1360–1390	31	1380
1330–1350	30	1340
1290–1320	29	1300
1250–1280	28	1260
1210–1240	27	1220
1170–1200	26	1190
1130–1160	25	1150
1090–1120	24	1110
1050–1080	23	1070
1020–1040	22	1030
980–1010	21	990
940–970	20	950
900–930	19	910
860–890	18	870
820–850	17	830
770–810	16	790
720–760	15	740
670–710	14	690
620–660	13	640
560–610	12	590

A paired samples *t* test was used to compare student ACT diagnostic test score taken

during the summer prior to 11th grade and the final composite ACT score the student

received on the standardized assessment administered by the College Board. Table 15

shows descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-test ACT scores (n=95). The post-test

ACT final score mean was higher (20.06) than the pre-test diagnostic ACT score (16.91).

The standard deviation for the pretest and posttest were fairly close together (.366 and

.401). Table 16 shows the results of the paired samples *t* Test. The results of this test

reveal that there is statistically significant difference between the diagnostic ACT score

and final composite ACT score, with academic growth demonstrated by improved ACT

scores (p=.000). Note the average increase on the ACT is 3 points.

Table 15. ACT Paired Sample Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	ACTPreTest	16.91	95	3.570	.366
	ACTPostTest	20.06	95	3.905	.401

Table 16. ACT Paired Sample Test

		Paired Differences							
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	ACTPreTest - ACTPostTest	-3.158	4.847	.497	-4.145	-2.170	-6.350	94	.000

The results of the data analysis indicate that over the course of participation in the

ACT test prep program offered from the summer before 11th grade through the duration

of the junior year, most participants saw improved academic achievement as measured by

the ACT college entrance exam. The growth in academic achievement measured is statistically significant, indicating that the intended proximal outcomes of supporting students in improving college entrance exam scores are consistent, potentially as a result of participation in NJ LEEP. The mean difference between pre- and post-test scores indicates an average increase of three points. This statistically significant improvement in scores can provide an opportunity for students to be accepted into more competitive colleges and universities that require above average college entrance exam scores, which can add significant value to students' college enrollment opportunities.

During the qualitative interviews, 95% of students who participated in the ACT prep program offered by NJ LEEP indicated that they saw improvements in their ACT scores as a direct result of the program, which is substantiated by these outcome evaluation findings. Although most colleges and universities look at student applications holistically, meeting a minimum score on a college entrance exam such as the ACT is a typical requirement, and improvements in these scores could provide a significant benefit to students. Research has also demonstrated that "families with higher incomes are better able to purchase or produce important 'inputs' into their young children's development," which includes paying for supplement test prep tutoring to improve college opportunities, something most low-income and first-generation families are unable to do for their children (Duncan & Murnane, 2014). Providing college entrance exam test prep for students whose families are unable to do so because of financial constraints could help to ameliorate both the opportunity and academic achievement gaps that result from income inequality.

College Enrollment Outcomes. NJ LEEP has collected data on the high school graduation rate and college enrollment of its program participants. Complete data on high school graduation and college enrollment were collected on all participants who have remained in the program through their senior year. According to NJ LEEP program data, 100% of students who completed the program graduated high school and enrolled in college; however, because the program did not track attrition, there were no data gathered regarding the students who did not complete the program or their outcomes, nor the number or frequency of participant attrition. Regardless of attrition rates, the findings associated with college enrollment do suggest that students who remain in the program for the four-year duration are likely to have positive academic outcomes related to high school graduation and college enrollment. Frequencies and proportions of enrollment data for students who did complete the program can be found in Table 17. Table 18 provides a summary of the college ranking system used for this research. Table 19 provides detailed information on all the colleges and universities in which NJ LEEP graduates enrolled. A total of 128 alumni are included in the college enrollment data, which comprises of program participants from the six graduating classes between 2012-2017.

Table 17. *Frequencies and proportions of college enrollment categorical variables from 2012-2017 Graduating Class Cohorts (n=128)*

Variable	Value	N	%
Colleges Attended	College Name	51	100
Degree Type	2-year	8	6.3
	4-year	120	93.8
Institution Type	Public	51	39.8
	Private	77	60.2
College Location	In-state	68	53.1
	Out-of-state	60	46.9
College Ranking*	Most Competitive	36	28.1
	Highly Competitive	23	18.0
	Very Competitive	17	13.3
	Competitive	33	25.8
	Non-competitive/not ranked	19	14.8

*College ranking based on Barron's rankings (2017)

The college enrollment data reveal that students who participate in NJ LEEP's programs are highly likely to attend a 4-year rather than a 2-year college or university. Of the students who completed the program, 93.8% went on to enroll in a 4-year college or university. NJ LEEP participants also attended a wide range of colleges or universities, including two different 2-year schools (Essex County Community College and Hudson County Community College) and 49 different 4-year universities, 60.2% of program graduates went on to attend private colleges or universities, while 39.8% attended public schools. The most frequently attended schools were Rutgers-Newark (8.6%) and The College of New Jersey (7.8%).

College and university selectivity is often ranked based on categories chosen by Barron's, a publisher of a college guide, which includes an overview of a broad range of public, private, large, small, extremely competitive, and less competitive schools (2017). Barron's rankings are based on examining incoming freshman class variables including high school rank, GPA, college entrance exam scores, and admission percentage of applicants. For this research, colleges were ranked on a scale of 1 to 4 based on Barron's

ranking system as described in Table 18, with post-secondary schools not ranked by

Barron's system ranked as a 5.

Table 18. College Ranking System based on Barron's Profile of American Colleges
(2017)

	#	High School Rank	GPA	ACT Score	Admission Rates
Most Competitive	1	Top 10%-20%	A-B+	29+	33% of applicants admitted
Highly Competitive	2	Top 20%-35%	B+-B	27 or 28	33% to 50% of applicants admitted
Very Competitive	3	Top 35%-50%	No less than B-	24 to 26	50% to 75% of applicants admitted
Competitive	4	Top 50%-65%	Minimum C average	21 to 23	75%-85% of applicants admitted
Not Ranked	5	Colleges and Universities not ranked by Barron's			

The data in Table 18 describe the ranking of the various colleges and universities

NJ LEEP graduates attended based on Barron's college ranking consisting of 1) most

competitive (28.1%), 2) highly competitive (18.0%), 3) very competitive (13.3%), 4)

competitive (25.8%) and colleges who were non-competitive/non-selective were ranked

as 5 (14.8%). Of the 4-year colleges or universities attended, 85.2% of students enrolled

in post-secondary schools that were identified by Barron's to be competitive on some

level, including most competitive schools such as Georgetown, Princeton, and New York

University. The ranking of colleges and universities is significant because research has

demonstrated more competitive schools tend to have more resources and much higher

graduation rates than less competitive schools, and students who attend less selective

schools are significantly less likely to graduate (Leonhardt, 2013). Research has further

demonstrated that many high-achieving, low-income students do not enroll in

competitive post-secondary institutes at the same rate as more affluent students, even if their qualifications enable them to do so (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Leonhardt, 2013). Furthermore, low-income students who do enroll in competitive schools are much more likely to receive more generous financial aid than they would receive attending two-year and non-selective four-year institutions (Hoxby & Avery, 2013). This suggests that NJ LEEP's focus on helping to enroll students in more competitive schools is contributing to potentially helping their students increase their chances of graduating from a four-year institution with significantly less debt than if they did not enroll in a competitive school.

Table 20 shows the states where NJ LEEP graduates attended college or university. The majority of program graduates (53%) remained in the state of New Jersey, while just under half (47%) went to college or university out-of-state. Many of NJ LEEP graduates who enrolled in out-of-state schools traveled to neighboring states including Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut, and nearly one-fifth (18%) of NJ LEEP graduates went to Massachusetts; however, several students matriculated to more southern schools including Maryland and Georgia, and one even went out west to Colorado. The college enrollment outcome data indicate that NJ LEEP is, overall, effectively meeting its program goal to enroll students in 4-year colleges or universities for students who remain in the program. Furthermore, NJ LEEP is contributing to increasing the rates of students who attend competitive and selective schools, while also exposing students to various post-secondary institutes that are located out of local proximity, many of which students might not have considered if they had not participated in NJ LEEP's programs.

Table 19. *Colleges or universities NJ LEEP participants enrolled in following high school graduation*

College Name	Frequency	2-year or 4-year	Private or Public	In-state or out-of-state	College Ranking
Rutgers-Newark	11	4-year	Public	In-state	4
The College of New	10	4-year	Public	In-state	2
Essex County College	7	2-year	Public	In-state	5
Rutgers New	7	4-year	Public	In-state	2
Drew University	6	4-year	Private	In-state	3
College of the Holy	5	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Montclair State	5	4-year	Public	In-state	5
Ursinus College	5	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	3
Georgetown	4	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Loyola University	4	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	3
Mount Holyoke	4	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Saint Peter's	4	4-year	Private	In-state	4
Smith College	4	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Albright College	3	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	4
Boston College	3	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Fairleigh Dickinson	3	4-year	Private	In-state	4
Ramapo College	3	4-year	Public	In-state	4
Bowdoin College	2	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Bryn Mawr College	2	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Caldwell College	2	4-year	Private	In-state	5
Felician University	2	4-year	Private	In-state	5
William Paterson	2	4-year	Public	In-state	4
Williams College	2	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
American University	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
Amherst College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
Clark University	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
Colgate University	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Colorado College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Cornell University	1	4-year	Private	In-state:	1
Delaware State	1	4-year	Public	Out-of-state:	5
Franklin & Marshall	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
Georgia Southern	1	4-year	Public	Out-of-state:	4
Hampshire College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Hobart & William	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
Hudson Community	1	2-year	Public	In-state	5
Kean University	1	4-year	Public	In-state	4
Kennesaw State	1	4-year	Public	Out-of-state:	3
Maine College of Arts	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	5
Monmouth University	1	4-year	Private	In-state	4
New York University	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Penn State University	1	4-year	Public	Out-of-state:	3

College Name	Frequency	2-year or 4-year	Private or Public	In-state or out-of-state	College Ranking
Princeton University	1	4-year	Private	In-state	1
Rowan University	1	4-year	Public	In-state	3
Seton Hall University	1	4-year	Private	In-state	4
Spelman College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	4
St. John's University	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	4
Trinity College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	2
University of	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	4
University of	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Wellesley College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1
Wesleyan College	1	4-year	Private	Out-of-state:	1

Table 20. *States that were most commonly the location of NJ LEEP graduates' college or university*

Rank	State	N	%
1	New Jersey	68	53.1
2	Massachusetts	23	18.0
3	Pennsylvania	13	10.2
4	New York	5	3.9
4	Washington, D.C.	5	3.9
5	Maryland	4	3.1
6	Connecticut	3	2.3
6	Georgia	3	2.3
7	Maine	2	1.6
8	Colorado	1	0.8
8	Delaware	1	0.8

Comparison to Newark Public School Post-Secondary Outcomes. A

comparison between NJ LEEP graduate post-secondary outcomes and NPS graduate

post-secondary outcomes reveals that, overall, NJ LEEP participants are more frequently

attending 4-year colleges and universities and leaving the state than NPS graduates

(Table 21). Research on Newark Public School (NPS) graduates' post-secondary

outcomes indicates that only 53.3% of NPS graduates enroll in 4-year institutions as

compared to 93.8% of NJ LEEP graduates (Backstrand et al., 2014). Furthermore, 88%

of NPS graduates attend schools in New Jersey, as

compared to 53.1% of NJ LEEP graduates (Backstrand et al., 2014). These findings

suggest that NJ LEEP is effectively supporting its program participants in identifying and

enrolling in 4-year post-secondary schools and exposing its participants to more schools

outside of their local community and state. Furthermore, the majority of NJ LEEP

graduates are enrolling in competitive colleges and universities, whereas the majority of

NPS graduates are attending colleges and universities that are non-competitive and non-

selective.

Table 21. *Frequency of NJ LEEP graduate vs. NPS graduate college enrollment type and location*

Variable	Value	NJ LEEP Graduates	NPS Graduates
College Type	2-year	6.3%	62.1%*
	4-year	93.8%	53.3%*
College Location	In-state	53.1%	88.0%
	Out-of-state	46.9%	12.0%

*NPS student data sum of 4-year and 2-year percentiles is greater than 100% because some students enroll in both types of schools (Backstrand et al., 2014).

This finding is supported by the qualitative interviews in which a significant

number of program participants identified exposure to colleges and universities through

NJ LEEP as a key influence as a result of participation in the program. Many of the NJ

LEEP students indicated that they did not learn about colleges and universities from their

guidance counselors, with the exception of those schools closely located to Newark,

which could account for why a large population of NPS graduates attend schools in

northern New Jersey. Additionally, research has demonstrated that affluent students are

significantly more likely to apply to and attend more selective 4-year colleges and

universities than low-income students, and that low-income and first-generation students

are more frequently academically under-matched to post-secondary schools (Griffith & Rothstein, 2009; Jez, 2014; J. Smith et al., 2013). These findings suggest that NJ LEEP's explicit focus on assisting low-income students in applying to and enrolling in highly selective and competitive colleges and universities could help to mitigate this college enrollment disparity often resulting from income inequality.

Academic Outcome Findings Summary

The program academic outcome evaluation findings revealed that students who participate in NJ LEEP's program services are likely to demonstrate academic growth as measured by improvements in high school GPA and increased scores on the ACT college entrance exam. Furthermore, program participants are more likely to attend a competitive 4-year college or university than a 2-year college or university. These findings indicate that NJ LEEP is consistent in achieving its goal of improving its proximal academic achievement and college enrollment outcomes, which could help to contribute to successfully achieving its more distal program outcomes of increasing college matriculation and middle-class employment for its low-income and first-generation students. Furthermore, these findings corroborate the process evaluation findings from the qualitative interviews with key stakeholders where a significant majority of program participants indicated improved academic achievement and exposure to college as a direct result of participating in NJ LEEP's programs. It is significant to note, however, that the demographic and income data reveal that NJ LEEP program participants' family income levels are significantly higher than the average family with children in Newark, which has potential to substantially skew the outcome data findings.

Non-Cognitive Skills Outcomes

The Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ), which was administered to the 2017 cohort of 12th grade program participants (n=18), measures indicators of college readiness. While the 2017 senior class cohort included 32 students, only 18 were available to take the questionnaire. This instrument is used to measure socio-emotional variables that demonstrate adjustment, motivation, and student perceptions of college rather than the traditional verbal and quantitative measures used to assess academic preparedness for higher education and has a tested reliability of .85 (Sedlacek, 2011). This questionnaire is a self-reported survey consisting of 23 questions, including 18 Likert-scale, 2 multiple choice, and 3 open-ended questions. The NCQ assesses 8 factors that indicate readiness for college with possible score ranges following each variable (Table 22), including positive self-concept (7-27), realistic self-appraisal (4-14), understands and knows how to handle racism/navigate the system (5-25), long-range goals (3-15), strong support person (3-15), leadership (3-15), community (2-8), and nontraditional knowledge acquired (2-8) for a total possible score range of 29-125 (Table 20). Measuring non-cognitive variables is particularly important for low-income and first-generation students because research has demonstrated that the development of socio-emotional, non-cognitive skills can play a significant role in college persistence and graduation and have been found to correlate with college grades (Sedlacek, 2011). The analysis of the NCQ revealed that, overall, NJ LEEP seniors demonstrate aspects and characteristics of socio-emotional college readiness with an average mean score 89.6. Table 23 summarizes the findings of the NCQ.

Table 22. *Non-cognitive variables assessed through the NCQ. Source: (Sedlacek, 2011)*

Variable #	Variable Name
1	*Positive Self-Concept* • Demonstrates confidence, strength of character, determination, and independence.
2	*Realistic Self-Appraisal* • Recognizes and accepts any strengths and deficiencies, especially academic, and works hard at self-development. Recognizes need to broaden his/her individuality.
3	*Understands and Knows How to Handle Racism (the System)* • Exhibits a realistic view of the system based upon personal experience of racism. Committed to improving the existing system. Takes an assertive approach to dealing with existing wrongs, but is not hostile to society, nor is a "cop-out." Able to handle racist system.
4	*Prefers Long-Range to Short-Term or Immediate Needs* • Able to respond to deferred gratification, plans ahead and sets goals.
5	*Availability of Strong Support Person* • Seeks and takes advantage of a strong support network or has someone to turn to in a crisis or for encouragement.
6	*Successful Leadership Experience* • Demonstrates strong leadership in any area of his/her background (e.g. church, sports, non-educational groups, gang leader, etc.).
7	*Demonstrated Community Service* • Participates and is involved in his/her community.
8	*Knowledge Acquired in or about a Field* • Acquires knowledge in a sustained and/or culturally related way in any field.

Table 23. NCQ mean scores for the 2017 senior class cohort (n=18).

Variable	Possible Score Range	Mean Score	Percent of Score Range	National Median Range
Positive Self-Concept	7-27	19.5**	72	18-19
Realistic Self-Appraisal	4-14	9.8	70	9-10
Understands how to Navigate the System/ handle racism	5-25	18.4**	74	17-18
Long-Range Goals	3-15	9.7	65	9-10
Strong Support Person	3-15	13.1	87	13-14
Leadership	3-15	9.9**	66	8-9
Community	2-8	5.3	66	5-6
Non-traditional Knowledge Acquired	2-8	4.9**	61	3-4
Total	29-125	89.6	72	82-90

*Source: (Boboc & Nordgren, 2013)
**Denotes score above national median range

Positive Self-Concept. The positive self-concept variable measures how students

feel about themselves. Research has demonstrated that having a positive self-concept can

affect a student's adjustment to and success in college, particularly for African American,

Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and female students (Sedlacek, 2011). Students who

lack a positive self-concept are more likely to doubt their abilities, do not expect to do

well in either personal or academic experiences, and may even avoid taking on new

challenges. Students who feel confident in their ability to perform well in both academic

and non-academic experiences are more likely to perform better than those lacking

confidence in their abilities, which could contribute to greater college persistence. NJ

LEEP seniors who took the NCQ had a mean score of 19.5 out of 27 possible points,

indicating that overall, participants have positive self-concepts. NJ LEEP students scored

higher than the national median range (18-19) on this variable.

Realistic Self-Appraisal. The realistic self-appraisal variable measures an individual's ability to identify his or her own strengths and weaknesses in order to promote self-development.   Students who lack realistic self-appraisal can indicate feelings of deficiency or inferiority particular for low-income, minority, and female individuals. Students without the ability to realistically self-appraise may not be able to evaluate their own abilities accurately and are likely to be sensitive to evaluations others give to them, particularly negative assessments (Sedlacek, 2011). Students who are able to realistically self-appraise are able to value and acknowledge positive feedback and use and apply negative feedback to improve their performance. NJ LEEP seniors who took the NCQ had a mean score of 9.8 out of 14 possible points, indicating that overall, participants have positive self-appraisal. Higher scores on this variable have been found to correlate with college grades, retention, and graduation for all students, but particularly for African Americans and women (Sedlacek, 2011). NJ LEEP students scored within the national median range on this variable.

Navigating the System. A third non-cognitive variable identified by Sedlacek, is understanding how to navigate the system and handle racism, which assesses how a non-traditional (low-income, minority, female) student is able to deal with policies, procedures, and barriers that can interfere with the success and development of an individual (2011). Many of these barriers include minority students' ability to addressing and coping with institutional racism ("the negative consequences that accrue to a member of a given group because of the way a system or subsystem operates in society") (Sedlacek, 2011). This variable helps to assess how well students are able to understand and deal with racism or bias without being "submissive to existing wrongs, nor hateful to

society, nor a 'cop out,' and is able to handle a racist system and asserts that the school has a role or duty to fight racism" (Sedlacek, 2011). Students who score high on this variable are able to handle difficult circumstances with which they are confronted, which is critical to success in school. NJ LEEP seniors who took the NCQ had a mean score of 18.4 out of 25 possible points, indicating that overall, participants understand how to navigate the system and deal with racism. NJ LEEP students scored higher than the national median range (17-18) on this variable.

Prefers Long-Range Goals. Students who prefer long-range goals are more likely to achieve success in school. This variable assesses students' abilities to identify and understand the relationship between short-term efforts and longer-term outcomes, which is a significant factor in college persistence (Knaggs et al., 2015; Sedlacek, 2011). Research has also indicated that there is a potential relationship between student academic success and setting positive goals for the future that involve attending college, selecting a career, and understanding the steps required to achieve these aspirations (Athanases et al., 2016; Morales, 2010; Vasquez & Buehler, 2007). This suggests that scoring high on this non-cognitive variable will help students to set and achieve the goals required for success in college. NJ LEEP seniors who took the NCQ had a mean score of 9.7 out of 15, indicating, overall, participants are able to set long-range goals. NJ LEEP students scored within the national median range (9-10) on this variable.

Strong Support Person. Research has found that having a strong support system can have a powerful, positive influence on a students' academic success and persistence (Harper & Harris, 2012; MacLeod, 2008; Morales, 2010). This variable measures a student's identification of a strong support person or system in their lives that could

include someone from their family, community, or educational experiences who they can count on, particularly in time of crisis. Many students from low-income, first-generation, or urban backgrounds do not have a support system to fall back on in time of need, for encouragement or advice, but those who do have this system in place tend to perform better in school. Of all the non-cognitive variables, NJ LEEP seniors on average, scored the highest on this variable with a mean score of 13.1 out of 15, indicating that participants feel as though they have a strong support system in place. NJ LEEP students scored within the national median range (13-14) on this variable.

Leadership. This variable measures a student's evidence of leadership. Students who are most successful in post-secondary education have "shown an ability to organize and influence others" (Sedlacek, 2011). Having the opportunity to take on leadership roles has been found to be an essential skill for success in both college and career (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017). NJ LEEP seniors on average, scored 9.9 out of 15 on the leadership variable, indicating that participants demonstrated evidence of leadership. NJ LEEP students scored higher than the national median range (8-9) on this variable.

Community. This variable measures a student's connection to participation in their community and community service opportunities. Students who are active in their community "learn how to handle the system, exhibit leadership, and develop their self-concepts in such groups, that those who have been involved in a community often based on race and/or gender, are more successful in college than those not so involved" (Sedlacek, 2011). Being involved in the community could also be indicative of a student's ability to manage time between academic and nonacademic activities,

increasing the likelihood of success in college. NJ LEEP seniors on average, scored 5.3 out of 8 on the community service variable, indicating that participants demonstrated evidence of community service. NJ LEEP students scored within the national median range (5-6) on this variable.

Non-traditional knowledge acquired. This variable assesses students' ability to learn and develop through various means outside of the traditional educational setting. Students who are able to acquire knowledge in non-traditional means are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, engage with others in their community, and learn and develop skills not explicitly taught during the traditional school day. NJ LEEP seniors on average, scored 4.9 out of 8 on the non-traditional knowledge acquired variable, indicating that participants demonstrated evidence of learning outside of traditional school activities. NJ LEEP students scored higher than the national median range (3-4) on this variable.

Non-Cognitive Skills Outcome Summary

Overall, NJ LEEP seniors who participated in the non-cognitive questionnaire demonstrated aspects and characteristics of college and career readiness as measured by non-cognitive variables, with a mean score of 89.6 out of 123, which is at the high end of the national range. NJ LEEP participants scored within the national median range for four of the variables, and higher than the national median range for the remaining four variables, indicating that when compared to their peers of all ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds, NJ LEEP participants demonstrate equal or greater socio-emotional college readiness. When compared to the national median, NJ LEEP

participants scored higher than average on positive self-concept, navigating the system, leadership, and non-traditional knowledge acquired.

NJ LEEP students scored the highest on having a strong support person or system, which research has indicated can be a powerful influence on student academic achievement and success and is often a barrier that low-income and first-generation students face in regard to college persistence. Furthermore, this variable is a specific outcome that is a primary focus of NJ LEEP's program services, providing further evidence to support their successful implementation of developing positive adult and mentor relationships with their program participants. Additionally, this correlates with the theme of positive staff relationships, which emerged from interviews with program participants, 73% of whom indicated developing strong relationships with at least one program staff member.

While the development of non-cognitive skills does not necessarily indicate that students will persist through and graduate from college, the growth of these skills could help to improve students' chances of being successful in a post-secondary environment. This is particularly significant for low-income, first-generation, and minority students who may not have the embodied social and cultural capital typical of their more affluent white peers who are more likely to quickly and easily adjust to the milieu of a college or university.

Program Outcome Evaluation Summary

Overall, the program outcome evaluation revealed that participants of NJ LEEP are demonstrating academic achievement growth as measured by high school GPA, ACT scores, meeting college enrollment goals, and demonstrating non-cognitive college

readiness as measured by the NCQ. While many factors such as the high school attended, maturation, and peer influence can affect academic achievement and growth, the results of this evaluation are consistent with the direct focus on improving academic skills and test preparation programs do contribute to academic growth. One of the greatest areas of demonstrated academic achievement revealed as a result of this outcome evaluation is in the college enrollment of NJ LEEP graduates, who significantly enroll in more competitive 4-year post-secondary institutions than Newark Public School graduates. This is a noteworthy finding because students who enroll in competitive 4-year colleges and universities are more likely to graduate than those who enroll in non-competitive 2-year and 4-year institutions (Athanases et al., 2016; Griffith & Rothstein, 2009), which indicates that NJ LEEP is likely to have an influence on their program's distal outcome goal of increasing college graduation for low-income and first-generation students. These findings are supported by the process evaluation results in which observational data, document analysis, and key stakeholder perspectives revealed that academic achievement growth and college enrollment were influenced by participation in NJ LEEP's programs.

This outcome evaluation also revealed that NJ LEEP seniors demonstrate aspects and characteristics of college readiness as measured by the NCQ, which assesses non-cognitive socio-emotional variables. Students who score on the higher end of this questionnaire tend to embody more of the emotional intelligence skills and abilities that can have a significant influence on an individual's capacity to persist through college. Much like academic achievement, multiple variables outside of NJ LEEP's programming can have an influence on the development of these skills; however, one variable that NJ

LEEP likely played a significant role in developing is in providing an effective support system for their students, which is a primary focus of the program and is corroborated by the findings of the program process evaluation.

These findings are significantly limited by the small amount of valid data for current and past program participants, and the limited number of outcome variables assessed. While NJ LEEP has historically collected data on multiple outcome variables, including pre- and post-course assessments and attendance rates, the data collection system and management process resulted in a considerable amount of missing, incomplete, or invalid data. Furthermore, no data were collected on significant variables such as attrition, college matriculation and graduation, which appreciably restricts the ability to draw valid and reliable conclusions about the possible effects of the long-term outcomes of participation in this program. NJ LEEP would be able to access data on college matriculation and graduation through participation in the National Student Clearinghouse Database, which would provide important data on the long-term outcomes related to participation. Overall, this outcome evaluation could be improved by NJ LEEP implementing an effective data management system to ensure a valid data collection process to continue to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of the program. Additionally, it is likely that any outcome data are influenced by family income level, which this study found to be significantly higher than the median family with children income level for Newark. Higher family income is associated with greater academic outcomes and could play a substantial role in influencing the findings. Furthermore, the results are limited by the lack of a control group of the ability to adjust for confounders.

Chapter 8: Discussion, Recommendations, and Policy Implications

Research Overview

The shortcomings of the United States k-12 educational system to produce equitable

outcomes for all students, particularly for low-income, first-generation, and minority

students in urban areas, have increasingly become the center of public interest and

examination. This concern has become even more pressing as the need for high-skill

workers with advanced degrees has increased and opportunities for employment that will

afford a middle-class lifestyle for individuals without, at minimum, a college degree have

decreased in the 21st century as a result of globalization, advances in technology, and

dramatic shifts in current employment trends (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Duncan &

Murnane, 2014). Despite this growing demand for highly-skilled workers with advanced

degrees, there are still significantly underrepresented groups in the United States entering

the higher educational system, including racial and ethnic minorities, students from low-

socioeconomic backgrounds, and first-generation college students and even fewer who

persist and graduate with a degree (I. Smith & Johnson, 2003). Although the acceptance

rates of minority and low-socioeconomic status students into colleges and universities

have risen in recent years, retention and graduation rates for these students are still

shockingly low when compared to their more affluent, white peers (Schmidt, 2008).

Many reforms that have attempted to ameliorate the college enrollment and

educational achievement gap have been implemented throughout the years; however, the

majority of these reforms have focused exclusively on changes and interventions that

occur within the traditional school setting. Research has demonstrated that there are

significant out-of-school dynamics that considerably influence the educational growth

and development of all children, particularly those in low-income, urban areas, as well as first-generation and racial/ethnic minority students (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2012a). In response to this issue, various types of organized after-school programs have been developed to provide low-income students with structured extended learning time, or out-of-school learning time, in order to help diminish the academic achievement and opportunity gap and to provide a safe place for students after dismissal in urban areas. The significance of additional educational supports in and out of school is a necessary step to helping to achieve academic equity and outcomes for all students. The demand for effective after-school programs has continued to increase; however, many of these programs are non-profit, grassroots organizations, and often not able to serve as many individuals as would benefit from their services (Afterschool Alliance, 2014). Although there has been significant research conducted on the effects of after-school programs, there has been limited research investigating how after-school programs that are geared towards college and career readiness have affected low-income, first-generation, and racial/ethnic minority student educational outcomes concerning college enrollment and graduation and best practices for achieving college readiness for these students.

This research study was conducted to address the gaps in research by investigating the effectiveness of one after-school program in preparing low-income, first-generation, and racial/ethnic minority students for college through a theory, process, and outcome program evaluation. The purpose of this research was to understand if and how the New Jersey Law Education and Empowerment Project (NJ LEEP) in Newark, NJ contributes to low-income, first-generation, urban adolescent students becoming academically and socio-emotionally prepared for post-secondary education. This case

study included an in-depth examination of the program history, various program

components, and the perspectives of program participants, program administrators, staff,

and other key stakeholders through the use of qualitative interviews, observations, and

document analysis. Quantitative analysis of program outcomes was used to evaluate the

effects of the various program components, including college entrance exam scores,

GPA, and college enrollment in higher education. This research aims to add to the

knowledge of educators and those who work in after-school programs, as well as policy

makers, who could use the knowledge to help inform after-school program development,

particularly in urban areas where attendance and retention in college is significantly

lower than other student populations.

The research questions used to guide this research were broken into three

components, including a program theory evaluation, process evaluation, and outcome

evaluation. Component 1 of this research was an evaluation of program theory to analyze

the conceptualization of the program to ensure that it reflects valid assumptions about the

nature of the problem and that the program represents a feasible approach to resolving the

problem. The following overarching question guided Component 1:

What do key stakeholders identify as the primary goals and objectives of NJ

LEEP?

    c. What are the characteristics of the intended program participants to be

served?

    d. What services should be provided and how are these intended to meet

program objectives?

Component 2 of this research was an evaluation of program process used to assess the fidelity and the effectiveness of the implementation of a program. This step of the evaluation also contributed to providing details for a rich, thick description of the program and services provided. The following overarching question guided Component 2:

How have NJ LEEP's programs and services been implemented?

    c. Do aspects and characteristics of the program services provide evidence of quality?

    d. How do program structures and activities align with the articulated program theory and goals?

Component three of this research was an evaluation of program outcomes, which used statistical analysis of secondary academic data and socio-emotional variables collected by NJ LEEP to examine the following overarching question:

To what extent has NJ LEEP achieved its objectives in terms of participant achievement in the areas of academic and socio-emotional outcomes?

In order to assess the quality and effectiveness of NJ LEEP's after-school program through a program theory, process, and outcome evaluation, the researcher conducted observations, document analysis, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, and employed statistical analysis of secondary data and triangulation of the findings during analysis. Program evaluation theory was used as the conceptual framework, which helped the researcher prompt the stakeholders in clarifying their program theory, and it also facilitated the process and outcome evaluations. This was accomplished through working with key stakeholders to create a change model (casual

processes that must occur to reach desired outcomes) and an action model (actions or

interventions in a program that produce the desired outcomes) to develop program theory

(Chen, 2006). Triangulation of data was used to provide sufficient evidence to support

conclusions draw from each component of data collection. Member checking was

implemented throughout the data collection and analysis process to ensure validity.

Discussion

This research presents a detailed representation of New Jersey Law and Education

Empowerment Project's efforts in providing college and career readiness educational

program services to low-income and first-generation high school students in the greater

Newark area to help narrow the academic achievement and college enrollment gaps. The

purpose of this research and the discussion of the findings is to add knowledge and

understanding to the ways in which programs, organizations, educators, and policy

makers can help to improve the future academic and socio-emotional outcomes of low-

income and first-generation students. The findings of this research provide evidence that

are consistent with improvement in low-income, first-generation students' academic

achievement, college readiness, college access, and college enrollment as a result of their

participation in NJ LEEP's program services and provide insights into how this program

has been able to achieve those results.

Program Theory. The first component of this research was an evaluation of the

program theory, which included working with the key stakeholders to develop a detailed

program logic model, define the key characteristics of the target population, examine the

understanding among stakeholders about the intended effects of the program services,

and assess the logic and plausibility of the program. The findings of the program theory

evaluation showed that the articulated program theory was determined to be logical and plausible. NJ LEEP's articulated program theory holds that if the program participants regularly receive additional academic services then their academic achievement will improve, which will in turn academically prepare students to enroll in and succeed in college. In addition to academic interventions, the program services provide socio-emotional skill development and instruction in professional behavior and expectations. The program theory assumes that if students receive services that develop these non-academic skills, students will then be further prepared for both college and career. The program theory also asserts that providing supplemental services and support in the college application and enrollment process will help first-generation and low-income students overcome college access barriers, which will in turn result in their ability to apply to and enroll in college. The last component of NJ LEEP's articulated program theory indicates that providing a strong support system through parental outreach programs and workshops and providing program alumni support while in college will result in greater student success during high school and in their post-secondary education.

Each component of the articulated program theory is supported by the research literature on college readiness and access, particularly for low-income and first-generation students, which suggests that an effective implementation of the program theory will result in the anticipated associated outcomes.   Research has consistently demonstrated that a student's academic performance is one of the greatest predictors of college success (Backstrand et al., 2014; Boboc & Nordgren, 2013; Conley, 2012; Schwartz & Washington, 1999; Stewart et al., 2015). A primary component of NJ LEEP's program theory and the foundation of the program model is to provide rigorous

academic instruction and support to develop and increase academic achievement of all program participants through repeated reading, writing, speaking, and test-taking skills. Research has shown that non-academic skill development, in addition to academic preparedness and achievement, can play a significant role in college persistence (Athanases et al., 2016; Milner IV et al., 2015; Sedlacek, 2011). This suggests that integrating services that address supporting students in developing non-cognitive skills, while also supporting academic development, can generate significant positive benefits, which could help prepare students for success in college, particularly for low-income, first-generation students who might otherwise not receive this support. Low-income and first-generation students also significantly benefit from counseling and advisement through the college application process, which can be particularly daunting for individuals who have no prior experience with this complex process. Research has demonstrated that providing students with support through the college application process can improve college graduation rates because students are more likely to enroll in a post-secondary institute that is a good fit, is not financially burdensome, and provides additional student resources (Castleman & Goodman, 2015; Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Stephan, 2013; Stewart et al., 2015). The final component of the program theory is the development of a strong support system for the program participants, which is also corroborated by research that has found students with a strong support person achieve greater academic persistence and graduation outcomes than those who do not have such a support system in place (Harper & Harris, 2012; MacLeod, 2008; Morales, 2010).

The finding that each component of the program logic model is supported by the research literature indicates that if the program is implemented as intended, it is likely to

yield the anticipated outcomes. Furthermore, the evaluation of the program theory showed that NJ LEEP has succinctly articulated its intended target population, which is essential to ensuring that the intended recipients of the program services are being identified to receive the program interventions. Additionally, interviews with key stakeholders regarding program theory demonstrated that there was substantial agreement that the academic, socio-emotional, and college bound skill building activities and services contribute to increasing access to and success in college. Program implementers and participants, as well as family members, agreed that participation in the program results in increased academic achievement, public speaking and networking skills, and planning for and achieving success in college. There was also agreement between the program implementers and program participants about the specific outcomes associated with particular program activities, indicating a collective understanding about the intended purpose of the program and its anticipated outcomes.

Program Process. The findings of the program process evaluation revealed that, in general, the program was implemented effectively and aligned closely with the articulated program theory. The program process evaluation included a combination of observations, document analysis, and interviews with 57 key stakeholders including program administrators, staff, current program participants, program alumni, and parents/guardians of program participants. In order to better evaluate NJ LEEP's program implementation and effectiveness, triangulation of data was used. The triangulation of the data during analysis contributed to increasing the validity of this evaluation because the justifications for the interpretation of the data were supported by evidence from different sources and perspectives throughout each component of the

research. The analysis of the findings for program process evaluation revealed that similar results were obtained across observational data, document analysis, and interviews with key stakeholders.

The implementation of the program closely aligned to the articulated program theory, and the services offered where in accordance with those detailed in the logic model. The majority of the program components were found to be implemented in a manner in which it is likely that they would yield the intended academic and socio-emotional college readiness outcomes anticipated, and for the past three years, NJ LEEP has successfully delivered its services to the intended target population. The findings for the program process evaluation were supported across the various data collection methods including the observational data, document analysis, and key stakeholder interviews.

The findings did identify significant areas where NJ LEEP could improve aspects of its program to align more closely to research based best practices, which could in turn help to produce greater positive outcomes for program participants. The document analysis and the observational data revealed that there is minimal integration of differentiation, collaboration, and student leadership, which research has indicated can increase college readiness, persistence, and matriculation (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017). The observational data and document analysis also indicated that the program has implemented a grammar program and vocabulary instructional practices that are not grounded in effective research based best practices, that several aspects of the curriculum implemented in the program use out-of-date content, and that there is limited technology integration. Although many areas of the

program services and interventions did employ effective practices, updating the curriculum could help to ensure greater results across all areas of NJ LEEP's program services.

One of the greatest areas of program strength as revealed by the process evaluation was in the development of positive peer and staff relationships, which was supported by the observational data and which research indicates promotes positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Merrill et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2015; Strobel et al., 2008). Positive interactions between program participants and staff members were observed across all program services and participants and alumni overwhelmingly indicated the significance of these relationships throughout the semi-structured interviews. Although participant and staff relationships were consistently found to be positive, interviews with program participants did not reveal consistent positive relationships with mentors assigned by NJ LEEP. Although some participants did develop excellent, supportive, and rewarding relationships with their mentors, equally as many participants felt as though they were not supported by their mentors. This finding indicates that there is considerable room for growth in the implementation and monitoring of the mentor program. Research has shown that positive mentor relationships can yield significant student growth outcomes and provide a positive support system when implemented effectively; however, it is necessary that this program be more closely monitored to ensure that all participants are connected to a committed mentor who is able to provide such support (Merrill et al., 2015).

The interviews with key program stakeholders corroborated the finding that the program implementation aligns to program theory. The program participants and

program alumni collectively identified specific academic and non-cognitive skills that they perceived to develop as a direct result of participation in NJ LEEP. Their perceived outcomes aligned with the intended anticipated outcomes articulated by program administrators and program staff in the program theory evaluation. Research has demonstrated that having a well-developed program structure, providing opportunities for positive participant and staff relationships, and establishing specific programmatic goals will significantly contribute to producing positive student outcomes in after-school programs (Harvard Family Research Project, 2008). The findings of the program process evaluation showed that NJ LEEP's programs do meet these criteria, however, the program could be further improved by taking steps to amend the curriculum to include research based best practices, provide more professional development on pedagogy to improve teaching practices, update the curriculum to be current and relevant, and more carefully monitor the mentor program.

Program Outcomes. The program outcome evaluation was focused on assessing the effectiveness of NJ LEEP's ability to produce the program's intended academic achievement and socio-emotional college readiness outcomes. This component was crucial to assessing NJ LEEP's ability to affect change because a program cannot be deemed effective unless it is able to bring about a certain degree of positive change as a result of its services and interventions. The areas assessed for the outcome evaluation included an analysis of academic achievement as measured by high school GPA, ACT scores, and college enrollment secondary data collected by NJ LEEP, and non-cognitive college readiness as measured by the NCQ. The findings of this component of the research showed that program participants are demonstrating academic achievement

growth in the areas of high school GPA and improved ACT scores. Participants were also significantly more likely to attend a four-year, competitive college or university than a 2-year, non-competitive post-secondary institute. Additionally, program participants demonstrated non-cognitive aspects and characteristics of college readiness at or above the national median range score on the NCQ during their senior year of participation in NJ LEEP.

The findings of the outcome evaluation also showed that when compared to Newark Public School graduates, NJ LEEP participants were much more likely to attend post-secondary institutes that were out-of-state, competitive, private, and provide 4-year bachelor degrees, which further corroborated the positive influence of participation in NJ LEEP (Backstrand et al., 2014). This finding was significant because research has found that low-income, first-generation, urban high school students are typically much more likely to be under-matched to colleges and universities than their more affluent, white peers who attend competitive schools at a significantly greater rate (Hoxby & Avery, 2013; Leonhardt, 2013). This finding suggests that NJ LEEP is adding value to program participants by not only helping to prepare them for college but providing assistance in enrolling students in more competitive, post-secondary institutes that they otherwise may not have considered. This finding is important to understand how NJ LEEP could contribute to achieving its long-term outcome goals of increasing college graduation rates for low-income and first-generation students. Research has found that students who enroll in more competitive, 4-year schools are more likely to graduate than those who enroll in non-competitive, 2-year schools, which suggests that matching students to a best-fit college could contribute to greater persistence and graduation for these students

(Leonhardt, 2013). However, it is important to note that the lack of National Student Clearinghouse data prevented the ability to use college graduation as an outcome measure.

The program outcome findings were significantly limited by the availability of data. While this research originally intended to examine the effectiveness of each individual after-school and Saturday writing course through an examination of pre- and post-course assessments, the effect of attendance on outcomes, and the rates of college matriculation, these data were not available. Evaluating these outcome measures would contribute to a much more holistic and detailed program outcome evaluation and contribute to greater insight into specific areas of influence as a result of participation in the program. This is a significant issue because one of the major long-term goals of NJ LEEP is to ensure its students are not only enrolled into college, but that they graduate from college. While many steps have been taken to help ensure students are enrolled in colleges that match with their abilities, potential, and are financially fiscal, very little has been done to help ensure NJ LEEP graduates are persisting through college, nor are steps taken to effectively collect or monitor these data. Recent studies have demonstrated that traditionally underrepresent students are enrolling in college at higher rates in recent years, however, many of these students are stalling and not graduating (Gewertz, 2018). In order to address this issue and determine if NJ LEEP's graduates are graduating college and if the program is achieving its long-term goals, steps need to be taken to collect and monitor the data.

The outcome data support the findings of the program process evaluation. The process evaluation showed that participants perceived that they were improving in their

academic achievement and ACT scores as a direct result of participation in NJ LEEP, which is corroborated by the results of the statistical analyses, which demonstrated both GPA and ACT growth over time. Furthermore, participants interviewed indicated they felt as though NJ LEEP played a significant role in helping them find a college or university that was a best fit, and often that they would have otherwise not considered. This is supported by the college enrollment outcome data that demonstrate the majority of NJ LEEP graduates are attending 4-year, competitive post-secondary institutes. Overall, this reveals that the findings of each component of this research are supported through various data collection points, helping to increase the validity of the findings. These findings also indicate that NJ LEEP is achieving its goals of increasing student academic and socio-emotional outcomes; however, steps could be taken to improve the program to potentially increase its effectiveness and the program outcomes.

How NJ LEEP is Contributing to Increasing Academic Achievement and College Readiness

An important element of this research, in addition to understanding what goals NJ LEEP is achieving, is articulating an explanation of how NJ LEEP is attaining its objectives and outcomes. The analyses of the findings of this research identified the development of the four primary areas of capital that play a prominent role in how NJ LEEP's program services help low-income and first-generation students to increase academic achievement, develop socio-emotional college readiness, and apply to and enroll in predominately 4-year, competitive post-secondary institutions. Figure 7 depicts the four areas of capital that NJ LEEP helps to cultivate in program participants that lead to the positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes found in this research.
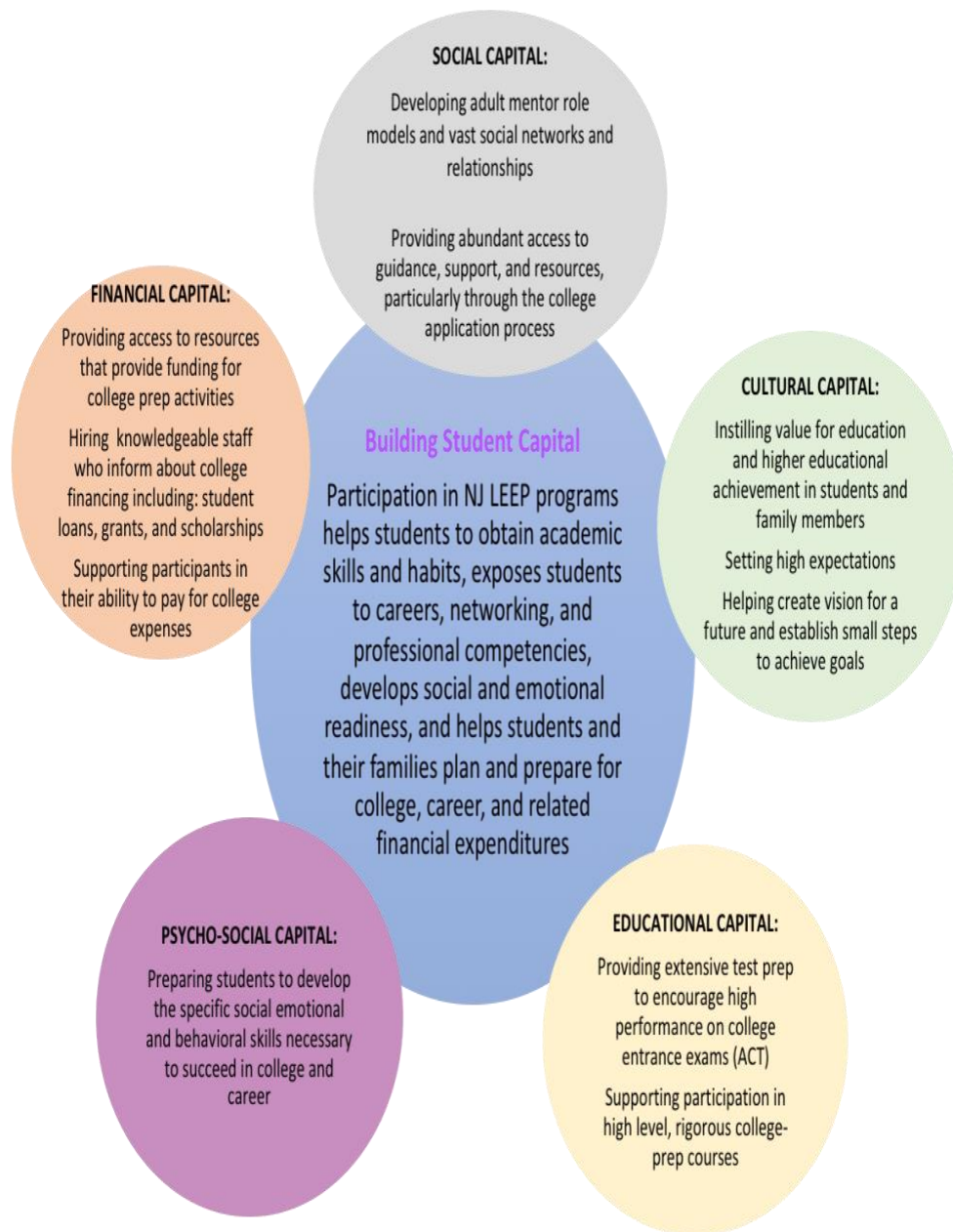
SOCIAL CAPITAL:

Developing adult mentor role models and vast social networks and relationships

Providing abundant access to guidance, support, and resources, particularly through the college application process

FINANCIAL CAPITAL:

Providing access to resources that provide funding for college prep activities

Hiring knowledgeable staff who inform about college financing including: student loans, grants, and scholarships

Supporting participants in their ability to pay for college expenses

Building Student Capital

Participation in NJ LEEP programs helps students to obtain academic skills and habits, exposes students to careers, networking, and professional competencies, develops social and emotional readiness, and helps students and their families plan and prepare for college, career, and related financial expenditures

CULTURAL CAPITAL:

Instilling value for education and higher educational achievement in students and family members

Setting high expectations

Helping create vision for a future and establish small steps to achieve goals

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CAPITAL:

Preparing students to develop the specific social emotional and behavioral skills necessary to succeed in college and career

EDUCATIONAL CAPITAL:

Providing extensive test prep to encourage high performance on college entrance exams (ACT)

Supporting participation in high level, rigorous college-prep courses

Figure 7. The influence of NJ LEEP on student capital

The research literature on barriers to college access indicates that most first-generation, low-income urban high school students do not have the embodied capitals needed for academic and socio-emotional college and career readiness (Eksner, 2015; Kao & Rutherford, 2007; Lu, 2013; Miller, 2012; O'Donovan et al., 2015). NJ LEEP is

able to ameliorate this deficiency by providing a variety of interventions and support that

contribute to the development of social, cultural, financial, and educational capital, which

in turn helps to prepare students to enroll in and be successful in their post-secondary

educational undertakings. The apparent success of NJ LEEP's method in preparing low-

income, first-generation urban high school students for college and career readiness lies

in the holistic approach to preparation that addresses areas of need that are often

overlooked or neglected through the traditional educational approaches to college

preparations tackled during the school day, which tend to focus singularly on academic

achievement.

As shown in Figure 7, the analysis of the findings of this research suggest that

participating in the various NJ LEEP program services helps to build different forms of

capital. Building social capital is associated with providing adult mentors as role models,

providing abundant access to guidance, support, and resources related to the college

application process, and helping students to create vast social networks and relationships.

Building cultural capital is associated with instilling value for educational achievement in

students and family members, setting high expectations, and helping students create a

vision for the future and establishing small steps to achieve those goals. Building

educational capital is associated with providing extensive test preparation for college

entrance exams and offering high level, rigorous college prep courses. Building psycho-

social capital is associated with preparing students to develop the specific social

emotional and behavioral skills necessary to succeed in college and career. The final

capital that participation in NJ LEEP helps to build is financial capital, which is

associated with providing access to resources that provide funding for college preparation

activities (e.g. obtaining fee waivers for applications), providing students and families with knowledgeable support regarding college financing and paying for expenses, and assisting students in selecting post-secondary institutes that will provide the greatest amount of financial support.

NJ LEEP's program services and interventions work to address four major areas of capital that help prepare underrepresented students with the academic, socio-emotional, and coping skills, financial knowledge, and support systems that holistically work to increase opportunities. Many of the areas that are targeted by NJ LEEP's programs are forms of capital that more affluent, college trained families are able to provide to their children through various social, cultural, and financial inputs. Research has described this issue as an inequity of opportunity that continues to grow with income inequality, resulting in greater educational inequity when affluent families are able to provide significantly more "inputs" into their children's academic and social experiences than families without the financial means (Putnam, 2015). Often times, this issue is compounded because more affluent families are able to move to areas with the best schools that can provide the best resources, leaving the less affluent to remain in poor schools with limited resources and often less academic rigor. This suggests a vital function for programs such as NJ LEEP is to provide opportunities and resources for students and their families who might otherwise not be able to access such important services.

Recommendations

A prominent goal of program evaluation is to identify both programmatic strengths and weaknesses and use these findings to provide recommendations for program

improvements in order to increase program effectiveness. The evaluation of the program

theory, process, and outcomes for NJ LEEP and the ensuing findings generated various

recommendations related to areas of potential program improvements. A summary of

recommendations can be found in Table 24.

Table 24. *Summary of Recommendations*

Recommendation	Objective	Component Referenced
1. Improve curriculum to be up-to-date and relevant	Improve curricular materials to include up-to-date and relevant information, including updating the Life Skills course materials and integrating technology and technology training	2
2. Improve curriculum to use research based best practices	Replace current grammar and vocabulary curriculum and instructional methods with research based best writing and vocabulary best practices	2
3. Improve staff development and training in pedagogy	Provide staff development to assist in shifting teaching strategies from predominately teacher-led to student centered learning and to increase opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and decision making	2
4. Improve monitoring of mentor program	Implement a system to ensure effectiveness of the mentor program to certify that all students are benefiting from a positive mentor relationship	2
5. Further develop and implement alumni program	Improve NJ LEEP graduate outcomes and provide continued support to align to program theory by fully developing a plan to implement and monitor the alumni program	2
6. Increase efforts to recruit boys to the program	Reduce the gender participation gap by establishing a plan to recruit and retain more boys in the program	3
7. Improve data collection methods	Improve both data collection methods to allow for future evaluation and analysis	2, 3
8. Develop and implement a plan for future evaluation	Establish a plan for evaluation to ensure the continued effectiveness of the program, track improvements, and to monitor outcomes	3

The first recommendation is related to the findings of the program process

evaluation, which revealed areas within NJ LEEP's curriculum that use out-of-date

resources. This was particularly evident within the life skills curriculum, which include resources, references, and supporting materials that are no longer aligned with current information. Although many of materials in the curriculum are still applicable, it is important that students are presented with the most up-to-date and relevant materials and resources, particularly in regard to the topics covered in the life skills course. Many of the resources that aligned to career exploration, resume writing, and job searching used outdated sources and materials that might give students an inaccurate perspective of the job market and expectations. NJ LEEP could benefit from updating the curriculum to include the use of technology when possible and as resources allow. While many low-income and first-generation urban students may have regular access to the internet and cellular phones, many may not have access to computers or training in the efficient use of computer programs and technology essential in the 21st century. Research has demonstrated a digital divide between white, affluent students and low-SES, students of color that has significant implications for college preparedness and future employment that results from how students use computer technology (C. Harris et al., 2017; Putnam, 2015; Ritzhaupt et al., 2013). In order to better prepare students for success in the 21st century, NJ LEEP should work towards improving its curriculum and integrating opportunities to learn to use technology effectively.

In addition to updating the curriculum and curricular resources, another recommendation regarding the curriculum is to replace current grammar and vocabulary instructional methods with research based best practices for writing and vocabulary. The current methods used by NJ LEEP for grammar instruction and vocabulary development have been demonstrated by research to be ineffectual, and in some instances detrimental

to student writing (Beck et al., 2013; Cleary, 2014; Flanigan et al., 2012; Graham, 2007; Hillocks Jr., 1984). While grammar and vocabulary development are essential to improving writing skills, the methods used as described in the curricular materials and observed during various program writing sessions are not the most effective methods for improving student writing and vocabulary knowledge. Research has demonstrated that grammar instruction is significantly more effective when taught in conjunction with student writing development, rather than as isolated sentence correction (Cleary, 2014; Graham, 2007; Hillocks Jr., 1984). Word knowledge and vocabulary development is also considerably more effective when taught through a robust approach that allows for understanding word parts, making connections between words, and developed in an authentic approach (Beck et al., 2013; Flanigan et al., 2012; Mountain, 2015; Vesely & Gryder, 2009).

A third recommendation is to improve staff development and training in effective pedagogy to increase the use of student-centered learning, including increasing opportunities for collaboration, differentiation, and decision making. The findings of the document analysis and observations revealed that the majority of instructional methods across most program services were teacher-centered. Research has demonstrated that students who have greater opportunities for leadership, collaboration, and decision making demonstrate greater college readiness and success in post-secondary education and their careers than those with limited opportunities to do so (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Ellis, 2013; Loes et al., 2017). The findings of the process evaluation revealed that one of NJ LEEP's greatest strengths lies in the staff's relationship building with program participants, which indicates a strong and dedicated staff; however, at the

time of the evaluation, no one on NJ LEEP's staff had any formal training in teaching, pedagogy, or best practices, which could be a substantial limitation for academically preparing students to college and career, particularly as NJ LEEP serves more students from disadvantaged backgrounds than in previous years when the acceptance criteria was less rigid. Research conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project on after-school programs identified programs that employ a project site coordinator who is licensed to teach as one component of best practices and that these programs demonstrate greater student outcomes than programs without an educator on staff (2008). This suggests that students could make even greater academic gains if NJ LEEP hired more education trained staff and trained their current staff in educational best practices.

The fourth recommendation is to implement a system to monitor the mentor program. The interviews with key stakeholders revealed that some students are receiving significant benefits from a positive mentor relationship; however, equally as many students indicated that their mentor was unavailable or unsupportive. Research has demonstrated that mentor programs can be a highly effective practice in supporting students and increase college and career readiness (Hanlon et al., 2009; Merrill et al., 2015; Morgan et al., 2015). In order for NJ LEEP's mentor program to be most effective, all students should be partnered with a mentor who is supportive and committed. Providing mentor training opportunities and implementing a system to check in with mentors and mentees to ensure the relationship is working could help to improve the outcome of this programmatic method.

At the time of this evaluation, NJ LEEP had not yet developed and implemented a plan to provide an alumni support program, therefore, a fifth recommendation is to create

a strategic plan to implement this component of NJ LEEP's program. An alumni support

program was identified as a major component of the articulated program theory and the

program logic model; however, it was unable to be evaluated because it had not yet been

implemented during the time of data collection. Although the staff indicated steps were

being made to implement this component of the program, details on how this program

would work were unclear. Other after-school programs have been effective in

implementing alumni support programs that provide student assistance during their post-

secondary education. Examining programs such as "Philadelphia Futures," who support

after-school alumni through sponsorship, mentorship, and outreach could help to provide

an effective model for this component of the program.

The analysis of the participant demographics in the outcome evaluation revealed that

there are significantly more girls than boys enrolled in NJ LEEP. Although the staff

indicated that they do make attempts to recruit boys, there is still a significant gender gap

in the program participants. Research has shown that recruiting boys into an after-school

program can pose more of a challenge than recruiting girls; however, taking additional

steps to recruit in more schools, implementing program incentives such as offering food,

targeting parents and school staff, employing year-round recruitment, and using recruiters

who look like the boys the program is hoping to target have all been found to be effective

methods to decreasing the gender gap (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Holstead et al., 2015).

A sixth recommendation is the need to improve data collection methods throughout

all program services. The document analysis and observational data revealed that

program staff are instructed to and do participate in regular data collection; however, the

types of data collected and the method for organizing and storing the data were not found

to be effective. Each staff member uses different methods for collecting and organizing data, and due to the multiple duties each staff member is responsible for, there were no structured methods for the organization or analysis of the data collection. This resulted in very limited valid data being available for the program outcome evaluation. The purpose of data collection should be to use it for informing program outcomes, student improvements, and program evaluation; however, without a structured data management system, much of the collected data were not able to be used. Furthermore, data were collected for several of the programs through pre- and post-course assessments, however, the data were inconsistent, as were the assessments, resulting in unworkable data. Working towards a formalized data collection and management system within the programs could help to provide a stronger picture of program effectiveness and student improvement. Additionally, no system was in place for tracking program alumni, which is a necessary component of data collection if long-term program outcomes are to be measured. Utilizing a system such as the National Student Clearing House database could help NJ LEEP to collect data on NJ LEEP graduates to track and evaluate the outcomes of alumni.

The final recommendation is to develop and implement a plan for future program monitoring and evaluation. The most effective programs are ones that are able to consistently track their program, identify strengths and weaknesses, and work to implement program improvements. Any strategic plan NJ LEEP develops in the future should consist of a design to continue to monitor its progress in order to evaluate program effectiveness and ensure the highest level of participant outcomes.

Implications for Policy

The findings of this research study have various implications for educational policy and policy makers. The first implication is the recognition of the significant role that after-school programs can provide in supporting students, particularly high-need students, in addition to the support and education students receive during the regular school day. Research has demonstrated that there are substantial factors outside of school that influence a child's academic and socio-emotional development, which suggests that only focusing educational policy and reforms on issues related to the traditional school day overlooks these important opportunities to improve learning outcomes (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2012a; Putnam, 2015). The findings that participation in a well-structured, college and career readiness program can contribute to improved academic achievement and enrollment in 4-year, competitive colleges and universities suggests that there is potential for these programs to add substantial value to the outcomes of low-income and first-generation students. Policy that supports and contributes to the implementation and funding of after-school programs could help to diminish the academic achievement gap in the United States educational system.

Another implication of this research for after-school program providers and educators is in the findings regarding the focus areas of the program. NJ LEEP is structured in a way that addresses various areas of need for its target population, including targeting the development of specific skills that are often not addressed in school. A considerable amount of time in NJ LEEP's programs is spent teaching students how to be better learners through study skill instruction, teaching students how to perform better on standardized tests, and helping students develop soft skills needed for

college and career readiness. Providing support in developing these specific skills helps to fill a gap in different types of capital that more affluent students often develop through interactions with their family, participating in middle and upper-class milieu, and through access to opportunities their parents are able to provide as a result of greater financial freedom. A focus on developing programs that help to provide opportunities for low-income and first-generation students helps to increase their social and cultural capital in ways that contribute to their college readiness. This suggests that an important implication for program providers and educators is identifying the specific developmental needs of the targeted program participants and designing programs that work to meet those needs.

In this research, one of the most significant findings is in the added value that participation in NJ LEEP provided to increasing student enrollment in 4-year, competitive colleges and universities. This objective was met, in part, through extensive college and financial advisement provided both in cohort groups and individually to help students identify a best fit. The implication for this finding is that program providers, educators, and school counselors can play a significant role in diminishing the college enrollment and achievement gap through purposeful advisement, exposure, and encouragement when working with low-income and disadvantaged students through the college application process. Research has demonstrated that low-income, first-generation, and minority students are often under-matched to post-secondary institutes, which could be diminished with a greater focus on college advisement for these students (Athanases et al., 2016; Castleman & Goodman, 2015; Griffith & Rothstein, 2009).

Finally, it is important to address the need for the additional rigorous academic instruction and support NJ LEEP program participants received through participation. Research has demonstrated, and the perspectives of program participants in this research support, that urban school environments frequently do not always provide the high level of rigorous curriculum required to prepare students for college and career. Many of the program participants indicated that a primary reason for participation in NJ LEEP was to challenge them in a way they were not being challenged during the regular school day. This suggests that in addition to continuing to implement policies that work to improve the curriculum of urban educational settings, policies that support supplemental programs such as NJ LEEP that offer a rigorous curriculum can help to ameliorate the achievement gap that occurs between urban and suburban districts. The findings of this research indicate that future policy making should work to provide funding and support to programs that work to help diverse, low-income and first-generation students prepare for, enroll in, and persist through college.

Limitations of the Study

The findings of this research must take into consideration the various limitations present throughout this study. Although the methods used in this study attempted to diminish its limitations through evaluating the program through the triangulation of multiple data points, several limitations still exist. The first limitation of this study is in the sample selection used. The sample of students for this research all attend one after-school program located in Newark, New Jersey. Using data collected from a single after-school program can limit its generalizability; however, this is typically not a goal of case-study research, and the rich, thick description of the program, and the specific program details

are intended to provide the readers with the impression of a shared experience. Additionally, these students, with support from their parents, self-selected to apply to this program, and then underwent a rigorous interview process prior to being accepted into the four-year, college-bound program. Inherently, this indicates that these students are highly motivated and likely to have higher than average achievement levels, which has significant potential to skew the results. Furthermore, the participants attended a variety of schools and school types across the greater Newark area, which could each contribute differently to students' academic growth and college readiness during the same time as program participation. More than half of the program participants attended a charter, selective-magnet, or parochial school, all of which are likely to provide greater support, resources, and academic rigor than traditional public schools. This suggests that students are likely receiving additional academic and socio-emotional support during the traditional school day in addition to NJ LEEP, which could significantly contribute to academic and non-cognitive gains measured in this research.

An additional limitation of this study was in the data used for the program outcome evaluation. Some of the data used in this component of the research were self-reported data provided by the program participants. The program participants and their families provided the demographic data collected by NJ LEEP and analyzed in the outcome evaluation. Data such as family income level and first-generation status were self-reported, which could result in skewed or misrepresented data. Furthermore, the statistical power of this data is limited due to the small number of students assessed and the missing data, as well as other significant variables including attrition and college matriculation not being tracked, and attendance and pre-and post-course assessments not

being collected or managed in a way to allow for valid statistical analysis. The findings

indicate that 100% of students who graduated the program went on to college; however,

because attrition was not tracked, this finding is misleading as it does not account for the

students who did not complete the program or their outcomes. A larger population and a

more complete data set would have increased the reliability of the findings. Additionally,

the validity of the comparison to the Newark Public School graduate outcomes is limited

because it is not a true comparison group and does not account for other significant

differences that could not be controlled for, but merely provides a general comparison.

The median family income level of NJ LEEP program participants also

contributes to limiting the validity of the observed outcomes. The median family income

of NJ LEEP program participants was significantly higher than that of median family

with children income level in Newark, which indicates that NJ LEEP's participants are

financially better off than many families in Newark, even if they still meet the

programmatic qualification of low-income. This could potentially limit the findings

because research has demonstrated that academic achievement is significantly linked to

family income, which could contribute to both the academic achievement and socio-

emotional growth observed in this study.

There is also an inherent limitation in using observational tools for measurement

even with rubrics, exemplars, and specific observational criteria because of the

subjectivity on the part of the observer. Finally, this evaluation is only a snap shot. It did

not take into account every single component of NJ LEEP's program services including a

full evaluation of the summer programs, parent workshops, and competitions, nor were

observations of the various activities conducted over the course of the whole year. This

can limit the findings because each of the program services and events conducted through NJ LEEP could contribute differently to student development and to meetings the goals and objectives of the program. Nonetheless, this research did use multiple methods of data collection (qualitative and quantitative) and triangulated data from multiple sources (document analysis, observations, interviews with various stakeholders, and quantitative outcome measures) to help increase reliability in light of these various limitations.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this research was to measure the influence of participation in NJ LEEP on student academic and socio-emotional outcomes. The findings of this research indicate, that overall, participation in NJ LEEP does improve academic achievement and socio-emotional college readiness outcomes for low-income and first-generation students; however, this investigation has led to additional questions that could lead to future research. The findings of this research have resulted in important questions regarding the implementation and outcomes of NJ LEEP's programs, which could have broader implications for practice and policy. One area of question relates to a primary goal of NJ LEEP, which is to improve college graduation and middle-class employment of its low-income and first-generation program participants. Since this question was unable to be answered through this research, future research should include collecting and analyzing the data that NJ LEEP has not yet collected including poverty level, attrition, pre- and post-course assessments, useable attendance records, college matriculation, persistence, and graduation. Collecting and analyzing data on individual programs offered through NJ LEEP could provide a more detailed description on the effectiveness of the program components and if the services are producing the intended desired outcomes. Collecting

college matriculation, persistence, and graduation data on NJ LEEP graduates could allow for an evaluation of the distal outcomes and a more valid comparison to NPS graduates, who could be case matched in order to control for variables such as high school type attended and family income level that have potential to significantly skew the findings.

Future research should also include a thorough evaluation of all program services including the recruitment and interview processes, parent workshops, the alumni program, and the various supplemental program components such as the debate and vocabulary competitions. Each of these program components contributes in some way to the program outcomes and could provide a more holistic understanding of how the program is achieving its goals. Furthermore, examining components such as the recruitment and interview process could provide more insight into the self-selection bias present in this study and could uncover information regarding increasing participation of boys in the program. Additionally, a deeper understanding of the role of parents in the program could provide a greater perspective in how their support influences student outcomes. This should also include developing a plan for continued program evaluation that would allow NJ LEEP to implement changes, collect data, and continue evaluation of its program services in the future. A detailed future evaluation plan should include an evaluation of all data points already collected as well as other data that to-date is not collected including poverty level, attrition, pre- and post-course assessments, attendance records, college persistence, and matriculation.

Future research could also identify similar programs and include a comparative analysis to determine differences found between programs to identify best practices and

how various program components influence student outcomes. Future studies could include case matching non-program participants to program participants control for specific variables and to identify differences between student outcomes. This would contribute to a deeper understanding of the level of difference participation in NJ LEEP is able to achieve regardless of variables such as high school attended, family income level, gender, or race.

Conclusion

All children in the United States deserve equal opportunity to achieve academic success, college access, and a chance at social mobility. The current status of educational attainment and income inequality in the United States indicates that despite providing opportunities for all children to receive a free education, there are additional forces preventing equitable outcomes for all students. These disparities are particularly significant for low-income, first-generation students in urban areas where access to social, academic, and emotional opportunities are limited both inside and outside of schools (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2012a; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Putnam, 2015). After-school and other out-of-school time programs are one approach to helping to ameliorate the current achievement and opportunity gaps by supplementing the education and experience that occurs during the traditional school day with access to a safe place to learn, grow, and develop outside of school. Research has demonstrated that high quality after-school programs can contribute to positively influencing the academic achievement and social development of program participants (Afterschool Alliance, 2014; Birmingham et al., 2005; P. M. D. Little et al., 2008). This study supports these findings and adds to the knowledge of after-school program implementation and outcomes by

providing educators, policy makers, and program providers with practical information and strategies in designing and implementing a comprehensive college and career readiness program that works to increase the academic achievement of low-income and first-generation students.

The findings of this research support the perspective that providing comprehensive academic and socio-emotional skill development to low-income and first-generation students can result in the participants obtaining multiple benefits that contribute to increasing their college readiness and access. These findings further reveal that targeting specific soft skills in addition to providing rigorous academic instruction, as well as developing positive support systems and intensive college counseling, play a crucial role in increasing college access to four-year, competitive, post-secondary institutes. The detailed descriptions of the program components, analysis of the curricular materials, and analysis of key stakeholders' perspectives provides additional understanding into what it takes to help prepare first-generation, low-income, urban students for college and career readiness. The focus on developing social, cultural, educational, and financial capital through various program components, all of which are implemented by a dedicated staff who develop positive relationships with program participants, play a significant role in the success of NJ LEEP's ability to achieve many of its goals and objectives.

In order to improve low-income, first-generation, urban student academic outcomes and diminish the achievement gap in the United States, this research indicates that a comprehensive approach to college readiness and access that incorporates students, teachers, parents, and other key stakeholders in the process is essential to success. It does

appear that intensive, four-year, college and career readiness after-school programs such as NJ LEEP have the capacity to improve program participants' academic achievement, socio-emotional college readiness, and college access by offering a variety of systemic interventions that target specific skills needed for future success. In order to achieve this achievement on a larger scale, educators, program providers, and policy makers need to provide funding and opportunities for these programs to operate and ensure they include access to rigorous academic curriculum, development of soft skills, fostering of positive adult relationships, and intensive college and financial counseling. The additional contribution of programs such as NJ LEEP could, overtime, help to diminish the academic achievement gap, and increase college access for all students regardless of geographical location, socio-economic status, or parental educational attainment.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocols
Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Program
Administrators/Directors/Facilitators
Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself, include:

    a. Name

    b. Title/Position

    c. Educational/Career background

    d. Length of time with NJ LEEP

    e. Describe your role in NJ LEEP?

Program Theory Questions:

2. How would you describe the mission and goals of NJ LEEP?

3. What are the characteristics of the target program participants?

4. What are the intended short term, intermediate, and long term effects of

    participation in the program?

5. What are the necessary resources for the program to run effectively?

Program Process Questions:

6. How is the program organized to run? (Days, time, length, student-teacher ratio,

    etc.)

7. How do the services provided by the after school program lend to meeting the

    goals of the program?

8. How do these services differ from traditional school services?

9. Who are the primary students receiving the services offered through the program?

    (Describe the program participants)

10. What are the needs of the program participants?

11. How does the program recruit and retain student participants? (Program participation)

12. How do you feel the goals and outcomes of the program are being achieved?

13. How do the services of the program benefit the student participants and prepare them for college and career?

14. What more needs to be done to further meet the needs of the student participants?

15. How, as a leader of the program, do you work with and train staff to effectively implement the program?

16. What challenges have you encountered implementing the program?

17. What is the future plan for the program?

18. What other comments would you like to share regarding the after school program?

19. Do you have any questions?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Program Staff
Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself, include:

    a. Name

    b. Title/Position

    c. Educational/Career background

    d. Length of time with NJ LEEP

    e. Describe your role in NJ LEEP

Program Theory Questions:

2. How would you describe the mission and goals of NJ LEEP?

3. What are the characteristics of the target program participants?

4. What are the intended short term, intermediate, and long term effects of
    participation in the program?

5. What are the necessary resources for the program to run effectively?

Program Process Questions:

6. How is the program organized to run? (Days, time, length, student-teacher ratio,
    etc.)

7. How do the services provided by the after school program lend to meeting the
    goals of the program?

8. How do these services differ from traditional school services?

9. Who are the primary students receiving the services offered through the program?

10. What are the needs of the program participants?

11. How does the program recruit and retain student participants? (Program participation)

12. How do you feel the goals and outcomes of the program are being achieved?

13. How do the services of the program benefit the student participants and prepare them for college and career?

14. What more needs to be done to further meet the needs of the student participants?

15. What challenges have you encountered with the program?

16. What other comments would you like to share regarding your experiences with the after school program?

17. Do you have any questions?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Current Program Participants
Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself, include:

    a. Name

    b. Grade/School

    c. Length of time with NJ LEEP

2. Why do you participate in NJ LEEP after school program?

3. How did you select which afterschool program to participate in?

4. What types of activities do you engage in during NJ LEEP?

5. What do you enjoy most about participating in NJ LEEP?

6. What aspects of participating in NJ LEEP do you not enjoy?

7. What would you be doing after school if you didn't attend NJ LEEP?

8. In what ways is your experience in an afterschool program different than regular school?

9. In what ways is your experience in an afterschool program similar to regular school?

10. What are your plans for college or career when you are finished with high school?

11. How do you anticipate that your experiences and participation in NJ LEEP will affect your future experiences in college or your career?

12. How has participating in an afterschool program influenced your life?

    a. *Academically?*

    b. *Socially?*

13. What ideas do you have that could help to make NJ LEEP better?

14. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share regarding your

experiences in NJ LEEP?

15. Do you have any questions?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Alumni of NJ LEEP
Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself, include:

   a. Name

   b. Current Grade/School

   c. High School attended

   d. Length of time with NJ LEEP

2. Why did you participate in NJ LEEP after school program?

3. What did you enjoy most about participating in NJ LEEP?

4. What aspects of participating in NJ LEEP did you not enjoy?

5. In what ways did participating in NJ LEEP help to prepare you for college?

6. In what ways did participating in NJ LEEP influence your life?

   a. *Academically?*

   b. *Socially?*

   c. *Personally?*

7. What more could NJ LEEP have done to help you prepare for success in college?

8. What are your plans for further education or career when you are finished with college?

9. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share regarding your experiences in NJ LEEP?

10. Do you have any questions?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Parents/Guardians of NJ LEEP Program Participants
Introductory/Demographic Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself, include:

    a. Name

    b. Child's age/grade/current schol

    c. Length of time with NJ LEEP

2. Why did you wany your child to participate in NJ LEEP after school program?

3. How does your child feel about participating in NJ LEEP?

4. In what ways do you feel supported by NJ LEEP?

5. What do you hope your child will gain from participating in NJ LEEP?

    a. *Academically?*

    b. *Socially?*

6. What more could NJ LEEP do to help support you or your child?

7. Are there any other thoughts or ideas you would like to share regarding your child's or your experiences with NJ LEEP?

8. Do you have any questions?

Appendix B: Site Approval Letter

NJ LEEP

Skills
Habits
Exposure

570 Broad Street
Suite 700
Newark, NJ 07102

973 297 1555
njleep.org

To Whom It May Concern:

I submit this letter, as Executive Director of NJ LEEP and on behalf of the institution, formally consenting to the following:

1. Working with Nikki Smith, a PhD candidate at Rutgers University, on her dissertation;
2. Giving Ms. Smith access to our program facilities, our staff and students, our curriculum and other relevant documents, and the data records NJ LEEP has collected since our inception.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at mfeinstein@njleep.org of 973-297-1555 ex. 205.

Sincerely,

Matthew Feinstein
Executive Director
NJ LEEP
570 Broad Street
Newark, NJ 07102

Appendix C: Out-of-School Time (OST) Observational Instrument

OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

COVER SHEET

CO-OBSERVED?
☐ Yes ☐ No
CO-OBSERVERS' INITIALS:
1._____ 2._____

Program ID/Location:	Observer Initials:	Observation Number:	Room Number:	Date: (mm/dd/yy)	Start Time:	End Time:

ACTIVITY NAME:	
ACTIVITY OVERVIEW (1-2 sentence description):	

ACTIVITY TYPE	✓ ata*	TYPE OF SPACE	✓ one	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	#					
Homework Help/Test Prep		Classroom		Total number of girls						
Tutoring		Gym		Total number of boys						
Academic activities (not homework)		Computer Lab		GRADE LEVELS (circle all that apply)						
Story reading/listening		Library		K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Visual arts		Cafeteria		7	8	9	10	11	12	other
Dance		Auditorium		PARTICIPATION TYPE					✓ one	
Music		Art Room		By age or grade						
Drama		Music Room		By interest (child's choice)						
Crafts		Hallway		All attendees (in the program)						
Sports—practicing/learning a skill		Outside Playground								
Sports—playing competitive or non-competitive physical games		Other: _____		*ata = all that apply						
Open, unstructured time (e.g., table games, internet, free play)		TOTAL STAFF	#							
Staff-assigned learning games (dominos, chess, etc.)		High school student								
Community service		College student or young adult								
College/career preparation		Certified teacher								
Cultural awareness clubs/projects		Specialist or other professional								
Other: _____		Other adult								

At the end of the observation, please indicate what type of skill development, if any, took place in this activity.		PRIMARY SKILL TARGETED IN SKILL-BUILDING	✓ one
SKILL DEVELOPMENT	✓ one	Physical/athletic	
		Artistic	
Skill-building		Math/numeracy	
		Reading/writing/literacy	
Skill practice/reinforcement		Decision making/problem solving	
Neither		Interpersonal communication	
This is a homework activity		Other:_____	

Source: (Pechman et al., 2008)

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING: STAFF...	INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: STAFF...
Use positive behavior management techniques that allow youth to accomplish the activity's objectives. Staff set consistent limits and clear behavioral standards, and these are appropriate to the age of the youth and the activity type. If it is necessary to discipline, staff do so in a firm manner, without unnecessary accusations, threats, or anger and there is no evidence of disciplinary problems.	**Communicate goals, purpose, expectations.** Staff make clear the purpose of what youth are doing and/or what they expect them to accomplish. Activity goals/expectations may also be implicit if students are clearly on task without staff direction. This item goes beyond how youth are expected to behave (which would be captured in item K).
Encourage the participation of all. Regardless of gender, race, language ability, or other evident differences among students, staff try to engage students who appear isolated; they do not favor (or ignore) a particular student or small cluster of students.	**Verbally recognize youth's efforts and accomplishments.** Staff explicitly acknowledge youth's participation and progress to motivate them using praise, encouragement, and/or constructive guidance/modeling. (Must involve verbal statements not just implied affirmation.)
Show positive affect toward youth. Staff tone is caring and friendly; they use positive language, smile, laugh, or share good-natured jokes. They refrain from threats, cutting sarcasm, or harsh criticism. If no verbal interaction is necessary, staff demonstrate a positive and caring affect toward youth.	**Assist youth without taking control.** Staff refrain from taking over a task or doing the work for the youth. They coach, demonstrate, or employ scaffolding techniques that help youth to gain a better understanding of a concept or complete an action on their own. This assistance goes beyond checking that work is completed.
Attentively listen to and/or observe youth. Staff look at youth when they speak and acknowledge what they have said by responding and/or reacting verbally or nonverbally. They pay attention to youth as they complete tasks and are interested in what youth are saying/doing.	**Ask youth to expand upon their answers and ideas.** Staff encourage youth to explain their answers, to give evidence, or suggest conclusions. They ask youth "why," "how," and "if" questions to get youth to expand, explore, better clarify, articulate, or concretize their thoughts/ideas. This item goes beyond basic Q&A.
Encourage youth to share their ideas, opinions, and concerns about the content of the activity. Staff actively elicit youth ideas, opinions, and concerns on the activity content through discussion and/or writing. This item goes beyond basic Q&A to fully engage with youth's ideas and thinking.	**Challenge youth to move beyond their current level of competency.** Staff give constructive feedback that is designed to motivate youth, to set a higher standard, and meant to help youth gauge their progress. Staff help youth determine ways to push themselves intellectually, creatively, and/or physically.
Engage personally with youth. Staff show a personal interest in youth as individuals, ask about their interests, and engage in discussion about events in their lives. This goes beyond content-based discussions to include personal interest and demonstrate caring by the adults.	**Employ varied teaching strategies.** To engage students and/or reach those with different learning styles, staff use diverse instructional strategies, which may include: direct instruction, coaching, modeling, demonstrating, or others. Varied instructional strategies can occur simultaneously and/or sequentially within the observation period.
Guide positive peer interactions. The lesson structure/content explicitly encourages positive relationships/interactions and/or teaches interpersonal skills. May involve staff explaining or through planned activity content why negative behavior (e.g., bullying, teasing, etc.) is unacceptable and offering constructive behavior alternatives. However, this item does not refer to behavior management, as described above (see item K).	**Plan for/ask youth to work together.** Staff structure activities so that youth work cooperatively to solve problems, and/or accomplish tasks. The focus of the activity is youth-to-youth, rather than youth-to-staff. This item goes beyond staff-assigned teams for competitive games and sports. In the case of staff-assigned teams, staff actively encourage youth to collaborate, plan, devise strategies, etc.
CONTENT AND STRUCTURE: ACTIVITY **(Note: When homework is the observed activity, do not score these indicators.)**	
Is well organized. Activity has clear (implicitly or explicitly stated) goals/objectives; there is evidence of a clear lesson plan and process(es), and tasks can be conducted in the timeframe available. If special materials are needed, they are prepared and available.	**Involves the practice/a progression of skills.** Activity involves practicing skills needed to complete tasks. If a long-term project, youth's activity on the project provides the opportunity to apply or expand skills or techniques previously learned.
Challenges students intellectually, creatively, developmentally, and/or physically. Activity's level of challenge is not so difficult that youth have trouble participating successfully and not so easy that youth complete tasks routinely, without thought, and become restless/disengaged.	**Requires analytic thinking.** Activity calls on students to think about and solve meaningful problems and/or juggle multiple activities or strategies/dimensions to accomplish a task. For example, the activity requires youth to think about two or more ideas, and/or understand and apply sequencing or patterns. This can apply to complex dance, arts, theater, or sports moves, routines, or strategies.

OST ACADEMIC AND TECHNOLOGY FEATURES

RATINGS:

Not Present. *Activity did not occur at all.*

Present. *Feature is evident during the activity, although it may not have been a central goal of the activity; or the feature is addressed directly by the assignment or in staff statements or instructions.*

Observer's Initials:	Site Name: Observation #:	Activity Name

LITERACY FEATURES

☐ If this activity/lesson is NOT literacy-focused, mark the box and move to the next section.

In this literacy activity, students:	Present	Not Present
a. Work on original writing	☐	☐
b. Work on a reading workbook, worksheet, or quiz	☐	☐
c. Read aloud to peers or staff	☐	☐
d. Read books independently	☐	☐
e. Work on understanding new words/word attack skills	☐	☐
f. Discuss the style or structure of literacy activities (e.g., book, poetry, drama, video, other media, etc.)	☐	☐
g. Discuss interpretations, make predictions, or draw inferences from literacy activities (e.g., book, poetry, drama, video, other media, etc.)	☐	☐

MATHEMATICS FEATURES

☐ If this activity/lesson is NOT mathematics-focused, mark the box and move to the next section.

In this mathematics activity/lesson, students:	Present	Not Present
a. Practice basic whole number math facts/operations (e.g., addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)	☐	☐
b. Work on a mathematics workbook, worksheet, or quiz	☐	☐
c. Work on problems using fractions or decimals, etc.	☐	☐
d. Work on problems using algebra, geometry/measurement, or data analysis	☐	☐
e. Use manipulatives, mathematics charts, or other tools to solve problems	☐	☐
f. Explain the reasoning behind how a problem is solved	☐	☐
g. Make charts, tables, or graphs	☐	☐
h. Complete open-ended math problems requiring youth to determine method	☐	☐

USE OF TECHNOLOGY

☐ If technology is NOT used in this activity/lesson, mark the box and move to the next section.

If computers are used, how many computers are being used during this observation? _____

In this activity, students use:	Not at all	L/T half the group	M/T half the group	Almost all
a. Internet search tools (e.g., Google, Yahoo!)	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Spreadsheet programs (e.g., Excel)	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Word processing program (e.g., Microsoft Word)	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Presentation software (e.g., PowerPoint)	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Drill and practice software for reading (e.g., Destination Reading, READ 180)	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Drill and practice software for mathematics (e.g., Achieve Now, SuccessMaker)	☐	☐	☐	☐
g. Calculators	☐	☐	☐	☐
h. Digital cameras or video recording/editing equipment	☐	☐	☐	☐
i. Other (describe below)	☐	☐	☐	☐

ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT		
1. Is the level of adult supervision appropriate to activity and age group?	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		
2. Is the work space conducive to the activity?	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		
3. Are necessary materials available and in sufficient supply?	Yes	No
If no: →Why not?		

OBSERVER'S SYNTHESIS AND RATING On a 1-7 scale, rate the extent to which this activity demonstrates these features:		
Element	OBSERVER'S SYNTHESIS	RATING
SEQUENCED: Activity builds progressively more sequenced and advanced skills and knowledge and challenges youth to achieve clear goals.		
ACTIVE: Youth engage actively in learning. They lead/participate in discussions, develop or research a product, contribute original ideas, collaborate, take on leadership roles, and/or are oriented toward completing tasks.		
PERSONALLY FOCUSED: Actively strengthens relationships among youth and between youth and staff.		
EXPLICIT: The activity explicitly targets specific learning and/or developmental goals		

OBSERVER'S NOTES

Observer's Initials:	Site Name: Observation #:	Activity Name:
SEQUENCED: The activity builds progressively sequenced and advanced skills and knowledge and challenge youth to achieve goals.		**ACTIVE:** Youth actively in learning. They lead/participate in discussions, develop or research a product, contribute their original ideas, work together, take on leadership roles, and/or are highly oriented toward completing tasks.
PERSONALLY FOCUSED: The activity strengthens relationships among youth and between youth and staff.		**EXPLICIT:** The activity explicitly targets specific learning and/or developmental goals.

Appendix D: Non-Cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ)

NONCOGNITIVE QUESTIONNAIRE: Adapted from (http://williamsedlacek.info) (Sedlacek, 2011)

1. Your student identification number: _____

2. Your sex is:
_____ Male
_____ Female

3. Your age is: _____

4. Please provide your high school grade point average (HS GPA) and your SAT or ACT scores:

HS GPA:_____
Verbal SAT:_____
Math SAT:_____
ACT:_____

5. Your father's highest level of education:
_____ High school graduate or less
_____Some college
_____College graduate
_____Some graduate school
_____Graduate degree or higher

6. Your mother's highest level of education:
_____ High school graduate or less
_____Some college
_____College graduate
_____Some graduate school
_____Graduate degree or higher

7. Your race is:
_____ Black (African American)
_____ White (not of Hispanic origin)
_____ Asian American (Pacific Islander)
_____ Hispanic (Latino)
_____ American Indian (Native American, Alaskan Native)
_____ Other

8. How much education do you expect to get during your lifetime?
_____ College, but less than a bachelor's degree
_____ B.A. or equivalent
_____ One or two years of graduate or professional study (master's degree)
_____ Doctoral Degree such as M.D., Ph.D., and so on

9. Please list three goals that you have for yourself right now:

1. _____

2.

_____

3.

_____

10. About 50 percent of university students typically leave before
receiving a degree. If this should happen to you, what will be the
most likely cause?

_____ Absolutely certain that I will obtain a degree

_____ To accept a good job

_____ To enter military service

_____ It will cost more than my family can afford

_____ Marriage

_____ Disinterest in study

_____ Lack of academic ability

_____ Insufficient reading or study skills

_____ Other

11. Please list three things that you are proud of having done:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

For the remainder of items on this survey, you will be asked to indicate the degree you agree or
disagree with a variety of statements that relate to what your feelings were or expectations of how
things were going to be WHEN YOU ENTERED COLLEGE.

12. The university should use its influence to improve social
conditions in the state.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly Disagree

13. It should not be very hard to get a B (3.0) average at this school.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly Disagree

14. I get easily discouraged when I try to do something and it doesn't work.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly Disagree

Respond to the statements below with WHAT YOUR FEELINGS ARE OR EXPECTATIONS
OF HOW THINGS ARE GOING TO BE WHEN YOU ENTER COLLEGE.
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following items. Click
on the appropriate number.

15. I am sometimes looked up to by others.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

16. If I run into problems concerning school, I have someone who will
listen to me and help me.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

17. There is no use in doing things for people; you only find that you
get taken advantage of in the long run.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

18. In groups where I am comfortable, I am often looked to as a leader.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

19. I expect to have a harder time than most students at this school.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

20. Once I start something, I finish it.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
5 = Strongly Disagree

21. When I believe strongly in something, I act on it.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

22. I am as skilled academically as the average applicant to this school.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

23. I expect I will encounter discrimination at this school.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

24. People can pretty easily change me even though I thought my mind
was already made up on the subject.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

25. My friends and relatives don't feel I should go to college.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

26. My family has always wanted me to go to college.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

27. If course tutoring is made available on campus at no cost, I would attend regularly.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

28. I want a chance to prove myself academically.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

29. My high school grades don't really reflect what I can do.
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neutral
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

30. Please list offices held and/or groups belonged to in high school or in your community.
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____