

Breaking Down the Barriers to Academic Success: Middle School Students' Perceptions of
Barriers to Academic Achievement

Thesis

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By

Laine Kolesar

Undergraduate Program in Social Work

Ohio State University

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Scottye Cash, Advisor

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Abstract

Middle school students, especially those of racial minorities and low socioeconomic status, face a multitude of barriers when striving for academic success. The wide range of possible barriers is what led me to ask the question of how middle school students themselves perceive their own barriers to academic achievement. What do they think is the most influential factor in their academic success? What do they see as a problem in their classrooms and communities? I also sought to explore how these perceptions are affected by self-efficacy and race. This was achieved through a survey administered to a sample of 88 middle school students. The survey included questions designed to assess self-efficacy and perceived barriers to academic success, in addition to questions about basic demographic information (age, race, and gender).

Results indicate that there are meaningful differences in self-efficacy based on gender and race. There are also differences in how participants perceive certain barriers, such as teacher cultural competency, based on race. The majority of participants agree that being tired and/or hungry in school is a barrier to their academic success. My study adds to existing knowledge of what causes the achievement gap. It also provides direction for future school social work practice, both within the school at which my research was conducted, and in schools that are struggling with similar issues.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this to the middle school students I taught for three summers at Breakthrough Cincinnati, an enrichment program for high-achieving youth from low-income families. This experience opened my eyes to the inequalities in our education system. These students' resilience, determination, and ability to rise above barriers inspired me, and continues to motivate me, to work toward providing all children with equal educational opportunity.

Acknowledgements

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Curriculum Vitae

May 2013.....Walnut Hills High School

May 2017.....B.S. Social Work, Honors with Research Distinction,
Magna cum laude, The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Social Work

Minor Field: Developmental Psychology

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Chapter 1: Statement of Research Topic

Introduction

My research is inspired by both the importance of the middle school years on future academic success, and the achievement gap as an example of social injustice in the United States. Middle school is often seen as a “fork in the road,” where children are divided between those who will go on to academic success and higher education and those who will not.

This gap in achievement stems from multiple structural and systemic processes present in the United States since the mid sixties, including the use of colorblind practices by educators, cultural conflicts in the classroom, the myth of meritocracy, and low expectations of teachers. Color blindness is the idea that modern educators shape curriculum and use teaching strategies that ignore racial differences. In an attempt to create an equal experience for students in the classroom, teachers can overlook an important part of many minority students’ identities and fail to engage them fully in the learning process (Milner 2012).

Lack of cultural competence is just one of many barriers contributing to the achievement gap. Inequalities begin at birth, as children born into poverty are more likely to be Low Birth Weight, which can cause cognitive and behavioral problems throughout their lives. In addition, food insecurity, family and neighborhood violence, and pollution—factors likely to affect a child living in a low SES household—all can interfere directly and indirectly with a child’s academic achievement (Berliner 2010).

School social workers have an obligation to not only advocate for and support individual students, but to promote social justice on a larger scale by closing the achievement gap and making sure all students have equal opportunity. Therefore, it is important to examine the

barriers faced by students within a specific school or district, while also evaluating how this knowledge can be used to promote widespread change.

Statement of the Problem

Disparities in achievement exist between minority students, mainly African-American and Latino students, and their nonminority classmates. These disparities are also seen between students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds and their higher-income peers (Olszewski-Kubilius, Steenbergen-Hu, Rosen, & Thomson (2017). Continued efforts to close or reduce this gap have proven to be largely ineffective, as evidenced by recent data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which reveals that the Black-White, Hispanic-White, and free and reduced lunch-nonfree and reduced lunch reading and math achievement gaps have remained stable from 2013 to 2015 (NAEP, 2015). It is important to mention that average scores for these groups have improved over the past 20 years, while the gaps between the average scores of the groups have remained stable (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009).

The Achievement Gap and Minority Students

In a study where both reading and math standardized test scores were measured twice every five years from 1973 to 2004, there is a difference in the average scores of white students and African American students ranging from 18 to 53 points throughout the five years. For white students and Hispanic American students, the difference ranges from 19 to 41 points (Milner 2012). Black students make up around 16% of the students in the United States, but they only make up 8.4% of students in gifted programs (Frye and Vogt, 2010).

Data from a 2011 math assessment for eighth graders indicates that overall student achievement was lower in schools with a high density of African American students and higher in schools with a low density of African American students. The black-white achievement gap

was larger in high-density schools than in low-density schools, but white student achievement remained constant no matter the school (NCES 2015). There is evidence that these gaps in achievement widen throughout the school years, tending to increase through the eighth grade year (West et al., 2000).

Minority gaps in achievement increase at a faster rate when measuring the highest-achieving students. Minority-nonminority gaps between average reading and math test scores measured for the same students from kindergarten to fifth grade widen at a higher rate for the students who entered kindergarten with higher skills compared to those that entered with lower skills. The gap widens approximately twice as fast for students who enter kindergarten averaging one standard deviation above the mean test scores, compared to students one standard deviation below the mean (Reardon, 2008).

According to Riegle-Crumb and Grodsky (2010), there is a larger gap in advanced high school classes between minority students and their white classmates than in lower-level classes. They point to the racial and ethnic disparities in family socio-economic status, as well as a school's racial and ethnic composition as factors contributing to this wider gap at higher levels of achievement.

Socio-Economic Status and the Achievement Gap

Directly related to the minority achievement gap, the income achievement gap has widened over the past three decades (Reardon, 2013). High-income students have higher standardized test scores, college completion rates, levels of enrollment in selective universities, civic engagement, extracurricular participation, and other educational outcomes. These income differences are a large factor in the black-white and Hispanic-white achievement gap, as minority parents generally have lower levels of academic achievement and income than white parents

(Hedges and Nowell, 1999). Children from higher-income families benefit from parents who have a greater familiarity of the education system, higher expectations for their children occupationally, and an earlier sense of how to communicate verbally and nonverbally in ways that are expected and rewarded in the classroom (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

This socioeconomic difference may account for the wider achievement gap at higher levels of achievement. For instance, parents who have a higher level of education may feel more comfortable interacting with school faculty and advocating for their child to have access to more advanced courses. In addition, they are able to better assist their children with difficult coursework, or seek help for their children in a more effective way (Lareau, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

Due to the wide range of factors that perpetuate the achievement gap, potential routes to closing this gap are numerous. It is somewhat unique in the study of the achievement gap to ask the students who are directly affected by this phenomenon: “Where do you think we should focus our efforts?” Most research in this field has focused on the opinions of teachers, parents, and school administrators, rather than the students themselves (Reis, Colbert, & Hebert, 2005). This omission is a problem—students have unique knowledge and insight into the issues they face and the best ways to combat them. A purpose of my study is to tap into this knowledge base, while empowering the students who participated in the study by allowing their voices to be heard on this issue.

Similarly, on a micro, or individual, level, this study seeks to provide direction for social work practice within Ridgeview Junior High School, which is where participants were drawn from. By pinpointing barriers faced by students within this school, social work interns like

myself, school counselors, teachers, and other faculty, can create new programs or alter existing programs with an eye toward improving these specific issues.

The profession of social work places high value on promoting social justice and equality on a larger, macro scale, in addition to empowering individual clients. My study embodies this value in that the achievement gap perpetuates many other forms of injustice, including the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, police brutality, gender inequality, and poverty. The results of the study provide insight into the barriers middle school students face across the country, and provide direction for ways to focus my future efforts to close the achievement gap.

Research Questions

- What do middle school students perceive as barriers to academic achievement?
- How are these perceptions of barriers affected by gender and race?
- Are there differences in academic self-efficacy in middle school students based on race and gender?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Theories on Etiology and Perpetuation of The Achievement Gap

The gap in achievement stems from multiple structural and systemic processes present in the United States since the mid sixties, including the use of colorblind practices by educators, cultural conflicts in the classroom, the myth of meritocracy, and low expectations of teachers. Color blindness is the idea that modern educators shape curriculum and use teaching strategies that ignore racial differences. In an attempt to create an equal experience for students in the classroom, teachers can overlook an important part of many minority students' identities and fail to engage them fully in the learning process (Milner 2012).

The difference in culture of white teachers and minority students can create a “resistant or oppositional environment,” where students strain to have a voice in the classroom and educators, often unintentionally, make them feel as if their worldview and experience is unimportant (Milner, 2012, p. 702). The myth of meritocracy in the United States is that working hard will unquestionably cause one to succeed. This can sometimes unconsciously permeate the thought processes of educators, who often come from higher SES backgrounds and have benefited from privileges and opportunities throughout their lives, to believe that students who do not achieve as highly may just not be trying as hard (Milner 2012). This, in turn, can cause teachers to lower their expectations for these students and not consistently try to find new ways to challenge them (Milner 2012).

Culturally incompetent practices manifest themselves in many ways in the classroom. Teachers are less likely to refer African American students to gifted programs, and even if they do get referred, these students are much more likely to drop out due to lack of support and an inability to relate to and identify with the students around them. (Frye and Vogt, 2010).

In addition to culturally incompetent practices in the classroom, parenting style and parental involvement is often seen as a reason for lower achievement among low-SES students. Children from low-income families are more likely to be raised by a single parent, which can often mean harsher and more inconsistent parenting practices (Areepattamannil, 2010). Low-SES families often also experience more instances of mental illness, abuse, and neighborhood and domestic violence—all of which can cause distraction from school (Leventhall and Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Importance of The Middle School Years

Middle school is a time of simultaneous academic and personal changes. The transition from elementary school to more demanding academic and social pressures, as well as life changes such as the onset of formal operations, becoming independent from family, and puberty all combine to create a difficult adjustment period during these years (Shoshani and Slone, 2013). Some of the measurable consequences of these stresses include a drop in self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy (Schunk and Pajares, 2002), lower academic achievement, increases in anxiety and chronic absences from school (Duchesne et al. 2009).

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) identify ninth grade as the “make or break year for completing high school” (p. 447). Enrollment rates for ninth grade in schools across the country are often double the amount of students enrolled in twelfth grade. In cities with high dropout rates, almost half of freshman students repeat ninth grade, and only 10-15% of these students graduate high school. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) point to the academic difference between middle school and high school as a possible reason for this difficult transition—more rigorous courses, longer homework assignments, and increasing graduation requirements. In addition, many middle school students enter high school with low reading comprehension skills.

Not to mention the many social concerns that associated with high school, such as an increase in peer pressure, delinquency, and bullying. Intervening in the middle school years is imperative in reducing academic achievement gaps.

Self-Efficacy Related to Academic Achievement

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in his or her own abilities to achieve a goal. This differs from self-esteem, which is one's sense of worth. A higher level of self-efficacy in students has been proven to predict higher levels of academic achievement and academic persistence (Schunk & Pajares, 2005). A lower level of self-efficacy, therefore, may be considered a barrier to academic achievement. In fields of science and math, self-efficacy is especially important in predicting actual academic performance (Chen and Usher, 2013). According to a study by Kaya and Bozdog (2016), students' perceived abilities in math and science significantly affect their abilities to succeed in these subjects.

Academic self-efficacy has been shown to decrease over the elementary and middle school years (Wigfield et al., 2006). This decrease in self-efficacy is seen especially in literacy, where students who struggled in elementary school typically learn to mask their deficits by forgetting books, plagiarizing papers, or copying work from classmates (Tovani, 2002). Teachers often are unaware of literacy struggles in these younger students; this results in older students' declining self-efficacy and performance in language arts classes. Efforts to improve students' self-efficacy in all subjects, as well as recognizing when a student is struggling, are important for teachers to implement into the classroom (Wigfield, Lutz, and Wagner, 2005).

Summary Statement

The achievement gap is perpetuated by numerous factors, including financial and opportunity disparities in the personal lives of students, differences in levels of parental

involvement, and issues with teacher cultural competency and availability of classroom resources. Larger social issues like poverty also play a role, as do individual factors like self-efficacy. Middle school is a critical time to intervene, as students often experience lower levels of academic self-efficacy due to social and environmental influences, and are learning important skills that will hopefully set them on a path toward high school graduation.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This is an exploratory, cross-sectional study utilizing an in-person survey. The survey was printed and given to participants on paper. It was designed to assess: 1) Gender, 2) Race/Ethnicity, 3) Grade in school, 4) Self-efficacy, and 5) Perceived barriers to academic achievement. The questions assessing gender and race/ethnicity were multiple choice, and check-all-that-apply. Grade in school allowed participants to write in either “seventh grade” or “eighth grade.” The section designed to assess self-efficacy and perceived barriers was structured as 25 statements, to which participants could indicate their level of agreement (“Really Agree,” “Kind of Agree,” “Kind of Disagree,” or “Really Disagree.”) There was one optional, open-ended question with space for participants to write (“What makes it hard for you to succeed in school?”).

Data Collection Procedures

The author received approval from the Institutional Review Board of the Ohio State University. Approval was also received from the principal at Pickerington Ridgeview STEM Junior High School to recruit around 90 participants and administer the survey at this site.

Ridgeview teachers each have one advisory period per day, and there are around 20 students in each advisory. Two seventh grade advisory periods and two eighth grade advisories were randomly chosen. Approval was received from these four teachers to have the author come in to explain the study, distribute the recruitment flyer (Appendix A) and the parent opt-out permission form (Appendix B). Potential participants were given the chance to ask any questions. The author explained that the survey would be given one week later during that same period—therefore, the potential participants’ parents and/or guardians had one week to turn in

the opt-out permission form if they did not want their student to participate. No parents/guardians turned in this form.

One week later, the author returned to these advisory periods and distributed the child assent form (Appendix C). After the participants read and signed the assent form, they were each given a copy of the survey tool (Appendix D). Participants had the rest of the 25-minute advisory period to complete the survey. The author remained in the classroom to answer any questions the participants had; this was possible due to the fact that the selected advisory periods were each at a different time of day. The author was employed at Ridgeview as a social work intern during the time that this research was being conducted, and therefore was able to invite participants to come to her office in the building, should they have any questions or want any more information in the future.

Measurement

The lack of existing tools designed to assess middle school students' perceived barriers to academic achievement necessitated the creation of an original survey tool, compiled from existing assessments and some additional questions written by the author.

To assess self-efficacy, an adapted version of the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES) was used. This scale includes 34 questions designed using Likert-scale responses to assess students' beliefs about their own academic ability. The questions fall into three sub-categories: talent, context, and effort. The last four questions ask participants to self-report their grades in each of the four main subject areas. The MJSES has a high reliability coefficient of .82. The sub-category of "talent" questions had the highest reliability coefficient, .78, and relates the most to perceived academic ability (Jinks and Morgan, 1999). Only the questions relating to

“talent” on the MJSES were used in the assessment tool. The first 13 questions following the demographics questions on the survey are taken directly from the MJSES.

To assess perceived barriers to academic achievement, a mixture of questions taken from the subcategory of “context” items on the MJSES were used, as well as questions adapted from an assessment tool created by Becerra (2012) to assess educational barriers affecting Latino students. Three questions were written by the author (the last three questions on the survey).

Becerra’s tool is geared toward discovering the reasons for low achievement among Latino students, and also uses the design of a Likert scale. Each of Becerra’s (2012) statements were changed so that they are not focused on Latino students specifically, and so that they are phrased in a more positive manner. Listed below are the six statements that Becerra (2012) used in his survey and the adapted statements used in the author’s survey. The statements taken from the MJSES are not altered in any way.

Becerra (2012):

1. The school is often too quick to label Latino kids as having behavior or learning problems.
2. Schools that have mostly Latino students have fewer good teachers.
3. Too many white teachers don’t know how to deal with Latino kids because they come from different cultures.
4. Because of racial stereotypes, teachers and principals have lower expectations for Latino students.
5. Too many Latino parents neglect to push their kids to work hard.
6. Latino students have weaker English language skills than white students.

Adapted statements:

1. My school and my teachers have never labeled me as a behavior or learning problem.
2. My school has as many good teachers as schools in other neighborhoods.
3. If my teachers are a different race than me, they know how to deal with kids from my culture.
4. My teachers and principal have the same expectations of all students, regardless of race.
5. My parents push me to work hard.
6. I have the same English language skills as my classmates.

Data Analysis

After participants completed the survey, the data was coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics, Version 24. To determine demographics of the sample, and the level of agreement to certain statements, frequencies were conducted. In addition to these descriptive statistics, measures of central tendency, overall frequencies, and standard deviation were used. Crosstab analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between response to certain statements and the participants' race or gender.

Chapter 4: Results

Demographics of the Sample

Participants consisted of 88 seventh and eighth grade students enrolled in Pickerington Ridgeview STEM Junior High School. Potential participants and their parents/guardians were given information about the study, and parents/guardians had the opportunity to sign the form if they did not want their student to participate. All participants also signed an assent form, and were aware that they could stop taking the survey at any time if they chose to.

The random cluster sample consisted of 88 participants, ages 12 to 14. The sample was split fairly evenly between seventh (46%) and eighth grade (42%), and male (33%) and female (43%). There were eleven participants who declined to identify their gender. The sample was diverse regarding ethnicity/race, and was fairly representative of the makeup of the school. Due to a large number of participants identifying as two or more races, the category of “multiracial” was created. Most participants in this category identified as a combination of White and Black/African American or White and Hispanic/Latino. The category of “Other” encompasses participants who identify as Asian, Pacific Islander, or Native American. There were ten participants who declined to identify their race/ethnicity. A detailed breakdown of the demographics of the sample is below:

TABLE 1. Description of the Sample

Variable	N	Percentage
<i>Grade in School</i>		
Seventh	46	52.3%
Eighth	42	47.7%

<i>Ethnicity</i>		
White or Caucasian	41	46.6%
Black or African American	17	19.3%
Hispanic or Latino	1	1.1%
Multiracial	15	17.0%
Other	4	4.5%
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	43	48.9%
Male	33	37.5%

Research Q. 1: What do middle school students perceive as barriers to academic achievement?

The table below is a breakdown of the frequency of responses to each of the statements on the survey. Some statements have up to four missing responses.

TABLE 2. Frequencies of Responses to Survey Statements

	N	Percentage
1. I am a good science student.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	6	6.8%
Kind of agree	59	67%
Really agree	21	23.9%

2. Sometimes I think an assignment is easy when other kids think it is hard.

Really disagree	4	4.5%
Kind of disagree	9	10.2%
Kind of agree	46	52.3%
Really agree	29	33%

3. I am a good social studies student.

Really disagree	1	1.1%
Kind of disagree	5	5.7%
Kind of agree	31	35.2%
Really agree	51	58%

4. I am one of the best students in my class.

Really disagree	9	10.2%
Kind of disagree	27	30.7%
Kind of agree	37	42%
Really agree	15	17%

5. My teachers think I am smart.

Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	16	18.2%
Kind of agree	42	47.7%
Really agree	26	29.5%

6. I am a good math student.

Really disagree	9	10.2%
Kind of disagree	27	30.7%
Kind of agree	37	42%

Really agree	15	17%
7. I usually get better grades than my classmates.		
Really disagree	5	5.7%
Kind of disagree	19	21.6%
Kind of agree	44	50%
Really agree	20	22.7%
8. I usually understand my homework assignments.		
Really disagree	1	1.1%
Kind of disagree	15	17%
Kind of agree	46	52.3%
Really agree	25	28.4%
9. I could get the best grades in class if I tried hard enough.		
Really disagree	7	8%
Kind of disagree	30	34.1%
Kind of agree	50	56.8%
Really agree	87	98.9%
10. I am a good reading student.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	22	25%
Kind of agree	34	38.6%
Really agree	29	33%
11. It is not hard for me to get good grades in school.		
Really disagree	6	6.8%
Kind of disagree	13	14.8%
Kind of agree	33	37.5%

Really agree	35	39.8%
12. I am smart.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	10	11.4%
Kind of agree	39	44.3%
Really agree	36	40.9%
13. When the teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer even when the other kids don't.		
Really disagree	4	4.5%
Kind of disagree	24	27.3%
Kind of agree	46	52.3%
Really agree	13	14.8%
14. My school and my teachers have never labeled me as a behavior or learning problem.		
Really disagree	7	8%
Kind of disagree	12	13.6%
Kind of agree	20	22.7%
Really agree	47	53.4%
15. My school has as many good teachers as schools in other neighborhoods.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	16	18.2%
Kind of agree	38	43.2%
Really agree	30	34.1%
16. If my teachers are a different race than me, they know how to deal with kids from my culture.		

Really disagree	5	5.7%
Kind of disagree	10	11.4%
Kind of agree	24	27.3%
Really agree	45	51.1%
17. My teachers and principal have the same expectations of all students, regardless of race.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	7	8%
Kind of agree	14	15.9%
Really agree	63	71.6%
18. My parents push me to work hard.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of agree	16	18.2%
Really agree	67	76.1%
19. I have the same or better English language skills as my classmates.		
Really disagree	0	0%
Kind of disagree	15	17%
Kind of agree	43	48.9%
Really agree	29	33%
20. I will graduate from high school.		
Really disagree	0	0%
Kind of disagree	0	0%
Kind of agree	7	8%
Really agree	79	89.8%

21. When I am old enough, I will go to college.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	1	1.1%
Kind of agree	9	10.2%
Really agree	74	84.1%
22. Adults who have good jobs probably were good students when they were kids.		
Really disagree	2	2.3%
Kind of disagree	11	12.5%
Kind of agree	34	38.6%
Really agree	38	43.2%
23. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually hungry.		
Really disagree	14	15.9%
Kind of disagree	17	19.3%
Kind of agree	28	31.8%
Really agree	27	30.7%
24. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually tired.		
Really disagree	6	6.8%
Kind of disagree	17	19.3%
Kind of agree	25	28.4%
Really agree	37	42%
25. My parents help me with my homework.		
Really disagree	24	27.3%
Kind of disagree	14	15.9%

Kind of agree	27	30.7%
Really agree	22	25%

Particularly notable when investigating research question 1, are statements 23 and 24 on the survey. A majority of students agree that it is hard to focus in school due to being tired or hungry. This has important implications for Ridgeview, and will be discussed further in the section titled “Implications.” Other barriers addressed in the survey, such as self-efficacy deficits culturally incompetent teaching practices, will be discussed in more depth in the following sections, where the results are broken down by race and gender.

Open-ended question results

Results from the open-ended question, “What makes it hard for you to succeed in school?” ranged from distractions in participants’ personal lives, perceived teacher incapability, distractions from other participants in class, or receiving “too much” homework. The most common responses were reiterating the statements that being consistently tired or hungry make it difficult to focus in school.

Research Q. 2: How are these perceptions of barriers affected by gender and race?

TABLE 3. Survey Responses by Gender

	Really disagree		Kind of disagree		Kind of agree		Really agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

1. I am a good science student.								
Male	0	0%	1	3%	23	69.7%	9	27.3%
Female	2	4.7%	5	11.6%	26	60.5%	10	23.3%
2. Sometimes I think an assignment is easy when other								

kids think it is hard.								
Male	3	9.1%	5	15.2%	16	48.5%	9	27.3%
Female	1	2.3%	3	7%	25	58.1%	14	32.6%
3. I am a good social studies/history student.								
Male	0	0%	2	6.1%	12	36.4%	19	57.6%
Female	1	2.3%	2	4.7%	16	37.2%	24	55.8%
4. I am one of the best students in my class.								
Male	3	9.1%	14	42.4%	11	33.3%	5	15.2%
Female	6	14%	9	20.9%	22	51.2%	6	14%
5. My teachers think I am smart.								
Male	1	3.1%	5	15.6%	18	56.3%	8	25%
Female	1	2.4%	9	21.4%	19	45.2%	13	31%
6. I am a good math student.								
Male	2	6.1%	13	39.4%	12	36.4%	6	18.2%
Female	6	14%	10	23.3%	22	51.2%	5	11.6%
7. I usually get better grades than my classmates.								
Male	3	9.1%	10	30.3%	14	42.4%	6	18.2%
Female	2	4.7%	9	20.9%	22	51.2%	10	23.3%
8. I usually understand my homework assignments.								
Male	0	0%	5	15.2%	16	48.5%	12	36.4%
Female	0	0%	7	16.7%	26	61.9%	9	21.4%
9. I could get the best grades in class if I tried hard enough.								
Male	0	0%	2	6.1%	15	45.5%	16	48.5%

Female	0	0%	3	7.1%	10	23.8%	29	69%
10. I am a good reading student.								
Male	0	0%	11	33.3%	15	45.5%	7	21.2%
Female	2	4.8%	5	11.9%	18	42.9%	17	40.5%
11. It is not hard for me to get good grades in school.								
Male	3	9.1%	7	21.2%	14	42.4%	9	27.3%
Female	3	7.1%	6	14.3%	13	31%	20	47.6%
12. I am smart.								
Male	0	0%	2	6.1%	17	51.5%	14	42.4%
Female	2	4.8%	5	11.9%	17	40.5%	18	42.9%
13. When the teacher asks a question, I usually know the answer even if the other kids don't.								
Male	1	3%	10	30.3%	16	48.5%	6	18.2%
Female	3	7.1%	10	23.8%	23	54.8%	6	14.3%
14. My school and my teachers have never labeled me as a behavior or a learning problem.								
Male	6	18.2%	6	18.2%	12	36.4%	9	27.3%
Female	0	0%	4	9.5%	5	11.9%	32	76.2%
15. My school has as many good teachers as schools in other neighborhoods.								
Male	0	0%	5	15.6%	16	50%	11	34.4%
Female	2	4.8%	10	23.8%	15	35.7%	15	35.7%
16. If my teachers are a different race than me, they know how to deal with kids from my culture.								
Male	2	6.5%	6	19.4%	10	32.3%	13	41.9%

Female	3	7.3%	2	4.9%	13	31.7%	23	56.1%
17. My teachers and principal have the same expectations of all students, regardless of race.								
Male	1	3%	2	6.1%	6	18.2%	24	72.7%
Female	1	2.4%	4	9.8%	7	17.1%	29	70.7%
18. My parents push me to work hard.								
Male	1	3%	0	0%	10	30.3%	22	66.7%
Female	0	0%	1	2.4%	4	9.5%	37	88.1%
19. I have the same or better English language skills as my classmates.								
Male	0	0%	9	27.3%	17	51.5%	7	21.2%
Female	0	0%	5	11.9%	20	47.6%	17	40.5%
20. I will graduate from high school.								
Male	0	0%	0	0%	2	6.3%	30	93.8%
Female	0	0%	0	0%	3	7.1%	39	92.9%
21. When I am old enough, I will go to college.								
Male	1	3.1%	0	0%	4	12.5%	27	84.4%
Female	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	4	9.5%	36	85.7%
22. Adults who have good jobs probably were good students when they were kids.								
Male	2	6.3%	2	6.3%	12	37.5%	16	50%
Female	0	0%	5	12.2%	20	48.8%	16	39%
23. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually hungry.								
Male	7	21.9%	9	28.1%	9	28.1%	7	21.9%
Female	5	11.9%	6	14.3%	15	35.7%	16	38.1%

24. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually tired.								
Male	5	15.6%	6	18.8%	10	31.3%	11	34.4%
Female	1	2.4%	9	22%	8	19.5%	23	56.1%
25. My parents help me with homework.								
Male	7	21.9%	4	12.5%	13	40.6%	8	25%
Female	12	27.9%	7	16.3%	11	25.6%	13	30.2%

In reference to perceptions of general barriers, and how these perceptions differ between genders, it is important to point out statement numbers 14, 18, and 24. Responses to statement number 14, “My school and my teachers have never labeled me as a behavior or learning problem,” indicates that male participants perceive that they are labeled as a behavior or learning problem at a much higher rate than female participants. (Male participants “disagree” with this statement at a rate of 36.4%, while female participants “disagree” at a rate of 9.5%).

Statement number 18, “My parents push me to work hard,” is another example of a statement dealing with general barriers where male and female participants differ in their responses. Female participants agree to this statement at a higher rate than male participants—females reported strongly agreeing to this statement at 88.1%, while males only strongly agreed at a rate of 66.7%. Also notable are the responses to statement 24, “I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually tired.” Female participants “agree” to this statement at a higher rate than males (75.6% versus 65.6%).

Male/female differences in statements dealing with self-efficacy are discussed following research question 3.

TABLE 4. Survey Responses by Ethnicity/Race

	Really disagree		Kind of disagree		Kind of agree		Really agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%

1. I am a good science student.

White	1	2.4%	3	7.3%	22	53.7%	15	36.6%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	0	0%	2	11.8%	14	82.4%	1	5.9%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%
Multiracial	1	6.7%	1	6.7%	11	73.3%	2	13.3%

2. Sometimes I think an assignment is easy when other kids think it is hard.

White	1	2.4%	4	9.8%	22	53.7%	14	34.1%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	2	11.8%	1	5.9%	8	47.1%	6	35.3%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%
Multiracial	1	6.7%	2	13.3%	9	60%	3	20%

3. I am a good social studies/history student.

White	0	0%	1	2.4%	14	34.1%	26	63.4%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	1	5.9%	1	5.9%	6	35.3%	9	52.9%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
Multiracial	0	0%	2	13.3%	8	53.3%	5	33.3%

4. I am one of the best students in my class.

White	4	9.8%	13	31.7%	19	46.3%	5	12.2%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

Black or African American	2	11.8%	5	29.4%	6	35.3%	4	23.5%
Other	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%	0	0%
Multiracial	2	13.3%	6	40%	5	33.3%	2	13.3%
5. My teachers think I am smart.								
White	5	12.2%	13	31.7%	15	36.6%	8	19.5%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Black or African American	2	11.8%	4	23.5%	10	58.8%	1	5.9%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%
Multiracial	1	6.7%	6	40%	6	40%	2	13.3%
6. I am a good math student.								
White	5	12.2%	13	31.7%	15	36.6%	8	19.5%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Black or African American	2	11.8%	4	23.5%	10	58.8%	1	5.9%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%	0	0%
Multiracial	1	6.7%	6	40%	6	40%	2	13.3%
7. I usually get better grades than my classmates.								
White	1	2.4%	10	24.4%	23	56.1%	7	17.1%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Black or African American	2	11.8%	6	35.3%	6	35.3%	3	17.6%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%
Multiracial	2	13.3%	2	13.3%	7	46.7%	4	26.7%
8. I usually understand my homework assignments.								
White	1	2.5%	8	20%	17	42.5%	14	35%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	0	0%	3	17.6%	12	70.6%	2	11.8%

Other	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Multiracial	0	0%	2	13.3%	10	66.7%	3	20%
9. I could get the best grades in class if I tried hard enough.								
White	0	0%	3	7.3%	11	26.8%	27	65.9%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	0	0%	0	0%	7	41.2%	10	58.8%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%
Multiracial	0	0%	1	7.1%	8	57.1%	5	35.7%
10. I am a good reading student.								
White	1	2.4%	10	24.4%	20	48.8%	10	24.4%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	0	0%	4	23.5%	7	41.2%	6	35.3%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
Multiracial	1	7.1%	3	21.4%	5	35.7%	5	35.7%
11. It is not hard for me to get good grades in school.								
White	3	7.3%	5	12.2%	18	43.9%	15	36.6%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	3	17.6%	4	23.5%	5	29.4%	5	29.4%
Other	0	0%	3	21.4%	5	35.7%	6	42.9%
Multiracial	0	0%	3	21.4%	5	35.7%	6	42.9%
12. I am smart.								
White	1	2.4%	4	9.8%	21	51.2%	15	36.6%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Black or African American	1	5.9%	2	11.8%	8	47.1%	6	35.3%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%

Multiracial	0	0%	1	7.1%	5	35.7%	8	57.1%
13. When the teacher asks a question I usually know the answer even if the other kids don't.								
White	2	4.9%	11	26.8%	23	56.1%	5	12.2%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	2	11.8%	4	23.5%	7	41.2%	4	23.5%
Other	0	0%	2	50%	1	25%	1	25%
Multiracial	0	0%	4	28.6%	9	64.3%	1	7.1%
14. My school and my teachers have never labeled me as a behavior or learning problem.								
White	3	7.3%	4	9.8%	11	26.8%	23	56.1%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	3	17.6%	3	17.6%	3	17.6%	8	47.1%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	1	25%	3	75%
Multiracial	1	7.1%	3	21.4%	3	21.4%	6	42.9%
15. My school has as many good teachers as schools in other neighborhoods.								
White	0	0%	8	19.5%	16	39%	17	41.5%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%
Black or African American	1	6.3%	3	18.8%	9	56.3%	3	18.8%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	1	25%	2	50%
Multiracial	1	7.1%	4	28.6%	4	28.6%	5	35.7%
16. If my teachers are a different race than me, they know how to deal with kids from my culture.								
White	2	5.1%	4	10.3%	8	20.5%	25	64.1%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

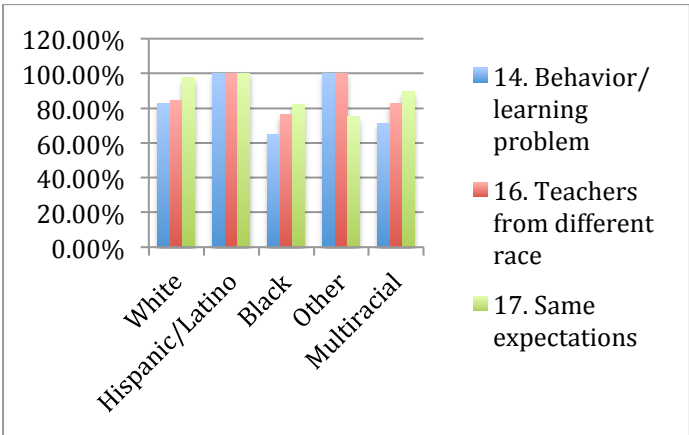
Black or African American	2	11.8%	2	11.8%	6	35.3%	7	41.2%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Multiracial	1	7.7%	2	15.4%	6	46.2%	4	30.8%
17. My teachers and principal have the same expectations of all students, regardless of race.								
White	1	2.4%	0	0%	6	14.6%	34	82.9%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	1	5.9%	2	11.8%	5	29.4%	9	52.9%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	0	0%	3	75%
Multiracial	0	0%	3	23.1%	2	15.4%	8	61.5%
18. My parents push me to work hard.								
White	0	0%	2	4.9%	10	24.4%	29	70.7%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	1	5.9%	0	0%	3	17.6%	13	76.5%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	-%	4	100%
Multiracial	0	0%	0	0%	2	14.3%	12	85.7%
19. I have the same or better English language skills as my classmates.								
White	0	0%	7	17.1%	22	53.7%	12	29.3%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	0	0%	5	29.4%	8	47.1%	4	23.5%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
Multiracial	0	0%	2	14.3%	7	50%	5	35.7%
20. I will graduate from high school.								
White	0	0%	0	0%	4	9.8%	37	90.2%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%

Black or African American	0	0%	0	0%	2	12.5%	14	87.5%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
Multiracial	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	14	100%
21. When I am old enough, I will go to college.								
White	1	2.4%	1	2.4%	6	14.6%	33	80.5%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	1	6.3%	0	0%	1	6.3%	14	87.5%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	2	14.3%	12	85.7%
Multiracial	0	0%	0	0%	2	14.3%	12	85.7%
22. Adults who have good jobs probably were good students when they were kids.								
White	0	0%	4	10%	14	35%	22	55%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Black or African American	2	12.5%	2	12.5%	7	43.8%	5	31.3%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%
Multiracial	0	0%	2	14.3%	9	64.3%	3	21.4%
23. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually hungry.								
White	6	14.6%	7	17.1%	15	36.6%	13	31.7%
Hispanic or Latino	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black or African American	4	25%	4	25%	3	18.8%	5	31.3%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%
Multiracial	1	7.1%	3	21.4%	5	35.7%	5	35.7%
24. I find it hard to focus in school because I am usually tired.								
White	1	2.4%	9	22%	13	31.7%	18	43.9%
Hispanic or Latino	0	0%	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%

Black or African American	3	20%	2	13.3%	2	13.3%	8	53.3%
Other	0	0%	1	25%	2	50%	1	25%
Multiracial	2	14.3%	2	14.3%	3	21.4%	7	50%
25. My parents help me with homework.								
White	14	34.1%	5	12.2%	14	34.1%	8	19.5%
Hispanic or Latino	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Black or African American	3	18.8%	3	18.8%	4	25%	6	37.5%
Other	0	0%	0	0%	3	75%	1	25%
Multiracial	3	20%	3	20%	3	20%	6	40%

In examining the difference in perception of barriers based on ethnicity and race, it is important to address the issue of cultural competent teaching practices. Statements 14, 16, and 17 on the survey are designed to assess students' perceptions of cultural competency. Below is a graph detailing the responses to these three statements. The categories of "kind of agree" and "strongly agree" have been combined, and only the percentage of participants who responded that they agree has been reported.

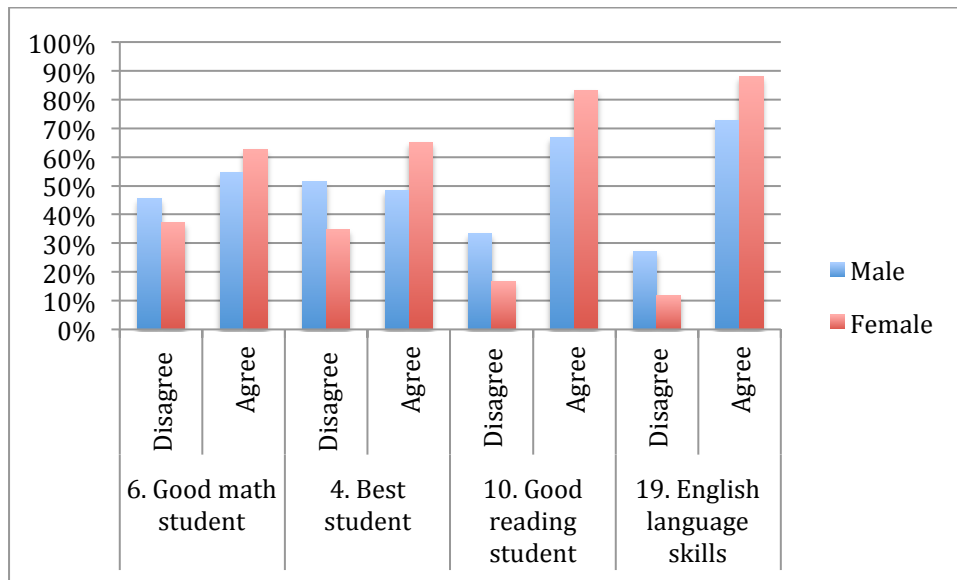
FIGURE 1. Perceptions of Cultural Competency by Ethnicity/Race



The responses to statement 14 indicate that Black or African American and multiracial students are more likely to perceive that their school or teachers have labeled them as a behavior or learning problem than White or Other students. Responses to statement 16 indicate that African American or Black and multiracial students are more likely to perceive that their teachers do not know how to handle students from their culture. Responses to statement 17 indicate that African American or black and multiracial students are less likely to perceive that their teachers and principal have the same expectations of all students, regardless of race.

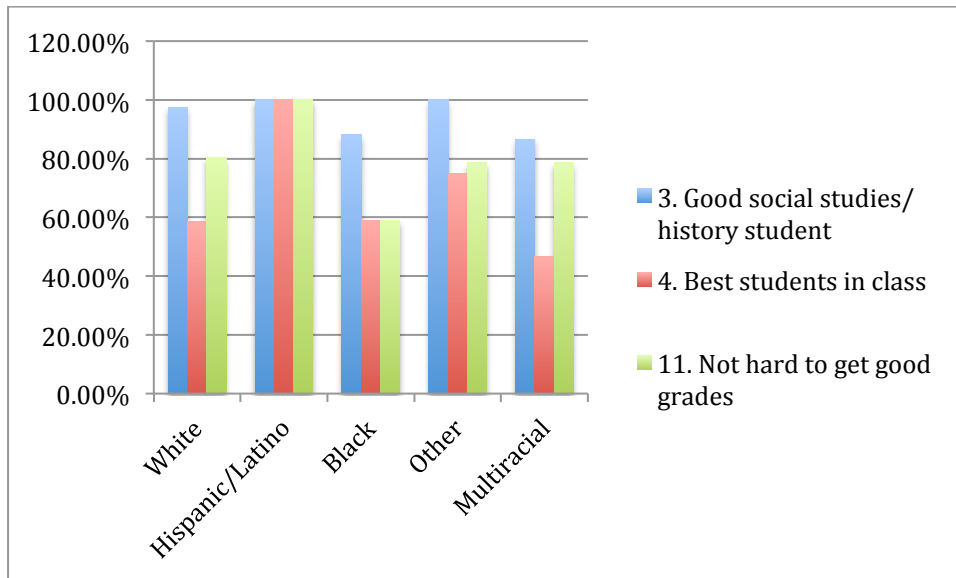
Research Q. 3: Are there differences in academic self-efficacy in middle school students based on race and gender?

FIGURE 2. Male/Female Self-Efficacy Differences



In terms of the responses to the four statements detailed in the graph above, female participants have a higher level of academic self-efficacy.

FIGURE 3. Race/Ethnicity Self-Efficacy Differences (% agree)



Responses to statements regarding self-efficacy indicate that there are differences in race/ethnicity. Multiracial students had the lowest self-efficacy in comparison to participants of other races regarding being a good social studies/history student and the best student in class. African American or Black participants agreed at a lower rate than participants of other races in response to the statement, “It is not hard for me to get good grades in school.” In all three statements, white participants indicated a higher level of self-efficacy than participants of other races.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of the Results

A majority of participants perceive that being hungry or tired during school is a barrier to their academic achievement. Other general barriers indicated in the study include being labeled as a behavior or learning problem by the teacher or the school, and perceiving that teachers and/or administrators have different expectations of students based on race. Male/female differences in perceptions of being labeled as a behavior or learning problem are notable; this should be investigated further as a barrier to academic achievement. Race/ethnicity differences on this same issue are also notable, as Black and multiracial students were more likely to perceive that their school or teachers have labeled them as a behavior or learning problem.

Black and multiracial students were also more likely to perceive that their teachers do not know how to “deal with kids from [their] culture” and that their teachers and principal do not have the same expectations of students, regardless of race. These results indicate that Black and multiracial participants perceive culturally incompetent practices within their school, a known factor in perpetuating the achievement gap.

Differences in perceptions of self-efficacy based on gender and race are also important when looking at barriers faced by students, as self-efficacy directly affects actual academic achievement. Females reported higher perceptions of self-efficacy in math, reading, and English language skills, as well as in general abilities, such as being the best student in class and having the ability to get the best grades if they tried hard enough. Black and multiracial students reported lower perceived self-efficacy on certain statements, in reference to being a good social studies/history student and difficulty of getting good grades in school.

Limitations

Due to the design of the study, the results can only point to correlations between the variables, rather than causation. Another limitation is the assessment tool itself, as it has not been tested for reliability or validity. Some of the statements may have been worded in a confusing way, and participants' responses cannot necessarily be generalized to the whole population.

The demographic breakdown of the sample represents another limitation of the study. All but one participant who identified as Hispanic also identified as another race, which caused there to be only one participant identifying as just Hispanic. This is a limitation because it mixes together data from all students identifying as "multiracial," and does not differentiate between the possible combinations of races that fit under this category.

Implications

Results from statements 20 and 21 indicate positive perceptions about high school graduation and college attendance. All participants "agree" that they will graduate from high school and the large majority of participants "agree" that they will attend college when they are old enough. It may be beneficial to investigate when and why these perceptions change, as these results are not indicative of the actual numbers of high school graduates and percentages of students who attend college.

There are many other implications, including ways that Ridgeview can implement changes based on the results of this study. Implementing education for students about healthy eating and sleeping habits, changing school lunches to be healthier, and adding cultural competency training to teacher professional development are ideas of ways for Ridgeview to make use of these results.

On a larger scale, these results provide a basis for questions to ask students at other schools, and barriers to investigate in more depth. Although the results cannot be generalized to

other populations, they can provide background knowledge and ideas for future research and programming aimed at closing the achievement gap.

Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

Further statistical analyses of the results of this study are necessary to make more detailed conclusions about relationships between the variables. Future research should focus on investigating specific barriers in more detail. For example, conducting focus groups or interviews with individual students with the intention of exploring the specific times they experience cultural incompetent practices in school, and what those experiences look like. This would also allow students to recommend more detailed ideas for how to address these barriers. Another path for future research is examining the ways that low-income, racial minority students have been successful in the past. This may provide helpful direction for how to build resilience in current students. It is also important from a social work perspective to focus on the strengths and successes of a population or group, instead of focusing only on the problem.

Williams and Portman's (2014) investigated resilience in four African American women from low-income, urban backgrounds who were currently attending a historically black college or university. The results of this study indicated several factors as important in their resilience and ability to overcome barriers; some of these factors included school counselors who helped link them with supports and resources, intrinsic motivation, and parental involvement with school activities (Williams and Portman, 2014). Watkins and Howard (2015) also emphasize the importance of parental involvement in and support of school activities as a factor in the academic success of low-SES students. Further research in this vein may provide insight into ways to build resilience in groups of students where barriers to academic success are high and protective factors are low.

The idea of asking students directly how they perceive barriers should also be emphasized in future research. Although the sample size of this study was relatively small and only included students from one school, it gave voice to a population that does not often get the chance to speak on these issues. These results are valuable both within Ridgeview Junior High School and within the broader scope of research into the causes and effects of the achievement gap. Change on a small scale affects change on a larger scale, and breaking down one barrier for one student is the first step toward creating equal educational opportunity for all.

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**YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN AN OHIO
STATE RESEARCH STUDY:
Perceived Barriers to Academic Success for
Middle School Students**

- **7th-8th grade students** are invited to participate
- I am conducting research to find out how middle school students perceive their barriers to academic success.
- Any child enrolled in Pickerington Ridgeview Junior High School is invited to participate (all participants need to be able to read and understand English)
- **The participants will fill out a 15-20 minute survey in person during normal school hours**
- Contact Laine Kolesar at Kolesar.26@osu.edu with any questions or concerns

Appendix B: Parent Opt-Out Permission Form

The Ohio State University Parental Notice of Child's Participation in Research and Opt-Out Form

Study Title: Breaking Down the Barriers to Academic Achievement: Middle School Students' Perceptions of Barriers to Academic Success

Researchers: Scottye Cash and Laine Kolesar

Sponsor: Ohio State University College of Social Work

This is a notice that your child will be participating in a research study. Information about the study is included below. If you do not want your child to participate, please sign the attached form at the very end.

Your child's participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you do not want your child to participate, please sign the attached form and return it to school with your child.

Purpose: The purpose of my study is to answer the following question: How do middle school students perceive their barriers to academic success?

Procedures/Tasks: The participants will complete survey on paper during normal school hours. The survey consists of 29 questions that ask the participants to rank how much they agree with certain statements. The statements are designed to assess the participants' self-efficacy and what they see as challenges to academic success. An example of one of the statements is: "I usually understand my homework assignments."

Duration: 20-30 minutes

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

Risks and Benefits: There are no anticipated risks to the participants.

The school may be able to make improvements based on the findings of this study. The results of this study will also be published by the end of the academic year. On a larger scale, my study will hopefully add to existing knowledge of what causes the achievement gap and provide direction for future social work practice in this area. However, there are no guaranteed benefits.

Confidentiality: The surveys will not ask for the students' names. The only identifying information on the survey is school, age, race, and gender. The hard copies of the survey will be kept in a sealed envelope until they are electronically documented. Once they are documented online, they will be returned to a sealed envelope and kept in a secure location. Only the investigators of the study will have access to this information. Electronic copies of the survey will be kept on a personal password-protected computer and only accessed on private Wi-Fi.

Efforts will be made to keep your child's study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child's participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child's records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Participant Rights:

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

Your child may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. If you choose for your child to participate in this study, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, or you feel your child has been harmed as a result of study participation, you may contact:

Laine Kolesar: 513-562-7534 or Kolesar.26@osu.edu

Scottye Cash: 614-893-7608 or Cash.33@osu.edu

For questions about your child's rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team,

you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the parental OPT-OUT permission form

***If you do NOT want your child participating in this study, you can:**

- **Sign the form below and have your child turn it in at school**
- **OR you can send an email to Kolesar.26@osu.edu stating that you DO NOT give permission for your child to participate in the study (include your child's name, your name, and your relationship to the child)**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that if I do not want my child to participate in the study described above, I should sign the form below. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. If I do not sign this form, I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of parent/guardian

Signature of parent/guardian

Relationship to the subject

Date and time AM/PM

Appendix C: Child Assent Form

The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Breaking Down the Barriers to Academic Achievement: Middle School Students' Perceptions of Barriers to Academic Success

Researcher: Scottye Cash and Laine Kolesar

Sponsor: Ohio State University College of Social Work

- **You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.**
- **This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.**
- **You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.**
- **It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.**
- **If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.**

1. What is this study about?

This study wants to answer the question: What makes it hard for middle school students to succeed in school?

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?

You will complete one survey on paper during normal school hours. The survey has 29 questions that ask you to rank how much you agree with certain statements. These statements ask about things that might make it hard for someone to succeed in school. An example of one of these statements is: “I usually understand my homework assignments.”

3. How long will I be in the study?

The survey will take around 15-20 minutes.

4. Can I stop being in the study?

You may stop being in the study at any time.

5. What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?

There are no risks to participating in this study.

6. What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?

The school may be able to make improvements based on the study results, but there is no guarantee that you will benefit directly from participating. This is because you will not write your name on the survey, so your responses will not be linked to you specifically.

7. Who can I talk to about the study?

For questions about the study you may contact:

Laine Kolesar: 513-562-7534 or Kolesar.26@osu.edu

Scottye Cash: 614-893-7608 or Cash.33@osu.edu

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

Signature or printed name of subject

Date and time

AM/PM

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining assent

Signature of person obtaining assent

Date and time AM/PM

This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian, unless IRB approves a waiver of parental permission.