

ABSTRACT

MARTIN-MCCOY, AUDREY K. *Voices of Promise: Understanding African American Student Academic and Social Perceptions of Experiences in Military Base Schools.* (Under the direction of Dr. Lance D. Fusarelli).

The establishment of the Department of Defense domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools was provided by Congress under 10 U.S.C. 2164 (a) (1) (2). This legislation allowed for the construction of schools to educate the children of armed service personnel and civilian employees for the federal government residing on domestic military bases. Today, the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) is a network of elementary and secondary schools that serve military dependents worldwide.

The research literature states that the average academic performance of students in military base schools is high compared to the performance of minority students, particularly African American students and tends to be among the highest in the nation as measured by standardized test data. The purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe the African American students' perceptions of experiences in military base schools. The goal of this qualitative study is to understand the academic/classroom experiences of African American students through their perceptions of the learning environment in an effort to determine the characteristics that contribute to the positive learning outcomes and school success that have been documented in the research. The research describes the lived experiences of individual students while revealing common elements of experiences across the group of students. It also attempts to capture their perceptions of the educational quality of schools military base sponsored schools.

The site selected for this study is a domestic military base school system located in the southeastern part of the United States. Eleven African American students ages fourteen

through eighteen participated in this study. Data was collected from the participants by way of a student biographical activity, a semi-structured individual interview, and a focus group interview to gain a clearer understanding of how these students perceived their academic and social experiences. Meaning in the responses was derived by initially examining each narrative independently and subsequently focusing on similarities of experiences. Data is displayed through the use of direct quotes from the participants, capturing the voice of the student to structure meaning from the individual's lived experience. Results center on themes that emerged from the data surrounding the academic and social perceptions and experiences of these students. Participants reported that they perceived their academic and social experiences in military base schools to be more favorable as compared to experiences in public schools. The participants also reported to perceive that military base school teachers demonstrated more caring, affective behaviors than public school teachers. Participants perceived from their experiences that military base school attendance had a positive impact on their personal performance in terms of school quality indicators (such as student pass/fail rates, standardized test scores, graduation and college preparation) and offered challenging opportunities to prepare them for the future.

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Voices of Promise: Understanding African American Student Academic and Social
Perceptions of Experiences in Military Base Schools

by
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband and soul mate, Jonathan McCoy, who has walked every step of this journey with me, hand-in-hand. Your enduring love and support sustain me. Words cannot express the degree of gratitude that I feel for all you have done to support me. Thank you for believing in me and having confidence in my abilities.

My father retired as a Sergeant Major in the United States Marine Corps after 30 years of dedicated service. When my father made the decision to join the Marines in November, 1955 it completely changed the course of my life, although I was not born until several years later. What I mean by this is that his decisions to take a chance for a life out of poverty, to see the world, to later marry my mother, and raise four children in a socially and culturally diverse environment made an enduring impact on how I define myself. My father is my hero. For this and many reasons, I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Mathew and Virginia Martin, for providing me with their loving support, nurturing guidance, and continued prayers as a first generation graduate student. At an early age they instilled in me the belief that I can do all things through God, who guides me with a vision for the future. Thank you to my siblings, Gwendolyn, Vivian, and Mathew Jr., my in-laws, nieces, nephews, and all my family and friends for encouraging and supporting me on this journey.

“The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.
Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

BIOGRAPHY

The author of this study, Audrey K. Martin-McCoy, was born at the Naval Hospital in Beaufort, a city near the Marine Corps Recruit Depot/Parris Island, South Carolina. The youngest of four children born to Mathew and Virginia Martin, Audrey grew up at Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base in southeastern North Carolina and its surrounding community. On August 24, 1976 she started her first day of Kindergarten in a military base school. From this first day through her final day as a student in a base school at the end of eighth grade, she developed a passion for education. She learned early on that high personal standards and accountability, coupled with clear goals and opportunity, would allow her to reach her dreams. She believes that her experiences in military base schools provided her with the foundation for enduring academic success. Her journey through these schools also exposed her to diverse cultures and ways of thinking, which tied with her academic experiences, has brought her to study this topic for her dissertation research. From her experience she believes that the academic and social atmosphere that is part of military base schools allows African American students to thrive.

After graduating from high school, she attended the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, earning a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Secondary Social Studies Education. Serving as a high school social studies teacher for five years, she continued her commitment to public service through gaining employment at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and North Carolina State University. She earned her Master of Education degree

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Audrey is married to Jonathan McCoy and currently resides in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Background of the Study

In 1950, an attempt to provide assistance to those areas of the United States that were heavily impacted by federal activities such as military installations, the Department of Defense (DoD) established a policy that created a set of schools to serve the sons and daughters of military service personnel. Prior to World War II Congress drafted a policy to construct school facilities in and around federal property to offset the costs and burdens placed on existing local educational agencies (LEAs). Congress established the Department of Defense domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools in September, 1950 under 10 U.S.C § 2164. In summary, this policy provides the Secretary of Defense with the authority to establish educational programs for dependents of military personnel and civilian federal employees if appropriate educational programs are not available. This policy first allowed federal appropriations for school construction, which ultimately evolved into a set of domestic school systems under the umbrella of the Department of Defense. As military interest shifted abroad following World War II there became an increasing need for these schools in foreign countries because of the large number of military service personnel stationed overseas with their families.

Today, the Department of Defense Domestic Elementary and Secondary Schools (DoDESS) and the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS- overseas) are combined to form the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA). Established in 1994, DoDEA is designed to educate the dependents of military service personnel all over

the world, representing a total student population of approximately 100,000 students.

DoDEA is headquartered in Arlington, Virginia and divided into three geographic regions including DoDDS –Europe, DoDDS – Pacific, and DDESS (domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools including Cuba). DoDEA is managed by a director. A deputy director supervises each region, totaling 199 schools. While the U.S. Department of Education provides federal impact aid to public school systems that surround and are impacted by military installations (Buddin, Gill, & Zimmer, 2001) it does not provide federal revenue to military dependents' schools. Local public school systems do not contribute to DoDEA schools. Schools serving children of military personnel are considered a Department of Defense field activity operating under the direction and control of the U.S. Department of Defense, which provides funding dispersion through the DoDEA headquarters. These schools largely represent students who are predominately middle class.

With fourteen districts located in twelve countries, seven U.S. states, Guam, and Puerto Rico, DoDEA schools are quite diverse. According to DoDEA, minority students account for approximately 53 percent of the total student population (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006). African-American students represent the largest proportion at 17 percent, with Hispanic students representing 15 percent, and Asian/Pacific Island students representing 7 percent. Students who are bi-racial or multi-racial represent 10 percent, while Caucasian students represent 47 percent of all students (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006). While there is limited scholarly research on the topic of schools for military dependents, results from one major study suggest that African American students in these schools academically outperform their public school peers, particularly as their performance is compared on

standardized assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001).

NAEP Performance

An approach used to track these academic gains has been through testing. DoDEA uses a number of assessments for diagnostic purposes and to measure academic achievement. Along with other school systems across the U.S., DoDEA also has an interest in participating in national assessments. According to Wright (2000), test scores associated with national assessments provide the most objective vehicle to measure education quality and are typically reflective of student achievement, but adds that these tests are “not the only measure of success for students, teachers, or schools” (p. 12). National assessments provide school systems the opportunity to compare their performance. One such assessment in which school systems across the country regularly participate is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), what is referred to “the Nation’s Report Card.” The NAEP program is sponsored and administered by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center for Education Statistics and is the only standardized assessment in which a national representative sample of students is selected, allowing for comparisons on the same test across states and territories (NAEP Overview, 2008). According to NAEP (2008), samples are drawn for three types of participation including National NAEP, State NAEP, and Long-term NAEP studies. Smrekar et. al. (2001) add, “NAEP has earned the reputation as the nation's best measure of student achievement over time” (p. 7).

DoDEA students have performed at high levels on the NAEP for the past several years on writing, reading, and mathematics assessments as shown in Table 1.1 below.

DoDEA eighth grade students ranked among the first in the nation in average scale scores on the 2007 NAEP writing assessment and the 2007 reading assessment, while ranking within the top ten in the nation on the 2007 NAEP mathematics assessment (DoDEA 2005 NAEP Reading Results, 2005; DoDEA 2007 NAEP Results, 2008; DoDEA 2007 NAEP Writing Results, 2008). Table 1.2 shows how DoDEA students average scale scores rank in comparison to all other students nationally on the NAEP assessments for the years indicated.

Table 1.0

NAEP Performance Comparisons: DoDEA and State Average Scale Score Comparisons for Grade 8 Students

Grade 8 Students							
	Jurisdiction	2007 Writing Average Scale Score		2007 Reading Average Scale Score		2007 Mathematics Average Scale Score	
Rank		Jurisdiction	Nation	Jurisdiction	Nation	Jurisdiction	Nation
1	New Jersey	175	154				
1	DoDEA, Massachusetts, and Vermont			273	261		
9	DoDEA, Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, Washington					285	280

Table 1.1

DoDEA Grade 8 Student Average Scale Score Performance Rankings as Compared to the Nation

NAEP Assessment	National Ranking of DoDEA Students
2002 Writing	3 rd
2005 Reading	2 nd
2005 Mathematics	6 th
2005 Science	4 th

Quite notably, the results have shown minority students in military base schools place first or second in the nation on the NAEP reading, mathematics, and writing exams. African American students' average scale scores have ranked either first or second highest in the nation, scoring higher than their public school counterparts on the NAEP reading, mathematics, and writing exams (Anderson, Bracken, & Bracken, 2000; DoDEA 2007 NAEP Results, 2008; DoDEA 2007 NAEP Writing Results, 2008; DoDEA Facts, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001). Table 1.3 below displays the NAEP average reading scale scores for DoDEA African American students as compared to all other African American students in the nation taking the test for the years indicated, as Table 1.4 and Table 1.5 show average scale scores for these groups for the NAEP mathematics and writing respectively.

Table 1.2

NAEP Average Reading Scale Scores and Rankings for African American Students

Grade 8 Students	2002		2003		2005		2007	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
DoDEA African American Students	262	1 st	258	1 st	258	1 st	259	1 st
Nation African American Students	244		244		242		244	
Nation All Students	263		261		260		261	

Table 1.3

NAEP Average Mathematics Scale Scores and Rankings for African American Students

Grade 8 Students	2000		2003		2005		2007	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
DoDEA African American Students	259	1 st	270	1 st	267	1 st	272	1 st
Nation African American Students	243		252		254		259	
Nation All Students	272		276		278		280	

Table 1.4

NAEP Average Writing Scale Scores and Rankings for African American Students

Grade 8 Students	1998		2002		2007	
	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank
DoDEA African American Students	148	2 nd	151	1 st	155	1 st
Nation African American Students	130		134		140	
Nation All Students	148		152		154	

Results on the NAEP assessments appear impressive for African American students in DoDEA schools. Little is known, however, about how these students perceive this success, or how they would personally describe their academic and social experiences within this school environment. An exploration of how these students describe their academic and social experiences in base schools in relation to the positive learning outcomes that have been documented is the focus of this study.

Statement of the Problem

In September 2001, the National Education Goals Panel and Vanderbilt University released one of a few scholarly research studies regarding students who attend military base sponsored schools. A finding from the study indicated that minority students, particularly African American and Hispanic students, tended to outperform their public school district counterparts on the NAEP exam and that the performance gap between Caucasian students and minority students was narrower than in the public schools (Smrekar, et al., 2001). While the study identified and explained school, community, and organizational factors that

surround why students in the domestic and overseas schools that serve military children experienced academic success, it did not specifically address the academic and social experiences from the perspective of these students. In fact, little is known about the experiences of students in military base schools. African American students account for the largest percentage of minority students in these schools. As a cultural group they are of particular importance because of the pervasive lag in academic performance traditionally experienced by these students, as well as their social-political history in the United States. As a result of slavery, institutionalized racism, and educational segregation, African Americans have a rather unique history and political positioning in this country compared to other minorities. Because the literature contains few studies exploring African American academic and social experiences from their perspective in military base schools, a qualitative study is employed to describe the lived experiences and the embedded meaning of these experiences for these students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe the African American students' perception of experiences in military base schools. The goal is to understand the academic and social experiences of African American students through their perceptions of the learning environment in an effort to determine the characteristics that contribute to the positive learning outcomes and school success that have been documented (such as above average standardized test scores, graduation, and matriculation into higher education) (DoDEA Postsecondary Plans and Scholarship Report, 2007; Shaul, 2001; Smrekar et al, 2001; Wright, 2000). A basic interpretive design along with dimensions of a

phenomenological research approach will be used. The research will attempt to describe the lived experiences of individual students while revealing common elements of that experience across the group of students. More specifically, the study attempts to address whether African American students who attend military base schools share similar experiences of school success and outline elements that they believe contribute to these positive learning outcomes. It will also attempt to capture their perceptions of educational quality of the schools. Research documents that classroom interactions and social relationships play an important role in the learning environment (Palincsar, 1998). The study seeks to shed light on the social interactions and relationships these students share with their teachers and how African American students view themselves academically and socially in comparison to their African American peers and their peers of other races in military base schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be employed to fulfill the purpose and achieve the goals of this study. These questions are constructed to gain a clearer understanding of the perceptions and experiences of African American students in schools that serve military children:

- 1) How do African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools?
- 2) To what factors do African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success?
- 3) Do African American students in military base schools share similar academic and social school experiences?
- 4) How do African American students in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and other students inside and outside of the classroom?

Definition of Terms

For clarification, the following terms are defined:

Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) – This term refers to the elementary and secondary education agency managed by the United States Department of Defense for students whose parent(s) are military service personnel or select civil service workers. This agency assists its schools in a capacity that is similar to that of a state education agency serving its public schools.

Department of Defense Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) – This term refers to the DoDEA schools that are located within the continental U.S., Cuba, and Puerto Rico. This is also referred to as DDESS or the DoDEA domestic military base school system.

Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) – This term refers to the DoDEA school systems that are located in countries outside of the continental U.S., Cuba and Puerto Rico. This is also referred to as DoDDS or the DoDEA overseas military base school system.

Military base schools – This term refers to schools that are part of the DoDEA school system, including domestic (DDESS) and overseas (DoDDS) schools.

Positive learning outcomes – This term refers to classroom achievement and mastery of curricular concepts as evidenced by passing grades on assignments.

School success – This term refers to above average standardized test scores, graduation, matriculation to college, and gaining and maintaining a sense of academic engagement and confidence.

Significance of the Study

The focus on military personnel and their families is timely in light of the current war in the Middle East. The perspective of military children provides a window into the lives of a population that is mainly minority and highly mobile, and represents households that are generally middle to lower income. Demographically these students share characteristics similar to students from urban inner city areas (Smrekar et al., 2001). Research findings in this area could possibly guide recommendations that could lead to policy improvements for traditionally low performing students. Public schools with diverse populations, a high proportion of students from low income households, and large number of mobile students tend to have little success in providing a high quality education to such students. The fact that students who attend military base schools display similar demographic characteristics and are demonstrating academic gains indicates that there are processes and approaches being utilized that need to be more extensively investigated. Accordingly, the findings will be significant for educators, parents, and the general taxpaying public. Policymakers, educators, and parents need to know that school success has been documented for all students in these schools, and especially notable is the work that has been done in consistently narrowing the achievement gap between Caucasian and minority students. This is particularly important given the federal government's emphasis on eliminating the achievement gap as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Understanding the experiences of minority students in military base schools could help explain why there have been significant academic gains in a student population that traditional public schools have had difficulty effectively educating (DoDEA Annual Report, 2001; DoDEA Annual Report, 2006; Smrekar

et al., 2001). This not only works toward closing gaps and raising achievement in elementary and secondary schools across the country, but could also provide the key to understanding how factors outside of race influence school performance. The general American taxpaying public should take interest in these findings as well. Congress appropriates a portion of the revenue collected by the government for the construction and maintenance of federal school facilities yet only the dependents of active duty and certain civil service personnel are permitted to attend these schools (10 U.S.C. § 2164). Finally, this study works toward building a larger body of scholarly research on this topic, as current research is very limited. There are remarkably few published scholarly research studies available on the topic of military base schools, and even fewer that discuss the personal experiences and perceptions of African American students in relation to the schools. Many of the reports that are available were commissioned by the Department of Defense to evaluate the overall quality of the schools. DoDEA typically has not conducted studies of this nature with its students because of resource constraints (DoDEA Director of Evaluation and Research, personal communication, September 28, 2007). Perhaps this is due to the research community being less familiar with the existence of the schools, or that there are a relatively small number of schools in operation (as compared to the number of local public schools across the U.S.). There may also be a lack of access granted for the study of the schools due to the security concerns that surround military bases.

Overview of Approach and Organization of the Study

This study will employ a basic interpretive design with dimensions of a phenomenological theoretical approach. According to Merriam (2002), an interpretive

strategy allows the researcher to “understand how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 6). The researcher acts as a mediator in transmitting the core of the participant’s lived experiences and perspectives. As a researcher one seeks “to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspective, and worldviews of the people involved or a combination of these” (p. 6). Within an interpretative design, the researcher is most interested in uncovering the meaning the phenomenon has for participants.

Phenomenology also informs interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). This approach is particularly effective in attempting to understand and interpret the in-depth lived experience of a group as well as capturing shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). One reason phenomenological aspects are particularly appealing in this study lies in the way that the approach situates the researcher with respect to the topic. The researcher in this study has intimate knowledge of the phenomenon of being an African American student who attended military base schools. The use of the phenomenological approach allows for the bracketing or suspending of these personal experiences, while at the same time understanding the essence of the lived experiences that underlie the structure of the phenomenon. This approach is also well suited to address the purpose of this study in describing the perceptions of African American students in military base schools and the goal of capturing the essence of these students’ lived (and possibly shared) experiences.

The interpretative and phenomenological approaches strongly subscribe themselves to understanding the subjective and constructed meanings created by individuals. The philosophical paradigm that underpins this study is social constructivism. According to Creswell (2007), this worldview provides for multiple, subjective meanings expressed by the

participants. Utilizing this view is also compatible with the purpose of this research, “to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Also, because of the researcher’s background and experience with this topic, the social constructivist view is suitable because of its practice of positioning the researcher’s voice and recognition of how her culture and lived experiences frames the study.

This study was conducted near one of the domestic military school sites located in southeastern North Carolina. The data for this study was collected by way of a student biographical activity, an individual interview, and a focus group interview. The data were analyzed and themes were identified to reveal the students’ perceptions of their academic and social experiences.

Chapter Two of this study provides the history and policy background of the military base schools. It presents a description of the current school system, including its school governance structure, demographics, and curricular approach. This chapter also provides a review of the available research literature on military base schools as a whole. It discusses research findings involving the achievement of African American students as a general population and their perceptions of school success.

Chapter Three outlines the research design, the methods to be used in data collection, the rationale for applying these approaches, and the plan for analyzing the data for meaning as well as textural and structural descriptions. It discusses the participant selection process, as well as procedures used to gain access to the students. The chapter includes a review of the methodological research literature relevant to this study. The subjectivities and the voice of the author in relation to this topic are also discussed.

Chapter Four offers the findings of the study, focusing on themes that emerge from the data. Extensive descriptions involving the themes surrounding the academic and social experiences regarding the phenomenon of being an African American student attending military base schools will be presented. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the major themes from the findings, its relationship to the research literature, and potential implications for research and practice. Recommendations are offered to educators, parents, and policymakers reflecting the voices of the study's student participants.

Summary

Chapter One has provided an introduction to inquiry, setting the stage for examining the perceptions of African American students' academic and social experiences in military base schools. This exploration attempts to reveal the meaning embedded in the students' experiences and whether they believe there are characteristics of their experiences that contributed to positive learning outcomes and school success.

The next chapter will give the historical and political background of the military school system and outline the current organizational context of schools in relation to the research literature. The chapter will also discuss African American student achievement and their perceptions of school success.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Introduction

Chapter Two of this study provides the history and policy background of the military base schools in setting the context for understanding African American academic and social experiences in these schools. The chapter discusses research findings in the literature on the school system, the demographic characteristics of military sponsors, a profile of the military child, and a description of the military social community. A review of the literature involving the achievement of African American students as a general population and their perceptions of school success is also presented.

History of the Military Base Schools

Interest in the education of military dependents dates back to the early 19th century as military posts were established and the nation pushed westward. Schools were initially financed through funds provided through the Army and U.S. Congress, and taxes placed on trade (Operation of the Department of Defense Schools, 1982). In 1949, there were approximately 100 schools in Germany, Austria, and Japan that were operated by three branches of the military service, including the Army, Air Force, and Navy (DoDEA Celebrates 60 Years, 2008). Military dependents continued to be educated on base or in public schools close to bases after World War I. Although schools on military bases were recognized by Congress, appropriations were uncertain at best. Base commanders relied upon contributions and donations as sources of revenue to operate schools (Operation of the Department of Defense Schools, 1982). In 1950, legislation was introduced to sustain

funding for schools operated by the federal government on military bases across the U.S. through Section 6 of P.L. 81-874. From the beginning domestic base school districts have operated much like state operated LEAs. “After 1950 schools were added to the system to allow military children to attend integrated school in locations where local schools remained segregated” (Shaul, 2001, p. 11). In the early years a base commander was in charge of the schools (Operation of the Department of Defense Schools, 1982), yet later authority was transferred to civilian educational administrators (superintendents and school board members) (Smrekar, et al., 2001; Wright, 2000).

After World War II provisions were made to establish schools for military dependents overseas (U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education, 1988). The Secretary of Defense combined the three separate overseas school systems into the Department of Defense Overseas Dependent School System. This school system was further subdivided into three worldwide geographic systems (DoDEA Celebrates 60 Years, 2008). The U.S. recognized the importance of having a unified system of schools that spoke a common language with uniform curricular goals. Although these overseas schools had been operational for years, Congress did not legislate funding for these schools until 1978 under the Defense Dependents Education Act. As worldwide enrollment grew, the Department of Defense saw the need to further consolidate federal responsibility for the schools and created the Office of Overseas Dependent Education, which in 1979 became the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDEA Celebrates 60 Years, 2008). Although school systems were geographically reconfigured to better address changes that were occurring on the world political stage, two separate systems continued to exist as the domestic and overseas branches

remained. In 1994 both the Department of Defense Domestic Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) and Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) were brought together to form the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).

DoDEA Today

Today, DoDEA is a civilian agency of the Department of Defense and is based in Arlington, Virginia. From its headquarters a director oversees the 199 schools internationally, with the assistance of three deputy directors that supervise each of the three major geographical regions, which include the European region, the Pacific region, and the DDESS/Cuban region (DoDEA Facts, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001). Figure 2.0 below shows the organizational structure of the school system. Within each region (Pacific, Europe, DDESS/Cuba) schools are further subdivided into districts that are headed by a superintendent.

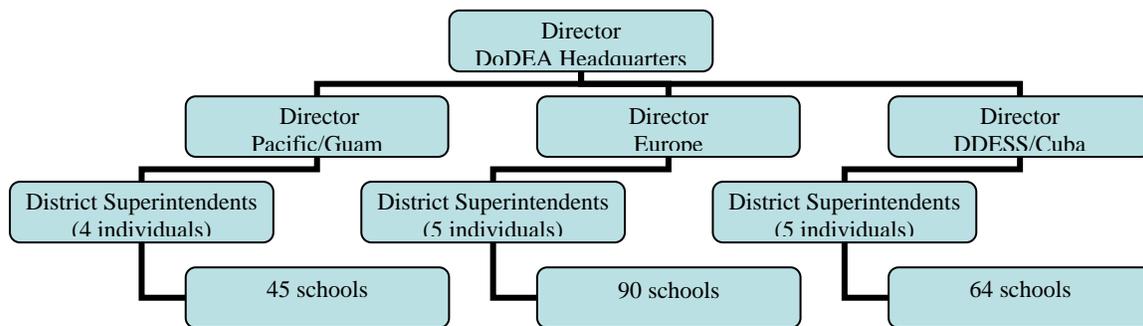


Figure 2.0 Organization of the Department of Defense Education Activity

Table 2.0 below outlines the region and the countries in which these schools are located. There are approximately 84,789 students enrolled in DoDEA schools, with about 25,554 students in the domestic system and 59,235 overseas. Instructional personnel

employed by DoDEA total approximately 8,800 individuals, with nearly 4,007 professionals employed in the domestic system and roughly 8,295 employed overseas (DoDEA Facts, 2008).

Table 2.0

Geographic Region and the Countries and U.S. States in which Military Base Schools are Located

Geographic Region	Countries/U.S. States with Military Base Schools
Europe	Bahrain Belgium England Germany Italy The Netherlands Portugal Spain Turkey
Pacific	Japan Korea Guam
United States/Cuba	Alabama Georgia Kentucky New York North Carolina South Carolina Virginia Cuba Puerto Rico

Schools that serve children of military personnel are organized and governed in much the same way as public schools across the U.S. There is a central office and an administrative staff that coordinates the allocation of resources with school principals. Grade level

configurations in the schools are the same as those in public schools. Elementary schools typically represents grades Kindergarten through fifth, middle schools typically represents grades six through eighth grades, and high schools represents grades nine through twelve. DoDEA schools are highly structured and face the unique circumstances of serving both students in domestic and overseas schools. While the public schools are nested in local education agencies (school systems), which are nested in states within the U.S., DoDEA schools are nested in communities, nested in districts (states) which are nested in either the domestic or the overseas region. For example, Scott Middle School is located within the community of Fort Knox, within the district (state) of Kentucky, within the domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools region. The community in which schools are located is the same as the military installation in which the school resides. This school is situated much the same way that a public state funded school is positioned within its school district and state. Figure 2.1 below outlines and describes the overall structure of two middle schools; a public state supported Daniels Middle School in Wake County and Scott Middle School within the DoDEA domestic school system.

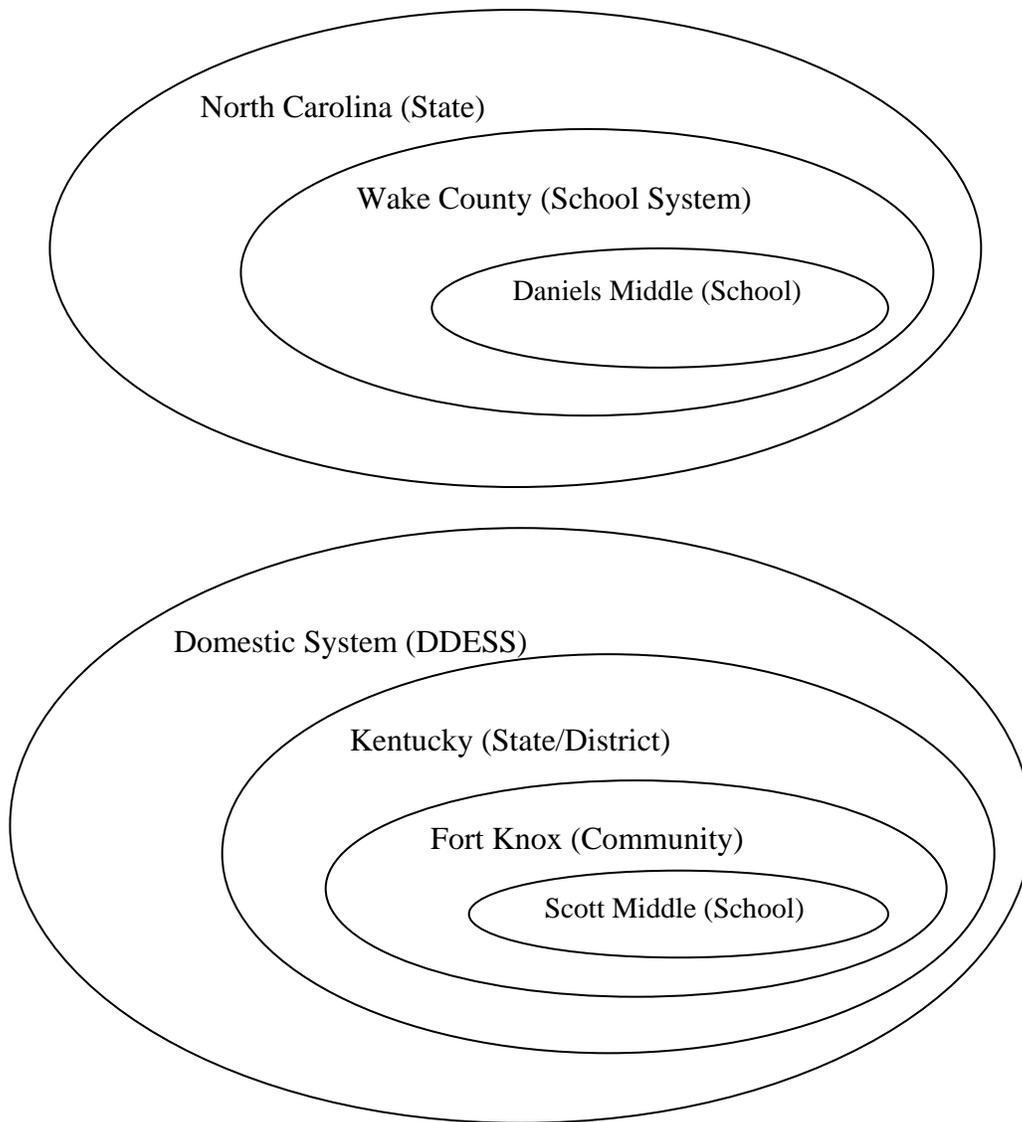


Figure 2.1 *An organizational comparison of public schools and military base schools*

The figure above provides an example of public schools and military base schools nested within each system. This figure shows the organizational comparison of the public state supported Daniels Middle School to the DoDEA domestic Scott Middle School.

Funding and Support for Military Base Schools

According to the literature, schools that serve military children are sufficiently funded to support the instructional goals of educating students (DoDEA Budget Book, 2007; Smrekar & Owens, 2003a; Wright, 2000). In terms of expenditures, it appears that both local public schools and schools that serve military students use the bulk of their funds on instructional related expenses. Both types of schools provide expenditures to address the day to day operations of schools, including principal and teacher salaries and benefits, supplies, and purchased services (such as contracts and travel). According to NCES (2008) the nation's public elementary and secondary schools spend an average of approximately 61 percent of expenditures on instructional costs for fiscal year 2006. For fiscal year 2007 DoDEA reports spending about 75 percent of its operations budget on instructional expenses related to personnel costs (DoDEA Budget Book, 2007). Smrekar and Owens (2003a) and Wright (2000) report that DoDEA schools costs are not directly comparable to local public schools because of a lack of monetary support from a state department of education. While the U.S. Department of Education provides federal impact aid to public school systems that surround and are impacted by military installations it does not provide federal revenue to military dependents' schools (Buddin et al., 2001). Schools serving children of military personnel are considered a Department of Defense field activity that operates under the direction and control of the U.S. Department of Defense, which provides funding dispersion through the DoDEA headquarters (Smrekar & Owens, 2003a; Wright, 2000).

However difficult in directly comparing the costs of U.S. public schools and military base schools, one common measure that assists in understanding how education funds are

spent is to compare overall per pupil expenditures across states and jurisdictions. Wright (2000) explains that for the 1997–98 and 1998–99 school year (the latest years that comparison data are available) DoDEA per pupil expenditures were about the same as those states with the highest student expenditures, which is comparable to states in the Northeast region of the country. The overseas school system ranked behind New Jersey, Connecticut, and New York with the domestic system ranking behind Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Delaware, and the District of Columbia. In fiscal year 1999 the U.S. average per pupil expenditure was \$6,435, while in the overseas system, DoDDS it was approximately \$9,055 and for the domestic system, DDESS it was \$8,586. Expenditures tend to be higher for the overseas schools because of the unique circumstances in operating schools in foreign countries and special overseas salary and benefit allowances for teachers (DoDEA Budget Book, 2007; Smrekar, et al., 2001; Wright, 2000). The highest state per pupil expenditure was in New Jersey at \$10,077.

In sum, DoDEA schools appear to be well funded yet lack the same levels and types of fiscal support that is given to public schools by the U.S. Department of Education. Since there is not a state agency that provides financial backing to the system, military base schools must prudently utilize resources. Many of the services and support are provided through the DoDEA Headquarters. Schools are well staffed and educator salaries appear to be competitive (Keller & Decotean, 2000; Smrekar, et al, 2000; Smrekar & Owens, 2003a; Wright, 2000). However, DoDEA per pupil expenditures have traditionally been less than what typically is spent in large U.S. public school systems with comparable proportions of minority students (NCES, 2000, Smrekar, et. al., 2001).

Helmick and Hudson (1997) discuss a study that was conducted in response to the Conference Report on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1995 (Public Law No. 103-337). The report requested that the Secretary of Defense conduct a survey of the domestic branch of the school system to investigate the possible transfer of the DDESS schools to the local public school districts. As a part of this study, public school systems with a minimum of 30 percent of its student population connected to the military were surveyed. Researchers wanted to determine the current and perspective funding levels and sources of revenue for these public school systems. Military parents, commanders, and DDESS personnel also participated in surveys and interviews (Helmick & Hudson, 1997).

Results from the study indicated that military parents overwhelmingly supported the DDESS system, expressing a high opinion of the schools' instructional quality, level of safety, and endorsement of parent involvement. Helmick and Hudson (1997) also report that these parents passionately and wholly oppose the transfer of DDESS schools to local public school systems. Parents were most concerned about student safety and security, whether their child would attend community schools, and the ability of schools to meet the unique needs of military children (for example, deployments of parents and frequent military transfers and reassignment). Military commanders and DDESS personnel shared several of the same concerns as parents. Interviews with public school officials revealed that while public schools were willing to accept students into their system by way of a transfer there would need to be additional aid provided to the school system to offset the fiscal burden that would be created. This would go well beyond Impact Aid, which are federal monies given to local public school systems surrounding military bases that helps offset the costs of military

students attending public schools (Buddin et al., 2001; Shaul, 2001). Impact aid is provided because military service personnel do not contribute to the local tax base that helps fund public schools.

Helmick and Hudson (1997) also report that while some public school systems rely on the contributions from federal Impact Aid, these systems proportionally receive less combined funding from federal and local sources than school systems that are not impacted by military installations. This decrease is due only in part to the non-contribution of military base personnel to the local tax base but is due to the fact that most public school systems that are impacted by military installations have lower than average per pupil expenditures as compared to their state and the national levels (Helmick & Hudson, 1997). Thus, federal funding increases most likely will not automatically and fully compensate for the local funding decreases.

Although there is currently no active plan to transfer the military base domestic schools to the public school districts, there may be more thought given to this prospect in the future. There are important trade-offs for both domestic military base schools and the local public schools to consider. A considerable financial burden would be incurred by the local public schools and/or the federal government with the immediate and long term transition. Helmick and Hudson (1997) point out that although the preservation of the domestic military base schools is more difficult to justify now than in the past, the main arguments for the sustainability of these schools rests in financial considerations and the schools' perceived value by military personnel and their families.

Characteristics of Military Service Personnel and their Families

The history and current structure of military base schools provides valuable organizational background information for understanding how the schools operate. To further realize the overall context of military base schools one must be familiar with the parents, their children, and the communities that influence the social climate in schools. The following section provides demographic and background information regarding military service personnel, their children, and their communities.

Demographic Characteristics of Military Service Men and Women

Of active duty military service personnel of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps branches, most of the military sponsors of students enrolled in DoDEA schools are personnel enlisted in the Army (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006; DoDEA Facts, 2008). In 2005, the year that the latest statistics are available, almost half of the active duty enlisted service personnel were in their early to mid-twenties, with the mean age being 27 years old (DMDC, 2007). Officers tended to be older, representing a mean age of 34 years of age. Most of the active duty members were assigned to the U.S. and its territories (84.5 percent). In 2005, the year the latest statistics are available, just over half of the active duty personnel were married (54.6 percent), and a little more than a third of the active duty members had children (34.9 percent) (MFRC, 2006). Children between the ages of birth to eighteen years of age represent the largest proportion of minor military dependents. The majority of children were 5 years of age or younger (469,129 or 39.8 percent), with 6 through 11 year old children representing a slightly smaller group (375,000 or 31.9 percent), while there were fewer children (286,795 or 24.4 percent) between the ages of 12 and 18 years old (MFRC, 2006.).

In 2005, approximately 62 percent of the active duty military was Caucasian (DMDC, 2007). The largest percentage of minority active duty service personnel enlisted in any of the military service branches in 2005 were African Americans at 20 percent, with individuals of Hispanic descent representing about 10 percent of the total active duty military personnel. According to the same report, American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and those persons of two or more races represented approximately 8 percent of active duty military personnel (MFRC, 2006). Approximately 53 percent of all students enrolled in DoDEA schools are minority, with the largest portion of these students being African American at 17 percent. Hispanic students represent 15 percent, Asian/Pacific Island students represent 7 percent, students who are bi-racial or multi-racial represent 10 percent, and Caucasian students represent 47 percent (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006).

DoDEA's student population is also distinguished by other important demographics. These demographic characteristics are reminiscent of students in large, urban school districts and may be considered challenges by some educators. The students are usually minority children from low income households with parents who possess limited education who are highly mobile. Eighty percent of the students in DoDEA schools are children of enlisted sponsors, who have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Enlisted sponsors generally earn less than \$50,000 a year (Powers, 2008). They are typically younger, earlier in their military career with younger elementary school aged children (MFRC, 2006). Military officers typically maintain, on average, a higher annual salary and generally hold a bachelor's degree or higher (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006; MFRC, 2006; Smrekar, et al., 2001). Only twenty percent of parents with children in DoDEA schools have a college degree (Smrekar et al.,

2001). Because of these two combined factors, income and education level, military rank may be viewed as a socio-economic indicator. These demographic characteristics help to describe, in part, the profile of the military child.

Profile of the Military Child

Keller and Decotean (2000) describe the life of the military child as one characterized by transition and adaptability:

Military children tend to grow up in a family environment that is marked, on the plus side, by closeness in the face of adventure and sometimes hardship and, on the minus side, by frequent transitions and uncertainty. Military children learn early on about moving, saying goodbye, being a new kid on the block, and most unfortunate, being separated from a parent for extended periods. (p. 8)

The average U.S. Army officer's high school child, for instance, probably was born overseas and made at least one transoceanic crossing before age five thereafter being transferred to several different school systems, enrolling for two or three years at a time (Keller & Decotean, 2000). Because of these transfers most military children gain a global perspective that few students experience. Keller and Decotean (2000) add:

They grow up comfortable in interacting with people of different cultures who speak different languages. They tend to develop close family ties in spite of physical separation. They learn to be flexible. They become self-assured. They learn how to make friends and how to keep friends even when they move away. Some students develop remarkable resilience; others do not. (p. 9)

These are positive characteristics in the life of the military child, but there are a few negatives. Military children are often confronted with uncertainty related to whether the parent will receive orders to another duty station or be sent to war. Mobility can disrupt the social and emotional well-being of students. This can be particularly difficult for students who do not adjust well to the stress of transition. Uncertainty is also encountered in learning how to cope with the stress of a new community, new schools, teachers, friends, and cultures (Keller & Decoteau, 2000). Learning and academic progress may be impacted by what is referred to as downshifting. According to Caine and Caine (1997), “downshifted learners bypass much of their capacity for high-order functioning and creative thought” (p. 19).

Yet in light of the stress, military children, especially those growing up overseas, often have complex identities that transcend cultural boundaries (Hylmo, 2002). Children who have attended various international schools tend to relate best to their peers who share their experience with diverse cultures (Gillies, 1998). Even children who grow up solely on domestic military bases develop unique cultural identities because of their exposure to the diverse people and experiences that are encountered. They share common ways of seeing culture and their place within it (Hylmo, 2002). Hylmo (2002) suggests this commonality occurs because military children “grow up in a reality that is significantly different from that of their domestic peers” which is impacted by an “environment that is embedded in international politics, economics, and socio-cultural relations” (p. 121). Environment seems to profoundly shape the way that these children see the world both culturally and socially. Ahmed (1999) comments that military children are able to take advantage of some of the social privileges that accompany its status. Hylmo (2002) describes military children in

countries outside of the U.S. as expatriate children, who are part of communities that “establish their own schools that follow the curricula of their home countries. The curricula that are taught follow a particular ideology, typically that of the home country” (p. 125). In many cases, these schools become preferred by the local community and the model for other educational institutions across the community.

Students who attend military base schools are subject to high mobility and transfers due to the nature of his or her parent(s) military employment. Service men and women are typically assigned to duty stations for three years and reassignment orders are often provided so that family relocations are least disruptive to the child’s school year. Typically, these reassignments are scheduled to occur during the summer or the Christmas holiday break (Keller & Decoteau, 2000). Most students and their families at some point experience the deployment of a military parent, and undergo the stresses associated with living in a single-parent home, particularly during a time of international instability. This stress can at times translate into problems at school and educators are encouraged to keep parents well informed. As Smrekar et al. (2001) and Viadero (2000) comment, there is a corporate commitment on the part of the military to back the schools in very tangible ways. For example, depending on the severity of a student’s misbehavior in schools, the parents of the student are notified along with the military parent’s commanding officer. The repeated misconduct of students in schools on military installations is not tolerated and could result in the entire family being removed from military base housing (Shaul, 2001; Smrekar, et al., 2001). Military service personnel are often reminded that part of their place of duty is in the schools, and they are expected to attend parent-teacher conferences and play an active role in

schools (Shaul, 2001; Smrekar, et. al, 2001; Viadero, 2000). Viadero (2000) describes the strong community relationship that is shared with the schools that is embedded in military culture and its infrastructure, commenting that school principals may call upon the local military command to provide resources, volunteers, and technical expertise to assist in schools.

Military Culture and Community

The military culture and community appear to play a large role in the atmosphere of military base schools. The military, being one of the oldest racially integrated social institutions in the U.S., has developed a culture that is intolerable of racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination (Moskos & Butler, 1996). Department of Defense schools were some of the first schools in the country to be racially integrated (Shaul, 2001). One of the fundamental premises of an armed and ready military is its ability to work as a cohesive fighting force that draws upon the talents and skills of its entire population, regardless of race or gender. Also part of this premise, there is a level of high expectation and standards for achievement, exhibiting the characteristics that allow one to rise to the immediate and complex challenges of military life inside and outside of the combat zone. Moskos and Butler (1996) contend that the high expectations found in the U.S. Army not only benefit all Army recruits, but also facilitates leadership opportunities for minorities who typically may not have had these chances. These authors state, “when necessary, the Army makes an effort to compensate for educational skill deficiencies by providing specialized, remedial training” (p. 9). Training and educational advancement are also core values of military culture.

Education and training are fundamental to career advancement and increased rank, which materializes into higher pay (Viadero, 2000).

In terms of the military community, the next door neighbors are most likely of a different race and have resided nationally and internationally. Income is stable in that at least one parent is employed and housing is secure. Although housing areas are separated by military rank (including the broad military categories of enlisted personnel, warrant officers, and commissioned officers rankings from lowest to highest pay grades), all students attend the same schools. The majority of students in DoDEA schools represent families of enlisted personnel who earn modest salaries, with basic pay ranging roughly between \$29,052 to \$51,055 (corresponding to paygrade Enlisted 7 and Enlisted 9 or E7-E9) (Powers, 2008; Smrekar, et al., 2001; Wright, 2001). Although the salaries of parents are considered to be low enough for their children to receive free or reduced lunch (which is often a proxy for socio-economic status), most parents have earned only a high school diploma (Shaul, 2001; Smrekar et. al, 2001; Viadero, 2000).

The community and social environment in which DoDEA schools exist are also important considerations in understanding overall context. Military family and neighborhood environments in which DoDEA schools reside are characterized by a close, supportive network of individuals and resources that Smrekar et al. (2001) likens to the nineteenth century mill towns “in which work, family, commerce, and schooling embraced all members in a cohesive, self-contained social structure” (p. 45) with individuals in these environment sharing a core set of common values. As reflective of the active duty military service there is a routine, disciplined, secure environment. There are a variety of programs and services

offered to families who live on military installations, many of which are social and recreational that create the sense of a city within a city. Social ties are stable, predictable, and spanning various communal contexts, from neighborhoods to schools (Wright, 2000).

Families are guaranteed to have at least one parent employed full-time with housing and health care being provided by the federal government (Rothstein, 2004; Smrekar et al, 2001). Although housing is segregated by rank, schools are characterized with a mix of students that come from homes across all the military ranks. School culture highly reflects the social community with an emphasis placed on a “culture of order, discipline, education, and training” (Smrekar et al. 2001, p. 32). Small schools are the norm and tend to be described as “communally organized” because their structure facilitates mutual support, social cohesion, and the drive to work toward common ideals. Shared norms and values facilitate trust and communication “and produce purposeful and meaningful activities that benefit students and adults alike in schools” (Smrekar et al., 2001, p. 45). More intimate knowledge of individual student and staff needs can be obtained because of the relative small school size, sense of community, and shared vision.

Characteristics of Military Base Schools

To help communicate this shared vision DoDEA Headquarters offers a comprehensive strategic plan unifying the direction for both the domestic and overseas schools (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006). DoDEA Headquarters outlines a five year plan to set “the strategic direction for both DDESS and DoDDS, yet provides the flexibility to address unique issues and challenges each program and each community addresses” (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006, p. 1). The plan reflects the “vision,

mission, guiding principals, goals, and outcomes” (p. 1) of the organization as outlined below.

Vision: Communities Committed to Success for ALL Students.

Mission: To Provide an Exemplary Education that Inspires and Prepares All DoDEA Students for Success in a Dynamic, Global Environment.

Guiding Principles are outlined as follows:

- S uccess for All Students
- T rust and Respect for Others
- U ncompromising Advocacy for Students
- D evelopment of Lifelong Learners
- E qual Access to Quality, Rigorous Education
- N ew and Motivating Challenges to Inspire Excellence
- T eaching with High Expectations
- S afe and Stable Learning Environment

There are four goals that are outlined in the strategic plan. Each of the goals is linked to a specific outcome for students. Within each outcome further specific outcome milestones, implementation milestones, and measures are tracked (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006). Each of the goals and its summary is summarized below.

Goal 1: Highest Student Achievement – outlines clear curricular program standards and goals detailing continuous and multiple assessment measures including student citizenship and involvement.

Goal 2: Performance-Driven, Efficient Management Systems – reflects management systems that allow for resource allocation that supports the learning environment (including facilities upgrades, maintenance, equipment, and technology).

Goal 3: Motivated, High Performing, Diverse Workforce – reflects the plan for personnel management and the hiring of well qualified certified and non certified staff. The section also delineates an extensively designed strategy for professional development.

Goal 4: Promoting Student Development through Partnership and Communication – outlines partnerships between parents, military commands, communities, and organizations. This section of the plan outlines partnership as a vehicle to promote student development in the enhancement of “social, emotional, and academic growth” (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006, p. 17)

Small schools allow for a better knowledge and understanding of student needs appears to be a key focus in DoDEA schools (Merenbloom & Kalina, 2006). Teachers are more familiar with family situations as well as student instructional needs in smaller schools. While teacher turnover averages about thirty-five percent each school year, DoDEA teachers remain stable, staying in one place for an average of about 20 years, creating a foundation of educational stability (Smrekar et al., 2001; Wright, 2000). To help better assess student needs, educators use a number of standardized diagnostic assessments to measure academic progress and achievement (DoDEA Assessment Program, 2008). DoDEA students appear to annually score above the national average in each subject on the Terra Nova Achievement Test and consistently rank at or near the top of the scale on the National Assessment of

Education Progress (NAEP) when comparing similar students across states and jurisdictions (DoDEA 2007 NAEP Results, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001).

Students who attend military base schools are provided with a standardized curriculum. This ensures that domestic and overseas students will be exposed to the same learning materials, especially in light of the high mobility experienced by these students (Wright, 2000). The DoDEA curriculum is very similar to that of U.S. public schools, including curriculum standards in grade Kindergarten through grade twelve in the areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, health education, music, and visual Arts (DoDEA Curriculum, 2008). Requirements for graduation are similar to those requirements for public schools with students required to have credits in the four core areas of English language arts (4 credits), mathematics (3 credits), science (3 credits), and social studies (3 credits) (DoDEA Graduation Requirements, 2008). Special programs are offered for students with disabilities (Wright, 2000). Classes contain mixed academic ability groups, as well as lower achieving students and students receiving special education services (Smrekar et al., 2001). While military base schools do not receive Title I. funding, instructional support teachers are also provided for students with disabilities (Buddin et al., 2001; Wright, 2000). The literature reports that advanced and honors level classes are made available to students (Wright, 2000). Programs which are widely used in public schools, such as Reading Recovery for elementary students and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program (noted for its success with minority students) is used at the high school level (Viadero, 2000). There are

183 instructional days in the DoDEA school calendar, with schools typically beginning in August and ending in June (DoDEA School Calendars, 2008).

Graduation exercises take place at the end of each academic year as in public schools. High school graduation and post secondary plans are often used as indicators of academic success. Students who attend military base schools typically perform as well or better than their public school peers on these measures (Shaul, 2001; Smrekar, et al., 2001). A high proportion of students who attend schools on military bases take college entrance tests, (performing at or near national averages), with about 60 percent of the graduates planning to attend four year colleges, as compared to 40 percent of high school graduates nationally (Shaul, 2001). DoDEA reports a 99 percent graduation rate for the 2006-07 school year (DoDEA Postsecondary Plans and Scholarship Report, 2007). Of the 3,248 military base students enrolled in twelfth grade in April 2007, 82 percent of students reported that they planned to formally continue their education after high school. Sixty-three percent were planning to attend a four year college or university, 17 percent planned to attend a junior/community college, and 2 percent planned to attend a vocational/technical school. Interestingly, 82 percent of African American students reported that they planned to formally continue their education, with 59 percent planned to attend a four year college or university, 20 percent planned to attend a junior/community college, and 3 percent planned to attend a vocational/technical school (DoDEA Postsecondary Plans and Scholarship Report, 2007).

Class and School Size

Expenditures across the nation's public school systems are to some extent fungible, therefore, two of the most widely accepted measures of inputs to school quality include class

size and teacher qualifications. Anderson et al. (2000) report that although class size data are not reported for a fairly large number of states, comparisons may be made across state public schools and military base schools. Using data for 37 states, (including the District of Columbia as a state), DoDDS, and DDESS these researchers ranked the percentage of classes with 25 or fewer students and found DoDDS ranked eighth in the list and DDESS ranked twentieth in the list of the total states/jurisdictions. Military base schools are also small. According to the literature small elementary schools are defined as those with enrollment of less than 350 students, middle school enrollment with less than 800 students, and high school enrollment with less than 900 students (Wasley, et al., 2000). According to DoDEA student enrollment data for June 2008, a little over half of the domestic military base elementary schools may be considered small schools and all middle and high schools in the domestic system may be consider small schools based on the above definition (DoDEA Enrollment Data, 2008). Middle and high schools on military bases tend to be small and are in contrasts to public urban districts for which many minority students typically attend (Orfield & Yun, 1999; Smrekar et al., 2001). Middle and high schools on military bases tend to be smaller than elementary schools because military personnel either retire or leave the service by the time their children reach the upper grade levels (Viadero, 2000).

Research through the years has found that small schools are associated with student achievement and more productive student-teacher relationships (Bracey, 2001; Fine, 1991; Merenblom & Kalina, 2006).

Teacher Quality and Professional Development

Since the majority of school expenditures are often devoted to maintaining support for instructional personnel it becomes apparent that teacher quality is fundamental to a successful schools' operation. Teacher quality can be reflected not only in the formal training of teachers, but in the professional development that helps to sustain effective practice. Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law includes a provision for highly qualified teachers and during the 2004–05 school year, 91 percent of classes across the nation were taught by highly qualified teachers under this provision (Stullich, Eisner, & McCrary, 2007). In spite of this percentage, students in schools that have been identified for improvement are more likely to be instructed by teachers who do not classify themselves as highly qualified. Teachers in high poverty schools were more likely to teach outside of their field of specialization, and high poverty and high minority school systems were more likely to report that competition with other districts was a barrier to attracting highly qualified teachers (Stullich et al., 2007). These authors also report that although teachers in high poverty schools were more likely to participate in professional development in the areas of reading and mathematics, opportunities were limited. Most received less than twenty four hours over a full school year.

Research has shown that student performance is correlated with teacher intelligence as measured by test scores (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1993; Webster, 1988) yet advanced degrees and certificates in teaching methodology are not necessarily related to student achievement (Anderson et al., 2000). Wright (2000) compared military base school teachers with teachers in U.S. public and private schools based upon the undergraduate schools

attended. Using a random sample of military base teachers the study revealed that these teachers had “higher-quality undergraduate schools and are thus presumably better qualified intellectually compared with public school teachers” (p. V2). Anderson et al. (2000) and Wright (2000) also analyzed SAT Reasoning Test and American College Test (ACT) scores of undergraduate institutions of teachers within the sample and found that DoDEA teachers graduated from four year colleges and universities with higher than average scores. The same study showed that overseas military base teachers earned a higher percentage of Master’s degrees when compared to teachers in U.S. public schools. Shaul (2001) also reports that almost 70 percent of teachers in both domestic and overseas schools earned advanced degrees and “virtually all teachers in DoD schools are certified in the subjects or grades they teach, both in domestic and overseas schools” (p. 37).

Teaching experience does not ensure quality yet it does indicate a level of continual professional practice and exposure to methods and strategies that are most effective with a range of students. DoDEA teachers have more years of teaching experience than do the teachers in the U.S as a whole. Research findings indicate that the median teaching experience of public school teachers in the United States in 1996 was 15 years, whereas the median years of experience reported for DoDEA teachers was approximately between 10 and 20 years (Smrekar et al, 2001; Wright, 2000). Teachers in military base schools earn salaries that are roughly comparable to their counterparts in large public school systems (Smerker et al., 2001; Viadero, 2000).

It may be argued that much of DoDEA’s student success on national assessments such as NAEP may be attributed in part to the training and preparation of its teachers. This

would make sense seeing that the military's commitment to education is grounded in preparation and training for promotion. DoDEA's approach to professional development seems to be comprised of both a centralized component that is directed by the DoDEA Professional Development Branch headquartered in Arlington, Virginia, as well as professional development that takes place at the local school district level. Local level districts and schools have the flexibility and decision-making power to implement programs that aligned with DoDEA strategic priorities. DoDEA professional development tends to be closely linked to school initiatives (DoDEA Professional Development Branch, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001). A combination of a centrally organized system of training along with a local, on-site system allows for a notably inclusive program of professional development. Many of the initiatives are backed by performance data which drives the types of available offerings. Wright (2000) describes that these general professional development opportunities occur throughout the school year. The headquarters office provides funding to each area school district and the district is required to explain how the funds will be used for professional development based on the DoDEA Community Strategic Plan goals and each individual school improvement plan (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006).

Criticisms Related to Student Achievement and Military Base Schools

As noted above, military base schools have demonstrated important successes in educating all students. DoDEA has also made strides in educating African American students as demonstrated through NAEP performance. Critics suggest that this success is due solely to advantages that are presented by the culture and structure created by the military that cannot be replicated to create achievement gains for many poor, urban, African American students

in public schools. Critics point out that the atmosphere of the military culture and community, with its common social and professional expectations that focus on discipline, education, training, stability, and security cannot be holistically recreated in general society nor in the public schools (Fruchter, 2007; Kingston, 2002; Rothstein, 2004; Viadero, 2000). Not only is the military culture and community of issue, but also school size. “Schools and students also benefit from smaller school size. Moreover, because these smaller schools are far more integrated than their urban U.S. counterparts, students of color in on-base school are not concentrated and isolated in large schools composed almost entirely of similar students, as they are in U.S. urban areas” (Fruchter, 2007, p. 20).

Rothstein (2004) and Viadero (2000) call attention to the fact that although military base school students, whose demographic characteristics are often compared to students in low income urban areas, do not live under the same conditions as students found in poor communities. Even though military base school students represent families who qualify for free or reduced school lunch, at least one parent is employed. Medical care and housing are subsidized by way of the federal government and housing communities are integrated by way of race and social class. Rothstein (2004) states that “the military won’t accept recruits without minimum attributes of self-discipline and educational attainment that are considerably higher than what exists in other low income civilian communities” (p. 78). The middle class culture that is created through social class integration results in military base students benefiting from middle class role models, which is an advantage that is not often afforded to students in lower class public schools (Rothstein, 2004). He continues by offering the following:

The military offers subsidized high quality early childhood and preschool services, so military base children come to elementary school ready to learn to a degree rarely found in lower class civilian neighborhoods. The military offers after-school enrichment and remediation. Army base children don't often lack vaccinations, vision care, or dental care, or suffer from untreated asthma. Parents on Army bases cannot choose to be uninvolved at their children's schools. Soldiers get released time to volunteer in classrooms. Commanding officers can, and do, order soldiers to attend parent teacher conferences, properly discipline children, and make sure homework is done. If children don't behave, their families may be evicted from base housing or, if the families are stationed overseas, shipped back home. (Rothstein, 2004, p. 78)

Fruchter (2007) acknowledges the validity of the criticisms of military base school as models for improving African American student achievement, yet he argues the following:

My argument, instead, is that the problem of how to create the school cultures necessary to encourage and support the high achievement of students of color is the key problem that must be solved to improve our nation's urban schooling. The DoDEA's schooling provides one example, at scale, of the solubility of that problem. DoDEA's successes indicate that school cultures can be organized to produce high levels of academic achievement by their students of color. The perspective that cultures of schooling are variable, and that their variability can support or retard student's academic achievement, is a perspective critical to producing schools that work for students of color in urban settings. What seems clear is that the DoDEA schools have produced one variant of such an effective schooling culture. (pp. 22-23)

Highlighting the success that military base schools are having in educating African American students is significant because de jure and de facto segregation has created assumptions regarding the intellectual inferiority of these students. “Examples of schooling success, at scale, in producing high achievement by students of color are necessary weapons against the legacy of assumptions about inferiority that still infiltrate schooling policy” (Frutcher, 2007, p. 23). Through not completely replicable for low performing urban schools, the success of the military base schools provides an important example of how school cultures can be organized to produce academic success for African American students. “DoDEA schools enjoy an organizational structure that combines accountability and autonomy, and instructional practice that uses such autonomy to develop and diversify teacher practices to meet students learning needs” (Frutcher, 2007, p. 23).

Research on Military Base Schools

The literature reports a few sources that describe military base schools in detail and how its organization and climate impact achievement for all students. The majority of the most comprehensive sources found for this review were government reports and surveys which have been referenced thus far throughout this chapter.

Anderson et al. (2000) and Wright (2000) present a two part series that is one of the most thorough quantitative and qualitative reports available on military base schools. Both reports present an assessment of DoDEA schools and the quality of education these schools provide. The issues are organized into five major areas: 1) student achievement, 2) curriculum, 3) teachers and administrators, 4) school environment, and 5) DoDEA management and relationships. The *Review of Department of Defense Education Activity*

(DoDEA) Schools Volume I. (Wright, 2000) describes the study conducted to address concerns that were raised by military leaders and parents who “expressed a significant level of discontent about the quality of education in DoDDS-Europe” due to the military drawdown in Europe and internal reorganization of DoDEA headquarters (Wright, 2000, p. S1). During the late 1990s the Office of the Secretary of Defense requested that an independent review of the DoDEA schools be conducted by the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) to address these concerns. The study objectives were to:

- 1) provide an objective assessment of the quality of education in DoDEA schools,
- 2) examine (military) command and parental issues and concerns about educational quality and expectations for students’ educational experience,
- 3) examine the issues and concerns identified by DoDEA personnel, and
- 4) make recommendations about how to respond to any differences between parental perceptions and expectations and the actual performance of DoDEA schools.

(Wright 2000, p. S1)

Over 240 interviews were conducted with almost 700 military leaders, parents, students, administrators, and teachers in both the domestic and overseas schools to further identify issues of concern and assess the overall quality of the schools. “Although it is difficult to compare DoDEA with other school systems because of its uniqueness as an educational system” comparative analyses between the DoDEA system and US public school systems were conducted (Wright, 2000, p. S1). Within the same year Anderson et al. (2000) completed a quantitative analysis of education quality as a second, more technical volume to support the first volume. Both volumes suggest that in terms of student achievement as

measured through test results on assessments such as NAEP and SAT, military base school students generally perform on these tests as well or better than U.S. public school students. The research also revealed that a higher percentage of military base high school graduates planned to attend college. In terms of curriculum, both volumes revealed that military base school could improve on the pacing a sequencing of the curriculum, yet had well qualified teachers are able to well execute instruction (Anderson et al., 2000; Wright 2000). In terms of school environment it was noted that expanded course offerings, sports, and extracurricular activities needed to be offered for students in smaller military base schools. Smaller schools require fewer staff members but limit the number and type of courses offered in schools.

The following year, the now defunct National Education Goals Panel released a study conducted by the Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University to understand the reasons why academic performance, particularly that of minority students, is among the highest in the nation in DoDEA schools (Smrekar et al., 2001). The Panel's mission was to understand why students in these schools performed so well on standardized tests such as the NAEP. The study released in 2001 revealed two principal findings outlined in the Report Summary:

Department of Defense schools combine in-school instruction with out-of-school activities and community conditions to construct an unusually productive set of educational opportunities for students, particularly. Department of Defense schools embrace 'productive educational opportunities' that are within the grasp of public school systems to emulate. (p. viii)

The report analyzed the governance structures, educational programs, and system of accountability. It also suggested seven traits of the school system that contribute to high student performance within military base schools which contributed to the success of all students (including minority students). These traits include the following:

- *Strategic Planning* – outlines the objectives for making organizational, financial, and educational improvements that incorporates the input of parents, school teachers and administrators, and the civilian and military community;
- *Alignment of System Components* – allows for a systematic coordination of efforts among the DoDEA headquarters, area superintendent offices, and community district offices for the delivery of disaggregated student performance results. Educators use this information to structure academic interventions and improvements;
- *Culture of High Expectations* – reinforces individual responsibility and accountability among students. Results from a NAEP school climate survey reported that 85 percent of African American students reported that teacher expectations were ‘very positive’ (Smrekar et al., 2001, p. 26);
- *Teacher Quality* – about 65 percent of teachers employed by DoDEA possessing a master’s degree or higher (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006) and practice teaching within their area of certification. DoDEA provides extensive professional development opportunities that focus on improving student performance as described above;
- *Child care* – providing for pre-school programs and youth service centers;

- Small schools – supported through the research literature as a contributor to student school success;
- A ‘Corporate Commitment’ – facilitated support from the U.S. military that is “both material and symbolic” (Smrekar et al., 2001, p. 50) defining the level of investment that military parents are expected to have in participating in school events, such as attending parent teacher conferences and volunteering in school activities.

It appears that the school system’s organizational structure is highly favorable for student success. Smrekar and Sims (2006) expanded on research completed in 2001 on behalf of the National Education Goals Panel and Peabody University in examining reasons for minority student achievement. Smrekar and Sims (2006) outlined eight reasons for high performance among all DoDEA students. These include the following.

- 1) A clear mission;
- 2) Adequate, but not copious resources;
- 3) Powerful and systematic measurement of monitored student progress;
- 4) Empowering professionals through giving them decision-making discretion;
- 5) Rich and varied instructional methods and professional development;
- 6) A strong sense of community outside of schools;
- 7) Small schools; and
- 8) The pervasive value placed on education and training by the military.

Smrekar and Sims (2006) concentrate on how all the organizational elements that contribute to DoDEA’s success fit together in what is termed “organizational alignment.”

The researchers hypothesized that military base schools attribute their success to the congruence in their organizational components. This study focused on nine middle schools in four DoDDS districts in Germany and Japan based on their consistent high performance in an attempt to develop a model of organizational alignment in educational settings. Using the Nadler and Tushman Organizational Congruence Model, findings revealed congruence between four major components within the school system that contribute to high academic achievement including “the work of the system (teaching and learning), the formal arrangements for doing the work, the people within the system, and the informal influences that come to bear the work and the people of DoDDS” (p. 46).

Other authors, such as Bloom, Bullion, and Caldwell (1998) and Joiner (2003) described school success in both overseas and domestic Department of Defense schools that is based upon efforts that must be integrated to provide overall school improvement to impact staff development and curriculum delivery. Bloom et al. (1998) explained how the school system attempts to incorporate long-term change and engage teachers to become agents of change in local school systems despite high student mobility, poverty, and a significant minority and English as a second language population. Shaul (2002) also reported the academic success of schools that serve military dependents and evaluated overseas teacher’s compensation packages in determining DoDEA’s adequacy in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers. The study found that DoDEA appears to have little difficulty recruiting and retaining well-qualified teachers, which is another important component of student academic success.

As research has shown, well-qualified teachers within a highly organized efficient school system can have a significant positive impact on African American students (Ferguson, 1998). Kingston (2002) discussed student achievement in DoDEA schools and points out that although these schools contain traditional demographic indicators for academic underachievement, including low family income, low levels of parental formal education, and high mobility rates due to military assignments and deployments, students in these schools typically perform well academically. He notes the importance of high teacher expectations, the attention paid to individual student achievement data and the “sophistication with which the Department tracks performance” (p. 65). Kingston (2002) also comments that public schools may benefit from emulating the ways that military base schools follow individual students who are highly mobile and hold them to the same high academic standard no matter what school he or she attends. Smrekar and Owens (2003b) echo this point. Typically high student mobility is a characteristic of urban minority low achieving schools, yet these authors point out that African American students in DoDEA schools perform at high academic levels. “Some observers contend that the high achievement among highly mobile students in DoDEA schools is a function of middle-class family and community characteristics of such students, particularly among minority students” (Smrekar & Owens, 2003b, p. 167). These authors argue that DoDEA schools simultaneously ‘do the right things’ and ‘do things right’ including the way of individual schools and the system respond to high student mobility rates (Smrekar & Owens, 2003b, p. 167).

Students who attend these schools also appear to recognize their impact. White (2003) outlines the testimony to Department of Defense officials of an African American student who attended a military base sponsored school in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The student defended the importance of maintaining military base schools in light of a round of base school closures that was planned for that year. The student describes the experience at Camp Lejeune schools as being part of an “extended family” in which students look out for one another. White (2003) describes Department of Defense officials’ attempt to examine the quality of education made available by the schools. Students and parent representatives spoke to the way that schools are designed to meet the unique needs of military base students, especially in reference to issues surrounding school transfers, deployments of a parent, and a profound understanding of the emotional support students need during these transitions.

This chapter has thus far introduced the history, the current structure of the military base schools, and research to date on the topic. It has also provided a description of the demographic characteristics of military sponsors, a profile of the military child, and a sense of the social community in which the schools are embedded. A review of the available literature on the school system has been presented to provide background and context within which the school system operates. The focus of the chapter will now turn toward literature related to African American student achievement. The next section will concentrate on Catholic and private schools and social and cultural capital as well as organizational system-wide efforts and school level efforts to improve the academic achievement of African American students.

Private Schools and the Transmission of Cultural and Social Capital

As previously referenced research indicates that African American military base school students tend to outperform their public school district counterparts on the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Research has also revealed that the academic performance gap between Caucasian students and minority students was narrower, particularly in the area of writing, than in the public schools (Smrekar et al., 2001). NAEP results for the past several years have shown that African American and Hispanic students place first or second in the nation on fourth and eighth grade reading, writing, math, and science exams (DoDEA 2007 NAEP Results, 2008).

Military base schools are not isolated in demonstrating school success in working with African American students. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) and Coleman and Hoffer (1987) extensively discuss the benefits that attending Catholic schools have for African American students. Specifically, Coleman and Hoffer (1987) discuss the achievement benefits in Catholic schools for African American students in having access to greater resources and curriculum choices. While military base schools are not considered private schools, they do possess many of the characteristics of these institutions, with smaller class sizes and an academically focused school and social culture.

Coleman and Hoffer (1987) reference "functional" communities and the value consistency found within the neighborhoods which private schools help to facilitate. For example, the pervasiveness of the middle class values of hard work and diligence in a functional community (such as that found in private schools) can aid in educational success and future mobility, even when the student comes from a household in which the parents may

possess a lower level of formal education. Parents understand the substantive benefits of exposing their children to this type of environment. Ascher (1986) summarizes how African American parents expressed a belief that private and Catholic schools offer a sounder education and better career development training than do public schools, and the desire for their children to have highly directed learning experiences within an integrated environment. Although Ascher (1986) and Fordham (1991) report that African American parents acknowledge a lack of reinforcement of their child's racial and cultural identity in private schools, parents are willing to accept the tradeoff for their children to experience greater academic success.

Some may argue that this tradeoff is worth the long term payoff in terms of exposing students to a culture of achievement in schools such as that found in Catholic and private schools. Tyson (2003) suggests that "at the center of debate on minority students' achievement is the issue of culture" (p. 347). Several authors, such as Bourdieu (1977), Delpit (1995), Lareau (1987), and Nieto (1994) all report that the disconnect between students' home life and the school as an institution is a major factor in school failure for minority and lower income students. These authors, as well as Brubaker (2004) and Reed-Danahay (2005) contend that U.S. schools are based upon Anglo European middle-class values, and minority students who are the most proficient at espousing these values are most successful in schools. Students are said to acquire this knowledge by way of *cultural* and *social capital*, which can often be imparted through the home environment. Hemmings (2007) defines cultural capital as "the valued academic and mainstream cultural knowledge and...the cultural dispositions that are conducive for success in various schools settings" (p.

10). Social capital is defined as the “social resources and networks that enable people to promote their own and others’ educational achievement and attainment” (Hemmings, 2007, p. 10). Social capital is gained through educational as well and non-educational related means, through various exposures to experiences and resources that are valued by the dominant culture. According to Tyson (2003) “the more closely the students’ homes reflect the mainstream culture, the greater the students’ initial advantage in school” (p. 327). This familiarity with dominant cultural norms may suggest the ease in which students may conform to school norms (Delpit, 1995; MacLeod, 1995). Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) state that in some organizations, high levels of social capital can benefit all individuals, while in most cases individuals are not openly educated on the subject. This may be part of the case in explaining why African American students who are part of educational environments such as Catholic, private, and/or military schools achieve academic success. It could be that these types of organizations structurally provide cultural and social capital supports inherent to their systems. Coleman (1990) discusses the creation and maintenance of social capital within an organization, while Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) expand on this argument, stating that social networks are a major vehicle in the distribution and the influence of social capital in high closure environments. Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) explain that “in a community of high closure, however, parents also have relationships with one another that carry reciprocal norms and obligations independent of the activities of their children, occurring as a result of business, family, or religious ties” (p. 389). Equal access to information is a value in the creation of social capital within an organization. This is evident in the institution of the military. Equal access to information is a requirement in fulfilling the mission and goals of

the military and one would expect this value to be evident in the schools that are connected to it.

Additional Supports for African American Student Achievement

Organizational Supports

The environment of Catholic and private schools coupled with access to and maintenance of social and cultural capital appear to explain part of the reason for academic success among African American students found in these types of schools. However, the literature offers additional explanations that range from the contextual organization of schools to individual student factors. Smrekar and Sims (2006) describe how “organizational alignment” is essential to student success in schools. Applying a business model to an educational setting, the researchers found organizational congruence among four major components within successful systems that contribute to high academic achievement. These components include “the work of the system (teaching and learning), the formal arrangements for doing the work, the people within the system, and the informal influences that come to bear (on) the work and the people of the organization” (Smrekar & Sims, 2006, p. 46). Schwartz (2001) details additional organizational influences that lead to African American student achievement, including the state and district’s role in policy development, early childhood development initiatives, school climate, school organization, teaching and learning, school management, and family support. Ferguson, Clark, and Stewart (2002) identified influential factors for improved student achievement including teachers’ instructional practices and classroom expectations, students’ weekly participation in engaging academic enriching in-school and out-of-school activities, open parent-teacher

communications, and high parental expectations for achievement that are supported by partnerships that have been developed with teachers. Ferguson et al. (2002) also suggest that “the achievement gap between students from different races and social classes largely may be most directly associated with variations in the time-use habits of students (in and out of school), and the involvement of parents, teachers, and adult mentors in students’ activities” (p. 17).

Organizational supports are tied to school level processes and outcomes. Research at the school level reveals that the relationships shared among teachers and students are important to school success. Teacher perceptions of students have been found to have an influence on African American student success, particularly in reference to performance indicators such as standardized test scores. Ferguson (1998) examined evidence that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students’ beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to help perpetuate the black-white test score gap. He goes on to address the assumptions that teachers’ perceptions, expectations, and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes. This appears to support the findings of Neal (2001) in her description of Caucasian teachers’ perceptions of African American student achievement and aggression based on students’ walking and body movement/language. Neal (2001) “proposes that walking movements in addition to other culture-related movements may influence teachers’ expectations for student achievement and behavior” (p. 168). She also points to research that indicates that “when students behave in ways consistent with their (African American) culture, teachers tend to perceive these students as aggressive, low achievers, and potential candidates for special education programs” (p. 173). Kent (2006) discusses the attempts on

the part of schools of education to better prepare pre-service teachers for urban schools serving predominantly African American students through providing training on positive teacher dispositions including attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that teachers exhibit in the classroom. Research has shown that minority students, particularly African American students, respond well academically to caring teachers who demonstrate high expectations (Kent, 2006).

These dispositions can make the difference in academic success for African American students. Positive teacher dispositions toward students can increase the likelihood that there will be increased student engagement and a caring school climate and classroom (Osterman & Freese, 2000). Osterman and Freese (2000) state that providing more support for students in secondary schools, improving the quality of relationships between teachers and students in creating a strong sense of community, and paying closer attention to the emotional needs of students all lead to a “direct and significant relationship between teaching caring, student engagement, and student learning” (p. 298). Fisher (2000) sought to obtain a comprehensive view of the academic predictors in studying school achievement with diverse African American student populations. The purpose of the research was to help explain differences between high and low achieving African American students. Four constructs showed promise in differentiating African American adolescents who academically perform well and those who perform poorly. These constructs include self concept in relation to academic ability, perceptions of opportunities for success in school, perceptions of future opportunity, and social support from significant others. Results of the study showed that “students who were academically successful (i.e. GPA and standardized test scores), had positive relationships

with teachers, received encouragement from their teachers, and believed that their academic goals could be obtained in the present school setting (Fisher, 2000, p. 325). African American parents with high to middle income levels had a harder time transmitting academic motivation to their children because these “students do not always receive adequate models for goal setting and problem solving” (Fisher, 2000, p. 323). Fisher’s (2000) results also showed that females were more supported academically, thus having a higher self-concept of academic ability than African American males. However, the prediction that students who do not perceive that they have limited opportunities in the future will have a higher GPA than students who believe they have limitations was not confirmed by this study.

Student Perceptions

It appears from the research that African American student perceptions of themselves and the school environment are important indicators for academic success. Sanders and Jordan (2000) examined the relationship between students’ perceptions of teacher-student relations and their academic achievement in grade 10 through grade 12. The authors found consistent evidence that teacher-student relations have “a positive and significant influence on adolescence educational investments, measured as school conduct, classroom preparation, and avoidance of maladaptive behaviors” (p. 67). These authors also found that positive teacher-student relations and constructive behaviors among students enhance academic achievement as measured in both standardized test scores and grade point averages. Sanders and Jordan (2000) also support the importance of building nurturing school communities with high-expectations to foster student engagement and academic success.

Student Self Perceptions

Student self perception and motivation appears to play a role in academic achievement (Lumsden, 1994). The influence of students' self perception and beliefs in his or her academic success has serious implications. Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) and Oyserman and Harrison (1998) suggest that there is a positive relationship between self perception and academic outcomes. Honora (2002) discusses the manner in which African American students conceptualize themselves, drawing connections to their future and attempting to integrate and manifest these conceptions through their academic performance. There seems to be an effort to connect current educational outcomes to future goals. According to Honora (2002) in referencing Nurmi (1991), "among adolescents, an extended... and optimistic...future outlook facilitates school achievement through long-term goal setting and persistence" (p. 302). McClendon and Wigfield (1998) follow a similar thesis in stating that African American adolescents' "student beliefs about their achievement outcomes are critical determinants of their subsequent achievement behavior" (p. 29). Steele (1992) states that students must experience a sense of inclusion and belonging within the academic community to become successful. He argues that academic achievement is contingent upon the student creating relationships within the school environment such that the student's self regard significantly depends on his or her own personal achievement.

Studies suggest that there may be a link between academic achievement and certain beliefs, such as those involving educational and occupational aspirations and attitudes toward school (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Dumais, 2002). According to Goldsmith (2004) and Mickelson (1990), educational beliefs and attitudes of African American students

as a group are more positive than Caucasian students, yet the overall academic performance of African American students is lower. Mickelson (1990) describes this as the attitude-achievement paradox in which both abstract and concrete attitudes are in contradiction. According to Mickelson (1990) abstract attitudes are based upon the idea that anyone can become successful if he or she does a good job in school. Although more optimistic and prosocial, these attitudes are less often operationalized among students. On the other hand, concrete attitudes are based in student experiences and are more connected to the students' everyday lives. Mickelson (1990) and Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) both conclude that concrete attitudes, as opposed to abstract attitudes, are a better predictor of student performance and most consistently explain the lapse in African American student performance compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Research has been conducted on attitudes of high performing African American students. Ford, Grantham, and Whiting (2008) found that academically gifted African American students credited their schools achievement to positive school behaviors and attitudes.

Student and Peer Perceptions

A body of literature focuses on how peers impact African American student achievement, including how accusations of “acting White” affect the African American student performance. Research studies have investigated whether African American students perceive their academic success as acting White in that some minority students condemn academic success, as they relate academic success as being counter to their cultural identity. In other words, this theory contends that African Americans who speak; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities that are considered Caucasian or White

cultural norms are judged as acting White (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Neal-Barnett, 2001; Tatum, 1997). The terminology “acting White” is used mainly in elementary and secondary education research literature in the discussion of the performance of African American students (Bergin & Cooks, 2001).

Some studies report the fear of acting White does exist for some students (Alpert, 1991; Peshkin & White, 1990; Suskind, 1998) yet the most widely recognized work on the subject has been done by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) describe the fear of acting White as a significant factor influencing the attitudes and underachievement of African American students in a Washington, D.C. high school. The authors based their argument on the concept of the formation of a group cultural identity. African Americans, because of their history, cultural frame of reference, and status as an involuntary minority group, (as a result of slavery) have developed a collective identity that is oppositional to the dominate culture. Historically groups who were involuntarily brought into a nation have been treated as oppressed minorities and often hold the dominate group responsible for their inferior economic and political status and “stigmatized culture or language” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 5). “Under this circumstance, involuntary minorities respond collectively as a group and they respond as individuals in ways that reinforce their separate existence and collective identity” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 5). The response of the group often results in oppositional perceptions of the collective identity of the dominant group. “That is, their very attempts to solve their status problem leads them to develop a new sense of who they are (as a minority group), that is in opposition to their understanding of who the dominant group members are” (Ogbu, 2004, p. 5). According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986) oppositional collective identity has its roots in

slavery and holds a broad and historical social context for African Americans that may play its self out in classrooms for some students.

This is not to say that minorities do not develop strategies to deal with the demands that they behave and talk like dominant group members in order to achieve self betterment in situations controlled by the dominant members of the dominant society. Ogbu (2004) argues that some African American students respond to school culture the same way that some African American adults respond to the dominate culture in rejecting what they believe are White attitudes, behaviors, and speech patterns. Ogbu (2004) adds the following:

In my own study, I have generally found that there are relatively few students who reject good grades because it is (acting) White. What the students reject that hurt their academic performance are “White” attitudes and behaviors conducive to making good grades. (p. 28)

According to the literature, there has been much criticism and debate regarding the acting White thesis (Aisworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Hamann, 2004; Tyson, 2002; Tyson, Darity & Castellino, 2005).

Cook and Ludwig (1998) did not find support the belief that group differences in peer attitudes account for the black-white performance gap in educational achievement, yet family background does account for a relatively small difference in effort on the part of the students in each racial group. Ferguson (2001) and Tyson et al. (2005) reports finding little evidence of oppositional culture among African American middle class students. Tyson et al. (2005), performing one of the first multi-site design qualitative studies of the topic, examined interview data in eight secondary schools in North Carolina. These authors comment that

“high achieving Black students across the sample schools were not deterred from taking advanced courses or striving to do well because they feared accusations of acting white or other teasing” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 583). Interestingly, these authors found that high achieving White students in some schools experienced a similar and more persistent burden of high academic achievement. Ford et al. (2008) examined peer pressure among African American students identified as gifted. As part of a larger study, gifted African American students were interviewed regarding their achievement-related attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions of acting White and acting Black. In this study many of the gifted African American students demonstrate an attitude-behavior discrepancy, faced negative peer pressures, and attribute acting white with school achievement, intelligence, and positive school behaviors and attitudes. Most attributed acting Black to negative school achievement, low intelligence, and poor behaviors and attitudes.

Diamond, Lewis, and Gordon (2007) assert that African American students are more likely to face the burden of acting White and the effects of oppositional culture in desegregated school environments in which Caucasian student are perceived as having greater education opportunities. These authors analyzed the argument of whether school structures (referring to school composition and organization) impact the burden of acting White. In interviewing African American and Caucasian high school students Diamond et al. (2007) found no evidence that African American students opposed school achievement, yet the students did “perceive race based limitations to their opportunities for getting ahead and are cognizant of racial patterns” of track placement within the local school context (p. 667). School context factors, such as social composition, have been shown to significantly impact

on achievement of all students, but the impact is greater on some groups more than others (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). For instance, these authors describe how African American students tend to benefit academically and socially by attending mixed race schools.

Rumberger and Palardy (2005) add that there have been few studies that have investigated the link between social composition and educational achievement, suggest that the effects of social composition are directly related to the influence of peers. According to Jencks and Mayer (1990), high achieving and highly motivated student can help to create an environment of success in schools, while low achieving non-motivated can create a sense of deficiency and hopelessness. This type of school wide culture can have a negative impact on high achieving students in lower achieving poorer schools because it means that the schools are organized around lower expectations and a less challenging curriculum (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Jencks and Mayer (1990) describe that poor, disadvantaged student may be more vulnerable to negative influences because they are less likely to find supportive influences at home or in the community. On the other hand, an achievement oriented school culture (generally found in more affluent schools) can have a positive effect on lower achieving students (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Rumberger and Palardy (2005) conclude that where students attend school has a major impact on how much they learn, stating that school characteristics account for more of the differences in student learning during high school than student background characteristics, especially for students attending high schools in affluent neighborhoods.

Summary

The research literature appears to hold that African American students in Catholic and private schools have traditionally experienced greater academic success than African American students in public schools. Much of this can be attributed to the structure of these schools and the cultural and social capital that is transmitted through the school community. The research speaks to factors within schools that appear to have an impact on African American student success, such as social relationships between teachers and students, where teachers express care and set high expectations. The research literature suggests that there may be a link between students' self-perceptions and their beliefs about their academic achievement and performance. These beliefs may be based in the student's specific abstract or concrete perceptions about his or her abilities and his or her future prospects. Student and peer perceptions are also important. The body of literature related to the premise of the burden of acting White provides perspective on how African American students and their peers may view and respond to academic achievement. The effects of peer and school social composition on African American student achievement was also discussed.

Chapter Two has outlined the history and policy background of military base schools. A review of the research literature on these schools was provided. Also, a review of the literature on effective organizational and school level implementation supports that have shown promise in increasing African American student achievement were presented.

The next chapter will outline the research design, the methods to be used in data collection, the rationale for applying these approaches, and the plan for analyzing the data for meaning as well as textural and structural descriptions. It will discuss the subject selection

process, as well as procedures used to gain access to the students and schools. The chapter will include a review of the methodological research literature relevant to this study. The subjectivities and the voice of the author in relation to this topic will also be discussed.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct the study, presenting a justification of the qualitative approach and theoretical framework, research questions, site selection and sampling, the data collection process, and a plan for analyzing the data. It addresses research validity while providing a review of methodological research literature relevant to the procedures used in this study. The subjectivities and the voice of the author in relation to this topic are also substantiated. Ethical issues and limitations of the study are discussed at the conclusion of this chapter.

Choice of Methodology

The purpose of this research study is to describe the academic and social experiences of African American students in military base schools. The goal is to understand the academic/classroom experiences of African American students through their perceptions of the learning environment in an effort to determine the characteristics that contribute to positive learning outcomes and school success as documented in the literature. The research describes the lived experiences of individual students while revealing common elements that of experience across the group of students. It also attempt to capture their perceptions of the educational quality of the schools. The study seeks to shed light on the social interactions and relationships these students share with their teachers and how African American students view themselves academically and socially in comparison to their African American peers and their peers of other races within military base schools.

Qualitative research methods, particularly those that lend themselves to basic interpretative design with aspects of phenomenology, are well suited for this type of investigation. This study employs a basic interpretive design with dimensions of a phenomenological theoretical approach. According to Merriam (2002), an interpretative strategy allows the researcher to “understand how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon” (p. 6). The researcher acts as a mediator in transmitting the core of the participants’ lived experiences and perspectives. Within an interpretative design, the researcher is most interested in uncovering the meaning the phenomenon has for participants. The researcher employs a social constructivist view in discovering how participants make meaning of their experiences. To do this, a researcher using an interpretive design is most interested in the following as outlined by Merriam (2002) including “1) how people interpret their experience, 2) how they construct their worlds, and 3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 38). In interpretative design, “the analysis of the data involves identifying recurrent themes and patterns, categories, factors, variables, and themes that cut through the data” (p. 38). The findings are a combination of recurrent patterns supported by the data from which they were gathered. Interpretative designs seek to understand these experiences and situate them within the literature. The overall analysis will be the researcher bringing forth the interpretations of the meaning of these lived experiences.

Phenomenology also informs interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Aspects of a phenomenological design will be used in this study. Phenomenology may be described as the process of understanding how ordinary people give meaning to particular situations that occur in their lives. Phenomenologists believe that “multiple ways of

interpreting experiences are available to each of us through interacting with others, and that it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 34). Further, “the aim of phenomenology is the description of phenomena, and not the explanation” (Enrich, 2003, p. 45). According to Creswell (2007), “the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence” (p. 58). Phenomenology is characterized by four key principles including: 1) *description*, 2) *reduction* (bracketing or temporarily suspending one’s assumptions about the topic), 3) *essences* (pinpointing the core meaning of the lived experience), and 4) *intentionality* (acquainting oneself with the unknown and the known in the process of interpreting the experience; making the subjective experience the source of objective reality) (Enrich, 2003; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990).

In relation to these principles, this study subscribes to the theoretical traditions of transcendental or psychological phenomenology as initiated by the nineteenth century German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Enrich (2003) describes Husserl’s philosophical approach to phenomenology as “the achievement of transcendental subjectivity.... In simple language, Husserl’s main project was to establish a method that would yield absolute essential knowledge” (p. 49) in the quest for seeking the absolute experience of the individual. Moustakas (1994) extends this discussion in describing the researcher’s need to set aside notions and begin with a novel perspective, often through reduction or bracketing his or her personal assumptions. Although this may be difficult because research interests often lie within topics that present familiarity, the literature states that reduction or bracketing

can be aided with the investigator acknowledging his or her position in relation to the research process (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994).

Within the current study, the phenomenon of investigation is African American students' academic/classroom and social experiences in military sponsored schools. The research attempts to describe the lived experiences of individual students through their perceptions while revealing common elements of experience across the group of students. In keeping with both the philosophical basis of interpretative and phenomenological approaches, the study attempts to develop a description of the essences of these experiences, not to serve as an explanation or analysis. What is particularly appealing in using phenomenology in this study is the way that the approach situates the researcher with respect to the topic. The researcher in this study has intimate knowledge of the phenomenon of being an African American student who attended military base schools. The use of the phenomenological approach allows for the bracketing or suspending of these personal experiences, while at the same time understanding the essence of the lived experiences that underlie the structure of the phenomenon. This approach is also well suited in addressing the purpose of this study in describing the perceptions of African American students in military base schools and the goal of capturing the essence of these students' lived (and possibly shared) experiences.

Theoretical Framework

As stated, the basic interpretive design along with dimensions of a phenomenological research approach will be used in this study. These approaches are particularly appropriate in attempting to understand and interpret the in-depth lived experiences of individuals, as well

as capturing shared experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The approach is well-suited to addressing the purpose of describing the academic and social experiences of African American students in military sponsored schools and the goal of capturing the essence of these students' lived experiences. The approach is companionable with the theoretical framework of social constructivism which underpins this study. According to Creswell (2007) this worldview provides for multiple, subjective meanings expressed by the participants. "Multiple realities exist and are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that realities are encapsulated in the form of abstract mental constructions for others to understand. This view is also compatible with the purpose of this research, "to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation" (Creswell, 2007, p. 20). Also, because of the researcher's background and experience with this topic, the social constructivist view is suitable because of its practice of positioning the researcher's voice and recognition of how her culture and lived experiences frame the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions are employed to fulfill the purpose and achieve the goals of this study. These questions are constructed to gain a clearer understanding of the perceptions and experiences of African American students in schools that serve military children:

- 1) How do African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools?
- 2) To what factors do African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success?

- 3) Do African American students in military base schools share similar academic and social school experiences?
- 4) How do African American students in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and other students inside and outside of the classroom?

Site Selection and Sample

To fulfill the goals of this research, a school site upon a military base was most favorable. The research was conducted by selecting a sample of students who attended a DoDEA district located in southeastern North Carolina. The North Carolina district is made up of sixteen schools and ties with the Fort Knox/Fort Campbell, Kentucky district in containing the largest number of military base schools located within the US. The North Carolina district is comprised of schools on a Marine Corps/Naval base and an Army installation in two separate cities. The district is contained twelve elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school. The North Carolina district was chosen for this study because of its proximity, relative accessibility, and size. The district's population had recently increased due to domestic and overseas military base realignments and closures. The community that was chosen includes students who best fit the population of interest.

The community school district of focus is led by a central office/community superintendent, which is characteristic of other military sponsored school districts and state-funded public schools. It employed over 800 educators and staff members the school district was comprised of seven schools, including four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school (DODEA Enrollment Report, 2008). The school district had a student population of roughly 3,200 students, with the majority enrolled in the elementary grades.

There were a slightly higher percentage of males. Approximately 34 percent of the students were minority with about 24 percent were African American (DoDEA Annual Report, 2006).

Access Issues

The researcher anticipated that access to the student population of interest would be a challenge. Therefore, the groundwork for building rapport for access began well before full study activities commenced. This was somewhat of an informal process which eventually developed into more formal requests beginning September 2007. Contact was first established with the director at the DoDEA headquarters research and evaluation office and details were shared about the approval process. The director outlined the requirements and process of approval that were to be followed prior to and during the research study. For example, after a thorough and lengthy formal application and approval process, (taking several months), the researcher must be escorted throughout the school grounds with an individual who is affiliated with the military in terms of active duty, civil service, or retired military status. This would be true even if the study activities were conducted after the school instructional day.

Additional informal inquiries for gaining access were sent to the director of the research and evaluation office at DoDEA headquarters. Rapport building took place through telephone conversations and e-mail correspondence. While the director expressed great interest in the topic and remained interested in the study, it was made clear that the area director of domestic schools, along with the district superintendent, and the school principal would all need to be in consensus to gain access to students. Final decisions to survey students in military base schools for research study participation rested with the school

principal, yet approval of the research request would be granted through the director of research and evaluation for DoDEA.

Upon preliminary investigation it was revealed that domestic military bases were undergoing substantial stress due to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Heavy deployments of at least one parent, research requests from government, public, and private organizations, and new school administrators all hampered efforts for the school system to grant approval to study students who were living on the military base and attending its schools. The director communicated at that time, however, that the request for access to these students may become a viable future option. The researcher more formally requested access to students for the study in February 2008 and March 2008, and was once again declined. A third request for access to students was submitted in July 2008 and was once again, the request was denied due to the same issues stated the year prior. Heavy troop deployments, administrative issues, and multiple research requests from other entities lead school executives to believe that DoDEA could not be involved in the current study activities.

Plans were implemented in August 2008 to gain access to the population of interest through the local public school system and community contacts surrounding the military base. Many potential participants were enrolled in the local state-funded public schools and participated in off base recreational activities. The public school system was contacted and project information was shared. Information was also shared with a military base school liaison within the local public schools. Access to potential participants was denied without full explanation. It is surmised that the school system prohibited the survey of students without special permission. Networking took place with state level officials who work

directly with the public schools surrounding the military base. Additionally, a discussion was also held with the state superintendent in an attempt to gain the special permission necessary to enter the public schools to conduct the research study. It was determined by the state superintendent that the final determination for public schools to participate was left to the individual public school system. The public school system, however, denied the research request in August 2009.

It was recognized that students of interest also participate in recreational activities in the local community and on the military base. The county and city parks and recreation departmental youth programs, summer and day camps, teen programs, base and public libraries, and community message boards were all solicited. After two years and one month of appeals, the researcher's request for access to potential participants was granted by a children, youth, and teen programs office aboard the base in October 2009. A program coordinator offered assistance in introducing information about the study to teens who attended after school and weekend programs.

Purposive Sampling

The nature of this study requires purposeful sampling, specifically criterion sampling. African American students of high school age, who have academic and social experiences in schools military base schools and in public schools, were the target participants for this study. In terms of sampling size, the literature related to the phenomenological approach supports a wide range in number of participants, yet ten or more participants appears to be consistently suggested (Dukes, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1989; Rieman, 1986). Eleven students were selected for this study. Because of concerns regarding the restraints of access (as

discussed above) students were selected by the program coordinator based upon criteria provided by the researcher. The criteria included the students' status as an African American being between the ages of fourteen through eighteen who possessed academic and social experiences in military base sponsored and public schools. Academic and social experiences in public schools allow for comparisons to be made across the sample, and can be effective in making the comparisons necessary to address the research. Students, who are ages fourteen through eighteen, may more adequately reflect upon and discuss their academic and social experiences within the schools than younger students. Additionally, the use of older school age participants allows for more chronological time to have attended military sponsored schools and public schools around the world, adding to a diversity of perspectives.

Adolescents were selected for this study and are of particular interest based on the literature's suggestion of a possible link between school achievement and students' beliefs and perceptions about his or her experiences in schools. Adolescent students begin to develop a more concrete academic outlook of themselves and the relationship this outlook may have with their individual academic performance in schools (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Dumais, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Honora, 2002; Mickelson, 1990).

Data Collection

Student Biographical Activity

Participants were asked to complete a brief student biographical activity. This allowed the participant to introduce him or herself and his or her initial perceptions of high school life. The activity also helped the researcher build rapport in beginning to understand the perspective of the participant. The activity was distributed in early November 2009 and

consisted of open ended questions that took no more than thirty minutes to complete. Each participant was asked to describe a typical day in his or her student life as if it were broadcasted as a television reality show. Participants were made aware that this information was used as part of the data collection and would be used in the final write up of the study results.

Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Aligned with interpretative and phenomenological inquiry, data were also collected by way of semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group interview. Semi-structured interviews are particularly well suited for studying individuals' understanding of the meanings in their lived experience (Kvale, 1996). Semi-structured interviews also provide participants with the freedom to openly express and elaborate on their thoughts and bring about additional related themes. Hatch (2002) describes semi-structured interviews as formal, researcher directed and "are in-depth in that they are designed to go deeply into the understandings of the informants" (p. 94). Interviews were conducted in person in a comfortable and professional atmosphere outside of the instructional day. The individual interview was approximately an hour, to an hour and a half in length. A primary and back up audio recorders were used and the researcher took notes during the interview. Each participant was advised of the purpose of the interview, how the data would be used in the study, and informed that their identity will be kept confidential. An interview guide and protocol were used for each interview (see the Appendices) focusing on the participant's experiences within the school environment, definition of school success, and interactions with peers and teachers in the classroom. Interviews were carefully conducted as to not

reveal the perspective of the interviewer and relevant research findings were withheld until all interviewing has been complete. During the formal interview process both the researcher and the participant are fully aware of its purpose to generate data, yet at the same time provide for a flexible verbal exchange between researcher and participant (Hatch, 2002). This is quite conducive to the constructivist theoretical approach.

Focus Groups

Along with individual semi-structured interviews, a focus group interview was also used with this sample to accomplish the purpose of this study. While individual interviews were held with all eleven students, a focus group discussion was held with five students within the sample. Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) comment that focus group interviews “can yield a great deal of specific information on a selected topic in a relatively short period of time” (p. 13). It allows for a broader pool of data, simulating discussion, naturalness of responses through its conversational nature, and sense of security if the group members are supportive. Another reason why focus groups are important to qualitative inquiry is the method’s ability to be structured in a manner that can gather diverse perspectives on a key topic. Thus, the goal is to understand multiple perspectives and perceptions as well as beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

One of the most prevalent uses of the focus group method in qualitative research is in relation to the basic interpretative design and phenomenological approaches. Focus groups used in this context help to describe the participant’s experiences and reveal the essence of the lived experience and perceptions of individuals who share a specific common characteristic or set of characteristics. Researchers are able to interpret this data and track

emerging themes from multiple individuals based on this technique. Within educational research and policy analysis, focus groups are useful in providing “an opportunity to obtain the perceptions and attitudes of key stakeholders regarding new policies or movements” (Vaughn et al., 1996, pp. 29-30).

Focus groups with adolescents are typically smaller and shorter in length. The size of the group is typically five to six participants and last approximately an hour (Vaughn et al., 1996). These provisions help to guard against potential distraction or the participants providing artificial responses. The researcher was aware that mixed gender focus groups or focus groups with students who attend the same school and attend classes together could possibly inhibit authentic responses, therefore the researcher attempted to safeguard against these situations. The researcher continually reassured participants that the focus group is a safe place to openly express their views without penalty. A tone of mutual respect and a positive communication was created at the onset of the session. The setting for the focus groups was a location that provided a comfortable and professional atmosphere, with table and chair arrangements that offered equal and easy discussion by all participants. The location was central for participants on a date and time was most agreeable to the group outside of the school instructional day. The researcher will relied upon a primary and secondary audio recorder during the focus group discussion.

As anticipated each participant spent approximately of 3 clock (contact) hours participating in this study over the course of approximately a 2 month (8 week) period. The researcher spent over 30 total clock (contact) hours collecting data from the participants.

Instrumentation and Research Questions

The individual interview and focus group guides were structured around the research questions as suggested by Kvale (1996) and Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996). Information gathered from the classroom observation protocol was interpreted based around the study's research questions. These individual interview and focus group guide are found in the Appendix. The questions prepared for the individual interview and the focus group interviews were categorized into four general topical areas including: 1) questions surrounding the participant's personal perceptions of his or her experiences in military base schools; 2) questions surrounding whether they think they have experienced positive learning outcomes and school success; 3) questions surrounding whether the participant feels that his or her academic and social experiences are unique; and 4) questions surrounding participant's relationships with teachers and peers. Participants were encouraged to share any additional thoughts and reflections that they may have after the close of each individual interview and focus group interview.

Parental consent was required prior to participation in the study considering that all of the students were under the age of eighteen. Parents/guardians and the students who agreed to participate in the study were notified in writing of the study's background and purpose and the importance of their child's participation, the confidentiality of the participant's responses, and the level and duration of commitment. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form to participate. For their participation, students and their parents/guardians were offered compensation in the form of a debit card at the end of the data collection phase and an electronic copy of the final results of the study. Approximately two months were planned

for data collection after the University granted approval to begin this phase of the research project.

Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) describes data analysis as “a systematic search for meaning” (p. 148). Data analysis focuses on themes that emerged from the data. Extensive descriptions involving the themes surrounding the academic and social experiences of the students of interest are presented. Data collected from the individual interviews and the focus group interview have been carefully transcribed from audio recordings into electronic files through a word processor. Each individual interview was kept as a separate word processed document. Notes from the student biographical activity and handwritten researcher field notes that were produced during the individual interviews and focus group were also typed into a separate word processed document. All data collected was organized and analyzed in conjunction with the researcher’s field notes. The researcher thoroughly read the transcript and field notes several times throughout the process of analysis. This was a process similar to that described by Patton (1980) where the qualitative analyst repeatedly returns to their data to ensure that it makes sense in relation to the research questions. Through reviewing the transcripts and field notes it was also noted by the researcher that patterns were emerging in the data and recognizing the point of data saturation as referenced by Creswell and Miller (2000). All of the data were manually categorized and coded through the assistance of a word processor. This is similar to the approach described by Carney, Joiner, and Tragou (1997), who explain how a word processing system can assist in filing and managing the data, allowing for ease in the manipulation of information into categories and subcategories.

To aid in the analysis process the researcher used the strategy similar to that described by Huberman and Miles (1994) in outlining a step-by-step strategy for data analysis. The structure that these authors delineate worked well for the novice researcher. The process involved writing marginal notes within the field notes and drafting a summary of the field notes which assisted in the recognition of patterns and themes. This allowed the researcher to note what she believes are larger units of general meaning (Hycner, 1985). A short list of tentative codes as described by Creswell (2007) was used. These codes were created a priori as referenced by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). The research questions served as the backdrop for each of the five tentative codes that were initially used; however the researcher was open to additional emergent codes.

These codes assisted in the development of patterns and themes that are based upon each participant's responses regarding his or her experiences. Focus was placed on common elements within the responses of each participant. Codes were counted as suggested by Huberman and Miles (1994) as these frequencies were of attention to the researcher as an indicator of shared views among participant responses. Meaning in the responses was derived by initially examining each narrative independently and then concentrating on similarities of experiences, and finally recognizing common components throughout the responses of all participants. The data were tagged or classified by themes. Baptiste (2001) describes tagging as the process of selecting parts of the data that most support the purpose of the research study. Data were displayed through the use of direct quotations from the participants, capturing his or her voice to structure meaning from the individual's lived experience. This analytic process required the researcher to critique the data and identify patterns and themes

through systematically asking questions of the data which is part of the theoretical constructivist approach. Hatch (2002) states that the constructivist researcher seeks to co-construct the meaning his or her participants bring to a concept. “The analysis will be up to describing the meaning structures participants use to understand (the concept) and the findings will logically take the form of descriptions that rely heavily on the voices” of the participants (Hatch, 2002, p. 59).

The data analysis process for this study, in sum, was characterized by four general elements including description, classification, interpretation, and presentation of the data, as outlined by Creswell (2007). The practice of transcribing, reading, and reflecting on the data lends itself to the researcher’s method of description. Coding and the emerging themes offered an opportunity for classification and interpretation of the participant’s responses to derive the essence of his or her lived experience, which was mainly presented through quotes from the participants.

Data analysis began soon after data collection commenced. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to critique the data and make adjustments to data collection instruments as necessary. The researcher remained open to this form of informal analysis, as it was valuable in enhancing the direction and course of data collection, and the study as a whole. Reflections of the formal and informal data analysis process were recorded in the researcher’s journal.

Research Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research can be defined in a broad sense as pertaining to the “relationship between an account and something outside of that account, whether this

something is construed as objective reality, as constructors of actors, or a variety of other possible interpretations” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 281). Maxwell (1992) goes on to state that validity is not an isolated property of a particular research method, but applies to the data and conclusions reached from that data.

The applicability of the concept of validity presented here does not depend on the existence of some absolute truth or reality to which an account can be compared, but only on the fact that there exist ways of assessing accounts that do not depend entirely on features of the account itself. (Maxwell 1992, p. 283)

Understanding the reality or *truth* according to the participant’s individual perceptions and experiences is fundamental to the purpose of this study. Because of this, interpretive validity is of particular attention and importance in the execution of this qualitative study. Maxwell (1992) describes interpretive validity as seeking “to comprehend phenomena not on the basis of the researcher’s perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the situated study” (p. 290). This allows meaning to be derived from the participants “in their own language” (p. 283). To facilitate this process, the use of thick description is necessary. Geertz (1973) describes thick description as meaningful images that not only speak to the richness of explanatory detail, but also situates personal perceptions and experiences within the framework of the life of each participant.

Reliability in qualitative research may be described as an assessment of how rigorously the research methods can be pressed in continuously leading to the same results (Kirk & Miller, 1984). According to Flick (2002) reliability in qualitative research relates most specifically to the full disclosure of the generation of the data, or in other words, where

it is “possible to check what is a statement of the subject on one hand and where the researcher’s interpretation begins on the other” (p. 221). Flick (2002) also comments that clear documentation and detail of procedures is needed for comparability and rechecking of the data is essential. He cautions against “frequently repeated data collection leading to the same data and results” (p. 221) because it may lead to mistrust of data dependability.

The current study is rooted in understanding the reality and truth of individuals based on their perceptions and experiences. Validity in this regard is best described as “credibility” and reliability can be equated to “dependability” as referenced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and is well-aligned with the approach of this study. Creswell (2007) comments on Lincoln and Guba (1985) in regard to thick description as used to substantiate credibility and dependability within a study. The understanding here is that credibility is built through providing detailed descriptions of perceptions and experience through direct quotes, authentic depictions of descriptions, and member checking. Dependability is built by way of thick descriptions with the researcher ensuring “that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied” (Creswell, 2007, p. 204) and that the results are not subject to change if the study were to be replicated.

Strategies used for building credibility included triangulation (through making use of multiple data sources such as the student biographical activity, the individual semi-structured interviews, the focus group interview, and the researcher’s journal), with the use of thick description that included direct quotes from participants. The researcher made use of a research journal. Strategies that were used to substantiate dependability included outlining a detailed process of data collection, clearly following all individual and focus group interview

protocols, accurately transcribing all audio recordings, and creating a standard format for all field notes as discussed by Flick (2002). An additional strategy that was employed to attain credibility and dependability was the use of critical subjectivity as described by Ladkin (2005). She references Heron and Reason (2001) in explaining that critical subjectivity allows the researcher to examine the personal frame of reference that he or she brings to study and “notice the ways in which they may be influenced by patterned responses rather than ‘in the moment’ perceptions” (p. 116). This practice of keeping in the moment added integrity to the data collection and analysis processes as well as lent credibility to the overall findings.

Safeguards Against Researcher Bias (Subjectivity Statement)

The use of elements of the phenomenological approach to inquiry present interesting challenges for the researcher, if bias is not recognized and kept in check. Phenomenologists strive to reveal the essence of the lived experience and perceptions of other individuals to discover their personal “truth” (Ladkin, 2005). The researcher, therefore, must ensure that she acknowledges her subjectivities toward the topic to ensure that the realities of the participants are authentically represented. The phenomenological process of bracketing through suspending preconceived notions and interpretation is useful in placing distance between the researcher and the participant’s experience (Hatch, 2002). In other words, this process allows the researcher to see that, “there is a world outside of me, which is independent of my interpretation of it. Knowing the ‘truth’ of that world requires me to attempt to apprehend that world prior to my interpretations of it” (Ladkin, 2005, p. 115).

There are biases regarding this topic on behalf of the researcher. I am an African American who was born on a military base. August 24, 1976 marked my first day of Kindergarten, which also happened to be my first day in a military base school. This was my very first school experience in that I did not attend day care or preschool. I attended grades kindergarten through eighth within the dependent military bases school system. Attending these schools had an enduring personal impact on me, encouraging me to “raise the bar” to achieve high academic standards. Completing my student teaching experience toward my bachelor’s degree in education and subsequently holding a full-time position in these schools shaped my teaching philosophy, encouraging me to adopt high standards and expectations for all students regardless of their circumstances. Grounded in these experiences is the belief that consistently high expectations and academic standards are inherently characteristic of the environment within military base schools. Based on anecdotal evidence and what has been documented in the research, there appears to be a perception that African American students who have attended these schools believe that they are being educated in a positive learning environment which helps these individuals realize school success. However, the question still remains as to whether these students, through their own individual voice, believe in the quality of the educational experience as a whole within these schools.

The personal perspective of the researcher in this study may be viewed as a strength in the sense that there is a deep knowledge and orientation to the topic, yet there is recognition of the challenge to keep biases in check. As mentioned above, the process of bracketing and a researcher’s journal was utilized. The research journal provided a place to openly reflect on the research process and provide “personal, honest, and reflective accounts

of the human experience of studying other people” (Hatch, 2002, p. 88). Hatch (2002) goes on to discuss how the practice of research journaling is an expansion of bracketing. He describes how journaling “gives the researcher some distance on the research process and provides a way to monitor his or her personal reactions to what is being discovered. Journal entries are useful for self-assessing researcher biases when interpreting data and for constructing the story of the research” (p. 88).

Ethical Issues

Prior to data collection the researcher gained the approval of the North Carolina State University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) and adhered to the guidelines and principles involving the treatment of research participants. Due to the participation of students under the age of eighteen, the request went under an extended Board review.

Maintaining high ethical standards was a major priority in conducting this study. This meant not only accounting for and minimizing researcher bias and subjectivities, but ensuring that participants suffered no harm. Intended and unintended consequences, whether positive or negative, potentially result from all research studies, yet the researcher had the prime responsibility of ensuring the effects experienced by the participants were minimized. Part of maintaining a principled philosophy regarding ethical standards required that the researcher provide full disclosure of the purpose of the study and how the results were to be used upon agreement of participation. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were notified in writing and were asked to sign a consent form for participation. Clarification of the obligation and time commitment to the study was provided, along with a statement that

the participant could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. While participant anonymity was not maintained because the researcher knew the identity of each participant, the written and verbal notifications included assurances of participant confidentiality.

Participant identity and responses are kept confidential. Confidentiality is maintained through the careful safeguarding, storage, and disposal of print and electronic data files. Pseudonyms are used to protect participant responses and the integrity of the data.

Since this study focuses on the perceptions and understandings of students in relation to their lived experiences it was important for the researcher to recognize that interviews could have triggered thoughts and memories that allow participants to make new connections and moments of discovery. The researcher was prepared for these events. Participants were encouraged to share any additional reflections that arose in the days following the interview(s).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A unique strength of this study is that it provides an examination of schools from the student perspective. Many studies that focus on elementary and secondary education give the vantage point of teachers and school administrators within the school setting. Students are most often directly impacted by the policies and procedural recommendations implemented toward research supported school improvement efforts. Therefore, it makes sense to deepen the knowledge base of research literature that focuses on the student perspective. In some cases where the student point of view may be given limited consideration in education studies, a deeper reflection of the manner in which students interpret their experiences of day-to-day life in schools is necessary. Listening to and actively investigating student

perceptions of experience to gauge learning is equally important as using quantitative measures (such as standardized test data) in understanding the effectiveness of teaching and learning practices. This study adds value to the body of research knowledge that reflects the students' voice, underscoring their ability to speak and the right to be heard. The student's voices are captured by way of rich, thick descriptions in the use of extensive quotes of their perceptions of school experiences. Another strength this study offers is that it presents a rare examination of the school lives of a student population that is seldom recognized in the research literature.

One reason why there is limited research literature related to the military base student population may be related to the issues of access. A significant limitation of this study surrounded issues of access to the target population of students. The federal bureaucracy and measures of protocol protracted access to the availability of participants. This impacted the time it took to gather the data and in some ways impacted the sample size. A larger sample size would have allowed for more in-depth comparisons between and among students. Additionally, only one school site that included the population of interest was accessible. The next closest site was located out of state and travel presented an economic burden to the researcher due to the limited financial resources supporting the study. An additional limitation rests in the amount of time dedicated to collect data in the field. The time frame was relatively short in capturing information in a qualitative study with elements of phenomenology. The constraint of the researcher's full-time employment impacted the overall time that could be spent in the field.

The researcher's personal perspective could have limited the study because she has a deep knowledge and orientation to the topic. To assist with the process of keeping biases in check, and as part of the practice of bracketing of experiences which is part of the phenomenological approach, the researcher kept a research journal. The research journal provided the researcher with a place to track and sort the personal reflections and impressions of the research process as a means of keeping feelings and biases in check.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the methods used for this study. A student biographical activity, individual interviews, and a focus group interview were used to conduct the data collection to reveal themes to capture the essence of the lived experiences of African American students in military sponsored schools. Issues of reliability and validity in qualitative research, researcher subjectivities, ethical issues, and study limitations have also been discussed.

The next chapter will provide a report of the findings based on the methods used in this chapter. Data analysis will focus on emergent themes. Extensive descriptions involving the themes surrounding the academic and social experiences regarding the phenomenon of being an African American student attending military base schools are presented.

Chapter Four

Findings of the Study

Introduction

Chapter Four offers findings from the study on the academic and social experiences of African American students in military base schools. This chapter focuses on themes that emerged from the data that were gathered through the focus group interview and the individual interviews conducted with African American students attending military base schools. Information was also gathered through a brief student biographical activity. Extensive descriptions involving the themes related to African American students' academic and social experiences in attending military base schools will be presented.

Review of the Purpose and Methodology of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe the academic and social experiences of African American students who attend military base schools. Military base schools are federally funded schools that are designed to educate the dependents of active duty military service personnel and some civil servants. The goal of the study is to understand the academic and social experiences of African American students who attend these schools by examining their perceptions of the learning environment. This was done in an effort to determine the characteristics that contribute to the positive learning outcomes and school success that have been documented in the research literature on military base schools. The study seeks to reveal what social interactions and relationships these students share with their teachers and how they view themselves academically and socially in comparison to their peers. Students were encouraged to compare and contrast their experiences in military

base schools with their experiences in U.S. public schools to help provide perceptions of educational quality. Social interactions and relationships were also examined to describe the relationships these students share with their teachers and peers.

To accomplish this purpose the researcher used qualitative research methods, particularly basic interpretative design as outlined by Merriam (2002) with dimensions of a phenomenological theoretical approach. In interpretative design, “the analysis of the data involves identifying recurrent themes and patterns, categories, factors, variables, and themes that cut through the data” (p. 38). The findings are a combination of recurrent patterns supported by the data from which they were gathered. Interpretative designs seek to understand these experiences and situate them within the literature. The overall analysis involves the researcher bringing forth the interpretations of the meaning of these lived experiences. In keeping with both the philosophical bases of interpretative and phenomenological approaches, the study attempts to develop a description of the essences of these experiences, not to serve as an explanation or analysis. The use of the phenomenological approach allows for the bracketing or suspending of personal experiences, while at the same time understanding the essence of the lived experiences that underlie the structure of the phenomenon. This approach is also well suited in addressing the purpose of this study in describing the perceptions of African American students in military base schools and the goal of capturing the essence of these students’ lived, shared experiences.

Participants for this study were recruited with the assistance of a youth and teen program on a military base in located in southeastern North Carolina. Eleven African American high school students who had academic and social experiences in military base

schools and in public schools participated in the study. Academic and social experiences in public schools allow for comparisons to be made across the sample and can be effective in making the comparisons necessary to address the research questions. The participants' ages in this study ranged between fifteen and seventeen years old. This age range allowed for a more extensive reflection in the discussion of academic and social experiences within the school setting than would younger students. Adolescents are of particular interest based on the research's suggestion of a possible link between school achievement and these students' beliefs and perceptions about their experiences in schools. Additionally, the use of older school age participants allows for more chronological time to have attended military sponsored schools and public schools around the world, adding to a diversity of perspectives. Parent/guardian consent was requested on the informed consent form used for this study being that all participants were under the age of eighteen. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the reporting of the data to help ensure confidentiality.

As indicated in Table 4.0 individuals participating in this study shared academic and social experiences spanning across approximately fifty military base, public, and private schools. There were a total of eleven individuals who participated in the study. The participant pseudonyms and demographic information can be found in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.0

Study Participant Reported Attendance in Military Base, Public, and Private Schools

Category	Number of Participants Reporting Attendance
Students currently enrolled in base school	10
Student(s) currently enrolled in public school	1
Total military base schools attended	33
Total state public schools attended	15
Private schools attended (in or out of state)	2
Overseas military base schools attended	4
Overseas public schools attended	1

Table 4.1

Study Participant Pseudonyms, Gender, Age, Grade Level, and Academic Year Designation

Participant (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Grade Level	Academic Year Designation
Ava	Female	16	11	Junior
Ben	Male	15	10	Sophomore
Cheri	Female	16	11	Junior
David	Male	17	12	Senior
Ethan	Male	17	12	Senior
Faith	Female	15	10	Sophomore
Gabe	Male	15	10	Sophomore
Hal	Male	16	11	Junior
Ian	Male	17	12	Senior
Jason	Male	16	11	Junior
Kalb	Male	17	12	Senior

There were a total of three female and seven male participants in the study. The majority of the participants were either in their eleventh or twelfth grade year, corresponding to being either juniors or seniors in high school. Using a purposive sample, specifically criterion referenced (African American high school students with experiences in military base and public school), participants were selected through the assistance of a youth and teen

center coordinator. Potential participants were presented with the background and purpose of the project and were asked to gain consent from their parent/guardian if they wished to participate. All names and contact information was kept confidential by the researcher. Any directly identifying information was changed, including names or identifying information for teachers, friends, and family members.

Participation in this study was completed through activities that included a brief written student biographical activity and a one-on-one or individual semi-structured interview. A subset of participants (five students) was selected to take part in a focus group interview. Selection for the focus group was based upon volunteers within the sample. Students who completed the biographical activity and the individual interview were compensated for their participation in the form a \$25.00 debit card. Those individuals who participated in the focus group interview were compensated with an additional \$10.00 debit card.

The student biographical activity allowed the participants to introduce themselves as well as helped the researcher build rapport and to begin to understand personal perspectives. The activity was distributed in late October 2009 and early November 2009 and consisted of open ended questions that took no more than 30 minutes to complete. Participants were made aware by the researcher that information from this activity would be used as part of the data collection. This activity is included in Appendix B.

Next, individual interviews were conducted based upon the participant's availability. The individual interview protocol is included in Appendix C. Each interview was conducted in person in a comfortable classroom location at one of the central teen center locations on

the base during November 2009. Each participant was reminded of the purpose of the interview, that their identity would be kept confidential, and how the information would be used in the final report. All interviews were conducted in the evening, outside of the instructional school day. Most of the individual interviews lasted approximately an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half in length. Participants appeared to be relaxed with the researcher as well as candid and verbose in their responses. The researcher used a primary and secondary audio recorder. The researcher also took handwritten notes during each interview.

The focus group interview was also conducted in November 2009. The focus group interview protocol is included in Appendix D. The focus group interview was conducted in a classroom at one of the base teen center locations. The five participants were reassured by the researcher that the group discussion was a safe place to openly express their views without penalty. Table and chair arrangements provided for equal and easy access for discussion by all participants. A tone of mutual respect and positive communication was created at the onset of the session. After introductions and preliminaries the participants appeared to be relaxed and natural in the researcher and in one another's presence, being forthcoming with their responses. The researcher once again used two audio recorders, with one serving as back up. Handwritten notes were also taken by the researcher during the focus group interview.

In terms of the total data collection it is estimated that the researcher spent over 30 total clock (contact) hours collecting data from the participants. Data was stored electronically. Data collected from the student biographical activity, the individual

interviews, the focus group interview, and all handwritten notes were carefully transcribed and transferred into electronic files through a word processor. All data collected from the biographical activity, the individual interviews, and the focus groups was organized and analyzed separately and then in conjunction with one another. The researcher thoroughly read the individual interview and focus group transcripts and notes several times throughout the process of analysis. All of the data were filed and managed electronically, allowing for ease in manipulating the information. The information was then manually coded into categories and subcategories.

The data analysis strategy used was similar to that described by Huberman and Miles (1994) outlining a step-by-step process for analysis in the recognition of patterns and themes. This allowed the researcher to note the larger units of meaning. A short list of tentative codes was generated. The research questions served as the backdrop for each of the five tentative codes that were initially used; however, the researcher was open to additional emergent codes. These codes assisted in the development of patterns and themes that were based upon each participant's responses regarding his or her experiences. Focus has been placed on common elements within the responses of each participant. Meaning in the responses was derived by initially examining each narrative independently and concentrating on similarities of experiences, and finally recognizing common components throughout the responses of all participants. Coding and the emerging themes offer an opportunity for classification and interpretation of the participant's responses. Data is displayed through the use of direct quotations from the participants, capturing his or her voice to structure meaning from the individual's lived experience.

The current study is rooted in understanding the reality and truth of individuals is based on their perceptions and experiences. Validity or “credibility” and reliability or “dependability” are accomplished through the thick description used to substantiate findings as seen in the quotes from the participants. Multiple data sources such the student biographical activity, the individual interviews, and the focus group interview were used to triangulate the data. The researcher also made use of a research journal to assist in the process of bracketing, which is used with phenomenological research. Reflections of the formal and informal data analysis process were recorded in the researcher’s journal. The use of a research journal also facilitated critical subjectivity in allowing the researcher to examine her personal frame of reference, being an African American student who once attended military base and public schools. This practice of keeping in the moment added integrity to the data collection and analysis process as well as lent credibility to the overall findings.

Research Questions and Themes

The following research questions were explored in of the study. These questions were constructed to gain a clearer understanding of the perceptions and experiences of African American students in military base schools:

1. How do African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools?
2. To what factors do African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success?
3. Do African American students in military base schools share similar academic and social school experiences?

4. How do African American students in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and other students inside and outside of the classroom?

The following common themes emerged from the data analysis:

- School experiences
- Perceptions of school quality
- Factors attributed to academic success
- Common/similar experiences
- Relationships with teachers and peers

Each of these themes relates to an overarching research question. As each theme is presented below in the Findings section, the corresponding research question will be addressed.

Description of Findings

The following report of the data has been written in both aggregate terms and individual responses. Individual responses and the use of direct quotes from subjects are important because the nature of the project involves the study of the participants' individual perceptions of their academic and social school experiences. The data analysis process for this study, in sum, is characterized by four general elements including description, classification, interpretation, and presentation of the data as outlined by Creswell (2007). As noted by Hatch (2002, p.59), "The analysis will be up to describing the meaning structures participants use to understand (the concept) and the findings will logically take the form of descriptions that rely heavily on the voices" of the participants."

Research Question 1: How do African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools?

School Experiences – Participants were asked to describe their overall impressions of the schools they attended. Many compared their academic and social experiences in base and public schools. These findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“It is a little different from public schools, base schools are strict on more things, that is also good, more people “believe” when they are strict. The curriculum is different; how we do our classes are different. It could be easier in public schools because there are fewer classes. We do eight classes and they just have four classes a semester. That is just how we do it differently but that is harder. It keeps you up on your work. You have to do it. That is one thing that I feel good about because I can get my work done. Certain classes on base have more than 25 students; a lot of them have less than that. We do not have a big school [on base] probably four to five hundred students in the school.” (*Ava, age 17*)

“In base schools it’s pretty good. It is pretty friendly. I first came to [current base community] in fifth grade. I made a lot of friends because I was pretty shy, but then again, I was out going. When you are outgoing with them, and you do not try too hard, they will accept you...it is pretty easy to get accepted. I think it’s because so many people come in and out and we are just used to people coming in so we are just accepting and won’t make them feel awkward or anything. There is not a lot of kids, so if you really needed help you could get it. Cause like most teachers care about you

and they will answer any questions that you have, but if you are at a really big school the teachers wouldn't really know you or really care about you really. In base schools most teachers know your name, like, it is pretty fun." (*Ben, age 15*)

"From what my friends in public schools say it's just different to hear how their schools work than the way our school works, I guess. So that's usually what we talk about when I talk to my other friends that go to out in town [public] schools because different things, like our schools the way that our schedule is set up. You take eight classes, four quarters, each semester. They take only four classes. And...like, there are some things that I would like, the way that they describe it I would like to go to out in town schools than base schools, then I like base schools because our academics are higher than out in town schools. Academics are a big thing. It is a big thing when you are trying to go to college. We know that colleges look at academics. I would say that academics are hard. I would like to have an athletic scholarship but just to know that I have like better education than some people, like are receiving or learning something different than other people are receiving. I appreciate the kind of schooling that I get. I guess, many of the people who live on base used to go out in town school. And there are a lot of people in base schools who have moved in and out constantly, so it is like if you met a new friend and they moved it is just good that you can keep in contact because you don't know if you will ever see them again because military schools are always changing, compared to out in town schools people are usually there for what seems like forever! That is like the big thing right there." (*Cheri, age 16*)

“Base schools are a little stiff, they need to be updated. They don’t seem to bend too much toward anything new, and it’s the same old same old and it is alright. Really in the world we are now if we don’t change with the times we’re stuck in the past. They teach us all these things, especially history and they say that we learn it so that we don’t repeat the mistakes of the past. Yet we are stuck in the past at school having outdated materials and learning lessons. One of the things that I might try to explain is that a lot of other foreign countries do more actual, pushing of their students to use technology that is on hand using new ways of learning like in math. They might say if you can do the problem like this, do it on computer or; maybe even have the students make up their own problems, turn it in and have other students do their own work, let them teach themselves.” (*David, age 17*)

“I think it is a nice, safe environment in base schools. You are not going to worry about anything bad happening. It is like when you go in there you feel from [the start] you are in a safe environment. I was in a really bad public school, there were like really bad clubs at school and you would go in there and we had metal detectors going into my school! Everyday before school you would go through a metal detector and then you would go through another one and they would wave you up and down to see if you had anything. So coming from a school like that to a military school you feel much safer, just from that. I think the teachers are highly qualified to do a good job. They really know what they are doing. They just don’t teach you random stuff they have a curriculum that they stick to throughout the year. Base school teachers are highly qualified because of the way they teach, but also like

the first day of school we get to know each other they give us a copy of their resume. They pass it around and they explain what they have done and what they did in college throughout their teaching experiences. Then you feel like teachers really care about you or what not, they check to learn your name and stuff like that. So like it was not like, 'hey you, come here!' They actually called you by your first name or called you "mister" or whatever. They take time out. If you took a test and you didn't do so good on it they say, 'see me after class and they will take time out of their planning period to sit down with you and the test to see what you could have done to get a better grade. That could be you doing extra credit next time or something like that. Public school was nice, but the grading policy was a lot easier. In public schools I use to get all A's pretty much. When I went to DoDEA school it is a 10 point grading scale but it is a lot harder to get and maintain good grades. It shows that you are learning a lot more stuff. They have something called EL [Extended Learning] it is like a learning period. If you need help with a class you can go and get help. That is the difference between public schools and DoDEA schools too, cause they actually have periods of time that you can go and get help if you don't understand." (*Ethan, age 17*)

"Public school is more crowded in a way to me. A lot of teachers have no patience. When I talked to my friends in public schools who go to public schools now they say public schools are crazy. It is usually big and teachers, they don't really have one-on-one conversations with people usually. They all teach school and at the big public schools and small public schools that is pretty much the same. In public

school, there is only one teacher who would take time to help you out. In public schools there is maybe two teachers who talk to each other. In base schools, it is close-knit it; is more family. It is easier to get by. There is not too much, like hectic. I can talk to my teacher anytime and any place, because like most of the time the classes are smaller and it is easier to talk to them. I have no idea why! They are like so easy to talk to! Teachers are just nicer. When I am walking around I see teachers talking to teachers all the time. Mostly in base schools it is like all teachers really help you out. They have a lot of meetings and talk to each other a lot. I think teachers maybe talk more than in public schools. They converse, like the math teachers all talk to each other, the English teachers all talk to each other about the students and things. Yeah, yeah. Their talking helps.” (*Faith, age 15*)

“The overall experience is good in base schools I would say. I’d have to say that it is very different, very different. There are a lot of different things, places you go you find things. The military schools on base, they command people much different; it is a lot more segregated than you would think. You come to a military base school you have all types of ethnicities and people. But as you get older you get more encounters and relationships that find their way into your life. Like when I was younger it seemed like school was just school. Everyone just flowed in and stayed together. Now there is a lot more diversity as you get older. You can tell that certain things or situation of race is different. Even now people look at you as though you don’t belong. It was the use of the “N” word. I found that very offensive. It hit me,

like the world is, we still have a lot of problems, really.... even in base schools, people may not always be as inviting.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“In base schools it has been really easy to be in classes. There are distractions but I feel like it is easier to learn, compared to public schools, maybe. Oh, yes, a lot different (than public schools). There was a lot of trouble, kids fighting. We had more than one police officer! It was like everybody was always saying bad things, doing bad things. I try to stay away from trouble. My parents (say) you don’t need to get in trouble. Military schools help you to stay out of trouble. I know that if I do this I will be kicked off base with my family. You have to leave, so you try to do good. There is not as much commotion. Everything seems more organized. It is friendly. There is not much trouble to get into. Everybody is nice; most of the people are nice. It is a pretty good environment to be in; it feels safe. We have a cop at our school for safety. You know that you have friends everywhere, especially in the school I go to, it is small so you really don’t make enemies per say. It is easy to make friends. The grading system is easy, it is not hard. You have to work hard, but it is not easy to fail as it is in public schools. Teachers will help you when you need it as long as you are not like... I can’t think of the word. Like if they see that you have a look on your face like, “oh, I am lost” you are saying you understand but you really don’t know what is going on.” (*Hal, age 16*)

“The base does not have a really big high school. Everybody knows each other and everybody gets along because everybody is used to moving around and they know how it feels. It is not a big school and everybody just knows everybody. On

base, everybody knows the feeling of being new. In base schools the principals show their faces and come out. At my current public school I don't see the principal. I know her name, but I don't see her. It is a bigger school, so it feels more like a high school atmosphere. There are a lot more people. Public schools out in town it is pretty much that everybody has been there since like second grade on up. If you are new you have to find your way around here yourself. I feel that the work is a lot easier in public schools. I went from the ten point [grading] scale to the seven point scale, it is pretty tough." (*Ian, age 17*)

"I really like the base schools. I have been out in town and they are not as nice. I can say that. When I was in off base [public] schools the kids did not treat me as nice as I thought they would. I had been on base then I went off base. They weren't as friendly as they were on base. I would rather go to a base school than public school because the teachers know you and they help you with everything they can help you with."(*Jason, age 16*)

"It would probably be completely different. Yes, there are differences in where people come from. Public school is different than base school. There are fewer people at my base high school. It is good, it is easy. The work makes it easy; school work and the way the school is ran. The teachers are not really disciplined. They don't give hard work really." (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of School Experiences

Participants described their overall impressions of both military bas schools and public they attended. Participants commented on similarities and differences in their

academic and social experiences on both types of school campuses. Academic experiences on military base schools appeared to be favorable and the social environment was depicted as welcoming, especially in comparison to public schools.

Perceptions of School Quality – Researchers and policy analyst often measure school quality through student pass/fail rates, standardized test scores, student dropout and graduation rates, and college attendance. Participants were asked if they believed that military base schools do a good job in helping students pass to the next grade level and obtain high scores on standardized tests. They were also asked if they believed the schools helped prevent students from dropping out of school, graduate from high school, and go to college and/or obtain future employment. These findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“I feel they give a lot of classes for you to get a lot of credits to help you pass. They teach well in explaining things. I think so because we take a lot of tests that help us. Before we take the Terra Nova, in each class they go over things that might be on the Terra Nova to help us prepare. Terra Nova is the test you take to see how much you learned over the years. They probably talk to students but we do have people who did drop out. The counselors probably talked to them about it but they decided to drop out. They do a pretty good job of helping students graduate.” (*Ava, age 16*)

“In helping students pass to the next grade level, it’s yes and no. They do because we have eight classes, but for base schools it is hard to balance eight classes. It helps if you went to college and had a lot of classes and a lot of work in all of those classes all at once. That is pretty good for us. And no because most of the time they

will pass you even if you have a bad grade, so it is pretty bad. I know of a lot of instances where that has happen. They have a pretty good teaching program. Since we have eight classes on a block schedule we have to remember stuff from the beginning of the year and take it to the end of the year and it is kind of hard for some students to process that and keep that in their minds through the whole year. We have to [remember] from the start to the end, beginning to end (for standardized tests). They actually care and other high schools where they really don't care. Some teachers come to you if you are missing something. Like if you are missing an assignment when you are absent, they might come to you, but some teachers won't, so it is like all part of being responsible. It all goes back to caring for students. Most teachers want you to graduate and they want you to go to college. Especially like my AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] teacher, she has basically class that helps you get ready for college, getting your applications and all your SATs down, they make sure you have it all." (*Ben, age 15*)

"Umm... I guess now they are more aware of drop outs. The senior class is probably about fifty people. This year they incorporated this thing called the Big 6. Basically, it's six steps in problem solving strategies. They try to incorporate that everywhere. We actually have to know the Big 6 because [school administrators] who come down here and want to see what strategies we take [to prevent] failing. So now [base schools] are really trying to incorporate the Big 6. It is more work ... but it is really good! It's, let's see, what are the six steps...I think the first is called task definition, you have to know what [the] task is and understand what it is. The second

one... is umm...I believe...what is it? We're gonna skip the second one! The third one is umm...location and access, basically where are you going to get your information from? How are you going to get it? The fourth one is use of information, like how would you use it, as in like you interviewing me, or like getting it from a book, and like how are you going to use it? The fifth one is synthesis and where you put it all together, and the sixth one is evaluation and you know what you did. The second one...umm. It is right there on the tip of my tongue because it has something to do with information I couldn't get the second one all the time. Actually [the Big 6] started toward the end of last year. I remember we had judging...how we could incorporate the Big 6. Plus I didn't really want to do it! But umm... now this year it is really a big thing. Now that they incorporated the Big 6 in here now when you get more into the higher upper grade levels is when they say more about colleges and tests and all that instead of the lower levels, of course they are going to touch on it because they want people to go to college, but it is not really a big thing until you become an upper classman, I guess. They try to from what I see, they try to. But if you don't want to go to college they are not going to say like we are not going to judge you from it. If you say you are stupid, but you are going to have to make it on your own. It is just something that you have got to do, you have to work to get there. If you don't and you slack off, that is fine, that is how it is. But a person doesn't want their children to drop out of school. There are some people who just don't want to try, and teachers are trying to help them over and over again. That is what teachers do; they try to help you over and over again. If you are missing work, they try to let you

turn it in late; they already busy from grading 200 other papers. They have to keep back tracking and then [grade] your paper. They do try to help children, but the people who don't want help, you can't help somebody who doesn't want to get help. That is like my language arts teacher now; she is teaching college prep to juniors and she really wants us to do good on our SATs because she really cares about them. She does this thing called "What's the Word" and it's like a vocabulary exercise where you use the SAT words. We do a lot of SAT type things; she even gives us the PSAT...she gives us certain things about the SATs. I know if you look at our senior classes I don't think that you can't find anyone who just didn't want to go to college. Maybe last year's senior class went a little crazy, but they still had to determine that they were going to college. Most of our classes actually do go to college. There are probably just a few that didn't." (*Cheri, age 16*)

"They do a decent job, in helping students pass to the next grade level but they can do better. They need to update the materials. I feel like school is hard, but it should be a little bit harder. Make us learn that extra mile. One thing teachers have talked about is that a lot of the other foreign countries, school curriculum are on a much higher scale than ours. Our nation is supposedly falling behind them. It is not going to be good for the future. Our economy is already bad as it is. If this continues, who knows what will happen. Usually for standardized tests they like to prep us to make sure that we can understand a lot of the materials before the test is given, also teaching us lessons inside class. We take the PSAT and I have taken the SAT. Base schools do a decent job with tests. That one could be improved because they want us

to graduate and go to a higher learning. They want us to succeed but they also want us to just finish this and that is it. They want to make sure that you get out of school and get done with whatever you do after that. I would like to see them do more in getting students active on what they want to do, maybe. A lot of kids in my class haven't figured out what they want. I found my interest and I had the teacher who expressed that they have done this, and I said, "Okay that seems fun, maybe I should take that as well." Some teachers like to talk to us and say, "Oh, this would be a good career choice." One thing that we had was a computer class that gave us certain tests based on our personalities and what subjects we like that found out what jobs we would like or could apply for. I got to see different types of jobs, different types of jobs for scientists and careers...like being an auto technician, a computer support person, or an astronaut, a lot of things. It gave me a broader spectrum of what I can do." (*David, age 17*)

"Yeah, I think so. We have some students that if you didn't do satisfactory during the school year you have summer school. We also have Homework Zone every Monday and Wednesday and I think that maybe Thursday and Friday. They arrive to school [and] go in there for about an hour and a half. Most teachers are in there and they help you with your homework to get done with it. During lunch you can also go to the library and get help with your homework too. So like our school does a lot to get the students to pass to the next grade. My junior teacher, she does a really good job at helping us prepare for the SAT. During the whole year she stresses it. Junior year is about the time that we take the SAT. At the back of the room you

check out SAT books for free anytime to study. The class assignment is that everybody goes up and gets a College Board account. College Board has an account that everybody gets starting their junior year. You've got all the colleges on there and their requirements. You can send them your SAT scores and ACT scores and all those tests. You can also sign up for tests on there too. You can also send your transcript on College Board. I don't know about sophomores and freshmen because I don't think that they know about it. But for juniors it is a major grade, you automatically get a zero for [not completing] that assignment and will pretty much mess up your whole grade. I know a couple people that were here when I was a sophomore. I know that they dropped out. There is this one student that dropped out but came back, but he told me that they when you drop out you have to see the guidance counselor to try to talk you out of it or whatever. They try to talk you into doing something different. He ended up dropping out, but he got a GED the last time I heard from him. So I don't really know if that is a good thing or a bad thing. Yeah, I think that base schools put more emphasis on goals they have for graduation. Every year the guidance counselor comes in class and says that they want this year to be the one to ever have 100 percent of students graduate. That had never happened before, but they come in and stress it. They take time out of our English and government classes to show us our transcripts all through the previous years and we look at it each class, one by one, and see what credits we need to graduate. So they can match your [next] schedule according to your transcripts." (*Ethan, age 17*)

“I think, yeah, they do! Academics at [base high school name] come first. A lot of times our sports are not really out there because we are mostly working on our grades. Being that way, you can pass to the next grade. Because most of us have all passed, I have never had a friend held back when I was in base schools. We take a lot of time talking about testing and practice testing. They give you a lot of information. We take the Terra Nova. Most students stay in school. Base school is not easy, but it is kind of easy compared to public schools. Public schools don’t really care, ‘like go ahead and drop out, it is not going to affect me!’ At our school they try to talk you out of it. Our guidance counselors make sure that we have everything and all of our graduation requirements. Sometimes during classes, they will come out to classes and do a schedule and ask you what you need and tell you what you need educationally, like do you take two math [classes] next year. They tell you what you need to graduate. They have the AVID [Advancement Via Individual Determination] program and there are a lot of college things. We have to do better to go to college, get a career. There is a lot of stuff around here that makes you interested or get excited about going to college.”(Faith, age 15)

“There are positives and negatives. I feel that as a military base school they do ensure a lot of safety and the core curriculum is tied to things that we are supposed to learn. However, if you look at schools out in town or maybe across county or so, their curriculum is a lot higher than ours, but it is on the same grade level. They are here higher and we are here lower, what happens when we meet up? They are a lot higher than us. With higher I mean it’s harder and the teachers. In some situations I

go to church out in town and there are students that go to my church who are from out of town. We will be doing stuff that they did last year at the end of the year or the beginning of the year. You have to wonder... if they are this much ahead of you where am I? They teach us how to take tests. Sometimes it will be a week before the tests and stuff, they give you test taking strategies and things of that nature, especially my language [arts] teacher. She has these things called journals. We write in our journals and a lot of the times she has SAT questions. We have to define all of the words and pick which one we think is the answer and why. Then she will go over the question, she will explain why it was chosen, we will write the question down and we go over the answer, things of that nature. I feel like that is very helpful, going over the information. I have it ready to use. We have very good counselors with the school and they are in connection with our colleges and most of them will help you to send out applications or give you places for interviews. Especially for the juniors they are always going around talking to some people, 'you can go to college here, you could get a job here.' They tell you how. The counselors do it for all students. My freshman year we all took a class period out to talk about where we want to go to college and what to do. They talk to you and ask you where you want to go, what job you want. They give you pointers on how to get there. Honestly, I would have to say they are not so good with dropouts. In most cases there is really not a way to get around that urge to drop out. I believe my friend said the senior drop out rate was immensely high. That is what he said. I think 100 or so graduated and there were maybe 200 in the class. But my freshman year I thought it was very high." (*Gabe, age 15*)

“Sometimes I think they do, and other times teachers they’ll sometimes maybe say that they will help you, but when they help you, you still don’t understand. Maybe they won’t give you the materials you need to help you learn better. People learn differently. We do a lot of practice tests and the pre-SAT, and the teachers do care and tell you that this might be on your Terra Nova, different tests we take. We take a lot of pre-tests. I think they do a good job of keeping students from dropping out. We have had a couple of drop outs at our school, but people come back to school. We have had some people drop out and come back. I think that the grading scale is a little lenient in military base schools. The grading scale, it is easier to get by. What is a B in a military school it might be a D in the public school. Maybe if you are in a public school you would be a poorer student. You have to work harder. I am not saying that I have to work hard. Base schools do a good job on people going to college.” (*Hal, age 16*)

“Yes, I honestly do believe base schools a good job in helping students pass to the next grade level. I probably would have never said yes if I did not go to a public school. I go to a public school now and I realize that public schools their whole thing is for you to want to pass. If you don’t want to pass then they are going to try to push you on to pass. Their grading will get you out of it. As far as on base, they try to get you to the next level. They really push us to go to college. They give out scholarships every year. I think that dropping out... has a lot to do with parents. Parents with kids in the military [schools] are rule enforcers, so they don’t want their kids to drop out, or even allow their kids to drop out. After going to a base school

you have more advantages. DoDEA has higher standards than all the public schools. There are benefits, yeah.” (*Ian, age 17*)

“Yes, base schools they work with you and if you are not doing so good in the subject they will pull you aside and say, ‘okay you need to work on this and if you need help just let me know.’ Yes...my language arts teacher gives us a journal everyday we come in to help us with tests. Sometimes there are PSAT questions from old PSATs and she helps us know what we are talking about when we are doing those questions. She helps us figure out what to look for. Most teachers try to work with you to keep you from dropping out. They are not trying to be mean to you and they are not trying to get at you and stuff. Yes, these schools help you graduate because in public schools you are kind of just like a number. In base schools it is so small that teachers actually know you and can help you with what you need. They can give you more advice in what you could do and what you shouldn’t do.” (*Jason, age 16*)

“Yes. They give us a lot of opportunities. They might switch your classes around during a semester to help you to make sure you pass that class during that semester. Yes, we take practice tests before we take the real one. We have to take the Terra Nova and SAT. We take the PSAT. In a way they do keep students from dropping out. They try to give students better opportunities. You get help in the classes here.”(*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Perceptions of School Quality

Participants appeared to believe that their academic and social experiences in military base schools were of sound quality. Many of the students mentioned that the schools focused on preparation for college through providing curricular assistance and standardized test preparation from teachers. The school reinforced messages of passing to the next grade level and staying in school, although some participants knew of students who dropped out of school. The implementation of a program to promote problem solving skills and strategies was also mentioned.

Summary of Findings: Research Question 1

This section synthesized the responses in addressing the first research question of how African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools. Themes that developed through an examination of the data include a description of mainly classroom experiences containing a snapshot of the role that teachers play in the learning process. Most participants compared their military base school experiences with public schools, and in a few instances, to private schools. As previously mentioned a subset of study participants took part in a focus group that included a discussion of overall school experiences in base schools where this comparison continued. As in the individual interviews, participants in the focus group tended to agree that the military base school academic and social atmosphere was different that what they experienced in public schools. The majority of the group found the experiences to be favorable. They discussed many of the social aspects in terms of moving from one military base to another and making friends. They also expressed in the focus group, as in the individual interview, that school

quality indicators (such as student pass/fail rates, standardized test scores, graduation and college preparation) mattered and that military base school attendance positively impacted their personal performance in terms of these indicators. While some public schools are better than others, the general perception was that military base schools cared more about the students and the student learning process; for learning in and of itself. This is opposed to performance on summative tests, social promotion/passing or graduating students although they may have a very low grade point average. This was reflected in the individual interview and in the following focus group exchange:

Ava: "I think it does. I think off base [public school] is more lenient than on base".

Cheri: "I agree. In base schools, as soon as you get to the higher grades they really try start to crack down on you 'this is your future or whatever' and all that other stuff."

Ava: "Off base [public schools] they don't care!"

Ben, Ethan, Cheri: "Yeah, they don't care! If you pass you pass, they don't care."

Ben: "Off base they care about the EOCs [state end-of-course test] or something like that. You just go to class to try to pass that. You pass that, you pass the class!"

Ethan: "On base you have to have a 2.0 to graduate and that is for all four years. You got to have a 2.0."

Ava, Cheri, Ben, David, Ethan: "Yeah, that's right!!!"

The examination of data continues with the presentation of the second research question and the themes that were derived from the analysis.

Research Question 2: To what factors do African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success?

Factors Attributed to Academic Success – The research suggests that student beliefs about their individual achievement and perceptions about the learning environment in schools contributes to positive learning outcomes. Participants were asked to define school success and a positive learning environment. They were also asked if they believed they were a successful student. These findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“Graduating. Graduating gets you college, graduating gets you to a good job. Make sure that you get all of your credits, even more if you can. [In a positive learning environment] a teacher that makes sure that you understand or asks the individual ‘do you understand?’ and is willing to take questions when they ask and thoroughly teaches it and explains everything that they are talking about. Especially in math, they really have to do that. Yes, I am a successful student because I make good grades!” (*Ava, age 16*)

“Getting all A’s, being able to balance extra curricular activities like basketball and other clubs, like SGA, student government. If you can still balance that and get A’s and a couple of B’s then I think that is successful. [In a positive learning environment] students aren’t bad, like that really gets on my nerves. When the student tries to disrupt the class or tries to be the class clown. That really messes me up. Umm, I think I am successful because I barely missed the principal’s list, so I got on

the honor roll and I only had two B pluses, so I did pretty good this quarter.”(*Ben, age 15*)

“Getting good grades, it would be a big thing, but there are also little things that will help you get good grades as in being organized, understanding what you are learning, and taking classes that you will be interested in taking in college. Just excelling in what ever you want to do basically... a positive learning environment would be an environment that has a lot of support, so since our school is so small, then classes are small so you get more attention from the teachers. Sometimes with out in town [public] schools they have more people. Here you get more one-on-one. I am really cool with them. They really care about your academics and they will really try to help you like excel in your academics. She really cares about us and our grades. And that is why I got an A in her class. Yes, I am a successful student. Well coming far from freshman year, I would probably say no because I had poor grades freshman year because I joked around a lot. When you got through high school you get more mature. So now I think I am more successful now that my grades have actually come up a lot.” (*Cheri, age 16*)

“Personal success during school would probably be understanding the materials that are given to you and being able to learn in the school without any distraction or hindrances, an environment where learning is varied, where learning is not just the same stuff over and over again; where classes offer a lot more learning materials in the subject. I believe that I might be a successful student. Some of my teachers might beg to differ. I like to do my work, but one thing I find about myself

is that I will be bored in class. Really, my problem is that I get bored in class because the materials are the same over and over. One of my math teachers, I liked him and he was a good teacher, but the materials were always the same and it was easy. I would always just sleep in class whenever I was done with my work because there's nothing keeping my attention. I want to learn it is just that it is hard to learn...like it is hard to make learning fun. On TV they are like 'learning is power!' this and that and it seems like it is great, but sometimes it seems boring. Preschool building blocks and putting blocks through little circles seems more interesting than some of the stuff at our school and some of the public schools." (*David, age 17*)

"Of course it would be good grades. I would say having a class discussion and I feel like I really GOT that discussion, I say 'I really got that!' I feel proud of myself like other people don't know what they are talking about and I KNOW what is being talked about! I feel good about myself, that I have learned something today. I will learn when the teacher calls us to the board.. If I don't get it he will correct me or she will correct me. When I go to the board I get it more. Some people get it by listening, and I have to get it by actually doing it. That is something different about myself. Yeah, I do believe that I am a successful student. It is only in some classes though. I am really good in math, so I have always done good in math. English I use to have a little trouble with. I can read and all that stuff, but like the high level words, I can't like handle what some of them words mean." (*Ethan, age 17*)

"It depends on how your standards are. School success (pause) like my success for school is that I try to pass everything. I do the best I can at anything,

especially like math and science. It is just my weak point. But you try to succeed in everything so that you can graduate. [In a positive learning environment] teachers understand students and students can talk. There is no, how shall I say it...there is no animosity. Know how kids now a'days kids are so rude and disrespectful and it is better now... It is just easier to learn. There [are] not a lot of people in class and the teacher usually takes time to answer questions. If there is not that many people you can do that. It is not like you have to wait after class, usually you have to do that [in a public school]. I suppose I am successful! I could do better, but time management is my goal I have to reach.” (*Faith, age 15*)

“School success to me is comprised of making A’s and B’s, a good GPA. Along with the A’s and B’s, [being] a core student, a lot of clubs, athletics, respectable, good behavior. A successful student is always having someone who will be there for you or by you. A positive learning environment is a safe environment for me. If I am safe, I do not have to worry about the guys to my right or left hurting me. I can focus more on school. I have talked to my parents about how safety is always a thought in the back of my head. I try to always think about how I would react if I had to protect myself and learning at the same time. Overall, I believe I am a successful student. Every progress report meeting or other meeting, it has mostly been positive about me.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“I think that passing all your classes with maybe A’s and B’s. Going to college, getting your degree, a good job defines success. [A positive learning environment] does not have distractions; the teacher, she is willing to help and she is

not always yelling. I try to be successful. I think that I do good in most classes. I try hard. I try hard, but I make B's. I know that I can do better than that; my parents know I can do better than that; my teachers know that I can do better than that. I think that maybe I spend too much time trying to make friends with everybody and need to focus on my school work more." (*Hal, age 16*)

"I have a different kind of perspective. I honestly feel to be successful in life you have to get the work done. I rather get it done that to do without. I would say a clean, drug-free, crime free community [is positive]. Everyone looks out for everyone. Yes, ma'am. I am successful. I have never failed a grade before. I am on my way to graduating, hoping that everything goes good. I have a B once on my report card. I have never had below a 2.0 grade point average." (*Ian, age 17*)

"Paying attention, try your best in everything. Don't slack off because that won't get you anywhere. When someone tells you to do something, do it with all that you can, like to the best of your ability. Where people are friendly and people do not bully you feel comfortable in the environment. Yes, I am successful because I try to do everything I can. When I have a task I try to do it all now. I don't try to slack off and that's what makes me a successful student." (*Jason, age 16*)

"Do your work and be a good student. How you carry yourself outside of school. Be good. Be very respectful. Yes, I am successful. I am respectful." (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Factors Attributed to Academic Success

The participants were asked to define school success and a positive learning environment. Many students stated that they believed school success involved making good grades and demonstrating the pro-social behaviors that will help them gain and maintain good grades. Most all students reported that they believed they were academically successful in school. A positive learning environment was described as one that felt supportive and was free from threats of school violence.

Factors Attribute to Academic Success: Contributions and Detractions

Participants were asked what elements in the school environment contribute or detract from their personal success in schools and whether they feel motivated to learn. The following findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“What makes me want do it is [sports] so that I can stay on the team. And getting all the homework, we have so much homework sometimes. I procrastinate sometimes when I think with all the homework we have, I wait. How many classes you have a day determines how much you have to do. I try to do all of it for that day.... After practice I go home and do homework.” (*Ava, age 16*)

“I am a better student when I am working hands on; I like working hands on I like when the teacher, not when she takes it slow, but when we have to ask questions...I want the teacher to stop and ask if there are any questions because some teachers will just go through the whole (lesson) and they will not let you ask questions until the end. That is hurtful on my part. I can't grasp it unless it is taught

maybe once or twice, twice or three times. I get distracted when kids walk in when the teacher is teaching. When other kids prevent you from learning that is what messes me up.” (*Ben, age 15*)

“It seems like freshman year it was the teachers that I probably had probably like detracted from my successfulness. Coming from 8th grade to high school I tried doing Algebra because I knew that that I was smart, even though I may not seem smart to some people. I stuck with Algebra that year and I believe that the teachers that I had weren’t very good teachers that taught me. Probably did not teach the way that I would learn. They just put things on the board and think that I am going to understand it. No, I am not going to understand it. I have to do it for my own self. So like the teachers I have now for Algebra II she shows us how, if you need help she will come over and show you and teach you until you actually understand it. That is why I think it propels my success. I am motivated to learn and I like learning new things. That is one thing about me, I love learning new things. I guess it is a good thing right now to be more successful.” (*Cheri, age 16*)

“The things that make me feel motivated to learn would be...one of the classes that might be a good example is science. Science likes to vary things; it likes to challenge you by expanding some of the ways that you learn through labs and experiments, a little bit of worksheets here and there with tests. A lot of my science teachers in the past have done things like mini quiz bowls. A lot of teachers are starting to pick up on that. It pushes the students to say okay, let’s make learning fun and competitive. Let’s make these students want to know what the material is. Those

types of things push me and make me happy. That is what kept my attention. Things that might have detracted from it are probably just doing the same thing over and over, like reading a book, answer the questions that are in the back, turn it in and that is it. The next day, sit down, take notes. Like sometimes teachers have us take notes that are actually in the book! I know that is good for repetition, but it just gets boring after a while. Why am I writing this when I could just open the book and read it? I was placed in AP [Advanced Placement class] but I had certain hard times because the teacher was very boring. A lot of the students in our class, I would talk to them afterward and I would be like is this motivating at all? The majority of them weren't but some were like, 'I just want to do the work and get it over with.' With me, if I am not motivated I won't be able to do anything. I ended up having to drop that class. It was the way that the work was presented. Whenever I've done projects I have excelled very high on those the majority of the time because it was a way for me to be creative and it changed the way we learned. My teacher always put that point on my project and said that I did very well! But on basic work that was repetitive and just boring I just couldn't do it." (*David, age 17*)

“Where I sit in class helps. When I sit in front I have to pay attention and cannot go to sleep because I am right in front of the room. I tell the teacher to put me in front of the class, or if the teacher asks if you are by anyone talking please get up and move now, and I was really the only one that will do that and move away from my friends in class. That is one way that contributes, like sitting away from my friends and going in my own way. In middle school I used to sit in back with all my

friends and they used to talk. I remember my middle school teacher...moved me to the front of the room. All of us was lined up, everybody else was in the back and I was in the front! The whole third quarter I got an A out of the class. Two periods I got C's in the class, then I got an A when I moved to the front. So since that worked, all of my teachers moved me to the front of the class. If I am in a class with one of my friends and they sit right next to me, I try to learn but I still talk to them a little bit and start conversations or people text me in class. I try to text back sometimes and that is a distraction. Also, some teachers like give mixed directions. They will say to do one thing, but they really mean do another thing. It seems like they do not make that clear, so you end up doing the wrong thing." (*Ethan, age 17*)

"Other students also help. There is a lot of...students you can go to, like your friends. Guidance counselors are really nice and our principals also. I feel motivated. I like to learn. At times I do and at times I don't. If it is boring, I will learn it, but it will take more because it is boring and will take more to do. I am in Chemistry, it is scary! (laughter) It is hard but I like to learn it. I have to really make sure that I am focused in so that I know what I'm doing because if I don't I will not do well." (*Faith, age 15*)

"I believe it is the teachers that contribute. I feel very motivated. Most of the time if I have a teacher that can connect to me and break things down for me I do better in the way that I understand. I gravitate toward someone who understands my position; someone who is grown up and understands the military lifestyle or has experience with part of it and knows how it is for students. As much as we really

don't want to say, there are some teachers out there that don't like a specific type that the student matches. I believe the students that are there that don't [fit] a specific type or any other reason may take it out against you. I believe that teachers say that a kid that cannot get good grades or get most of the material most of the time will up and misbehave. I believe it is true. There are a lot of kids I know who will sit in class and talk or treat you a certain way because they see the A's on your paper...mad because they don't have those good grades. Or maybe it is that you have passed a big grade, or they're thinking that you don't deserve to be there because you are achieving and they think you are inferior." (*Gabe, age 15*)

"I say [sports] motivate me. I really want to play [sports] and I know you can't play or you can't go to college and not get good grades. That is one thing I keep thinking. I just like playing sports and you can't play sports with bad grades. If you can pay attention to your teacher everything will be alright. If you don't understand something you should ask for help. People in their classes that make everybody laugh and try to be funny. Mostly like your classmates. They crack a joke here or there, maybe things people say and how they act. I think those are my main distractions." (*Hal, age 16*)

"I honestly think that the teacher has a lot to do with it. If I have a teacher who knows how to teach, you know, some teachers don't know it, they are not really good at explaining it. I feel like if my teacher can explain it to me [and] they have a positive attitude, they make everybody in their class have a positive attitude. On base... a lot of them have been strict but a lot of them had a reason to. Some of them

strict teachers can't really teach. I was lucky enough that the teachers I had that didn't know how to teach, I knew what I was doing. Students have a big impact. I don't want to judge no one, but I would say you can tell that they don't have the obedience. At home and stuff I feel motivated because that's what they (parents) want me to do. It's what I want to do too. As a parent you want your kids to be successful. My parents tell me over and over so yeah, I feel motivated. I see what people have, what educated people have versus what uneducated people have. It is kind of like a reality check to see. I am motivated." (*Ian, age 17*)

"Friends [and] some of the teachers because they actually help me learn and they are really nice and they actually work with me. Going to after school activities motivates me. My parents motivate me to learn. Every time we get a report card they give us money and a gift at the end of the school year." (*Jason, age 16*)

"The way that teachers teach. She gives out worksheets. She knows that I am capable of doing it. Teachers who will show you how to do things. I guess I motivate myself to learn so I can go to college." (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Factors Attribute to Academic Success: Contributions and Detractions

Participants were asked what elements in the school environment contribute or detract from their personal success in schools and whether they feel motivated to learn. The majority of students felt motivated to learn. A few of the elements in the school environment that contributed to their academic success included the intrinsic motivation to graduate and attend college, participate in school athletics/extra curricular activities, and teacher and/or parental encouragement. Participants reported detractions that included classes that provide limited

student interaction, behavioral distractions by classmates, or a student's learning style that was not compatible with a teaching style.

Factors Attribute to Academic Success: Preparation for Future Challenges

Participants were asked if they thought they learned differently in either military base or public schools that will help them be more successful or prepare them for future challenges. The following findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“Base schools are run by DoDEA; they have their own curriculum compared to other schools off base, regular public schools. So we learn differently from public schools. I think we do. In a way I guess that helps prepare us for the future.” (*Ava, age 16*)

“I think base schools have it over public schools. Like we are so small and we have the eight classes per semester, the high schools out in town [public] only have four classes per semester. You can balance it a lot better and public schools balance it better than our schools, but I think that we would beat them if we had an academic competition or something. Public schools could improve the way they do their scheduling.” (*Ben, age 15*)

“We have scholarship programs. I am sure other schools have them but I just never heard of them. I think it probably helps you get more noticeable to other colleges or something like that. You can try to sign up for it if you have good grades. If you want to be more successful academic wise, then base schools are it. But if you want to go sports wise, out in town [public] schools are more suitable. It is probably

everything here that prepares you to learn. It just depends on the kind of teacher you have, you may have a cool teacher and the way that she teaches you might help you learn.” (*Cheri, age 16*)

“There’s not much of a difference, but I would say that there is a positive and negative to both public and base schools. The positive to military school is that they do like to say that you need to get this work done, get it done now and stay on track, you can’t stop, you get a little behind and then it is going to get harder for you. Public schools are more of we will help you the best we can but we can only help you so much. They are both kind of supporting you but kind of telling you that you also have to do the work yourself, otherwise you will fail. If I had to choose right now, I guess I would choose military schools, just because it is easier to finish, based on the grading scale. A lot of the public schools have a different grading scale, like where a 70 in a public school is actually a D or lower, and an 80 is actually a C.” (*David, age 17*)

“Public school you have a lot more stuff to worry about than just school, really. Another difference between DoDEA schools and public schools is if you play sports DoDEA has an academic suspension and an academic requirement. You have to have a 2.0 or better to play sports, but public schools they really didn’t care what grade you got, as long as you can play a sport you are pretty much on the team. DoDEA schools you had to play sports and be a good student in the classroom. It depends on what public school that you go to, cause there are really some good public schools out there that actually get you prepared for college. I think that DoDEA mainly wants to get you to go to college. When you walk around the school you see

all these posters that say ‘Joe – 2.0’ and they stress to everybody...you have to have a 2.0 graduate from a DoDEA school and that is another difference between DoDEA and public. You have to have a 2.0 over all four years combined to graduate. I don’t know about public schools, if that is true or not. You have to pass classes. Yeah, they stress around school other posters, like having somebody winning a basketball championship and under it is says, ‘You think this feels good?!’ They have another one that says, ‘Graduates are going to have it better.’ It is priceless. It really catches your attention, and I say, ‘I might actually try to graduate.’ I think that DoDEA and public schools in freshman year English classes should lay out examples of previous student transcripts. Your freshman year is really an important year and like I know people said to me, ‘Yeah, I know.’ But I really didn’t think about it, but now I am like, yeah it really was an important year for me to do good that year. They should bring former students that graduated already or like students who are seniors there to come in and tell them how important it is. They can hear it from a peer’s point of view, instead of hearing it from an adult.” (*Ethan, age 17*)

“I am not sure if we learn different things for future success. I think it is probably all the same [information] but it is... broken down in different levels. On base it is probably better and [they] help you understand it more, like the learning materials and the way teachers teach. Some do, not all of the public schools prepare you for the future.” (*Faith, age 15*)

“I would say success is up to the students. As far as real life situations, I would go with public schools.” (*Ian, age 17*)

“I think it is about equal between public and base schools. Public schools have more money to buy better books and stuff, but base schools help you and speak to you. They don’t read us a book, they tell you what you are supposed to learn and help you with it.” (*Jason, age 16*)

Summary of Factors Attribute to Academic Success: Preparation for Future Challenges

Participants were asked if they thought they learned different concepts in either military base or public schools that will help them be more successful or prepare them for future challenges. Some students alluded to the idea that they felt that they were receiving a high quality educational experience in military base schools. While some students felt that both military base and public schools equally prepared them for prospective challenges, other students felt certain that base schools were better in preparing them for the future.

Summary of Findings - Research Question 2

This section has described the responses in addressing the second research question regarding factors African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success. Themes that developed through an examination of the data included descriptions of student beliefs about their individual academic achievement and perceptions about the learning environment in schools. Participants were asked to define school success and a positive learning environment. All study participants reported that they believed that they were successful students. As in the individual interview, students in the focus group tended to agree that interactive engaging classes with caring teachers was important to their academic success. Teachers also needed to demonstrate caring through a social connectedness with teens, expressing interest in student performance, as well as being

knowledgeable and interested in the subject matter he or she teaches. The majority of the students described the learning environment as positive and the importance of feeling physically safe was emphasized, with participants in the individual and focus group commenting on the lack of the need for metal detectors. Participants also reported school success although they have eight classes per semester as opposed to four classes per semester as found in the public schools that surround the community. Some also reported this success came with the heavier class load along with participation in athletics and other extra curricular activities.

During the focus group participants continued to discuss aspects of caring and school success in comments that were made during the focus group exchange as noted below.

Participants felt that military base schools “set you up for life” as described below:

Ethan: “I like DoDEA schools. You could have straight Ds and still be on the basketball team out in town [public schools] and you can still play.”

Cheri: “That is so true, that is so true! I would not want to go to those schools.”

Ethan: “Like here you have like one D...”

Ben and Cheri: “...and you will be on academic probation.”

Ava: “If you have two D’s you are on probation and three you are on suspension!”

David, Ava, Cheri, Ethan, and Ben: “Yeah!!”

Ben: “If you have one F it is automatic suspension. Off base it is like you have an F...”

Cheri: “... and you can just come out and play (sports) and that is not is really good.”

Ava: “It is not fair and we have to work hard!”

Cheri: "Right, right..."

Ava: "It is not fair and it is not good to tell your athletes you can fail in life and still succeed. What happens when you go to college?"

Cheri: "Exactly!"

Ava: "I can say one thing about [base high school], even though sometimes our sports teams are bad they still are really sports fanatics. There are some things about base schools that are better than public schools."

Ethan: "It sets you up for life."

Ben: "That is what I think."

David, Ava, Cheri, Ethan, and Ben: "Yeah!!"

Ben: "It sets you up for life and how life is going to treat you. Maybe you might have four classes in college. You have a lot of work. You can balance it out. You will be more organized than if you went to a public school."

David: "That's what I think."

Ethan: "You feel safer."

David: "Sure do!!"

David, Ava, Cheri, Ethan, and Ben: "Yeah, yeah!!"

Cheri: "I think that we will probably be better college students or better workers because of base school. All of the above!"

David, Ava, Cheri, Ethan, and Ben: "Yeah, yeah!" (in unison)

Cheri: "Everything all around!! Because at our school, base schools, they prepare you for college and prepare you for real life basically. So anything that you do that you are

doing in base schools right now is going to benefit you. It is going to make you a better student.”

The examination of data continues with the presentation of the third research question and the theme that was derived from the analysis.

Research Question 3: Do African American students in military base schools share similar academic and social school experiences?

Common /Similar Experiences – Participants were asked if they believed that they share similar classroom (academic) and social experiences with other students like them in military base schools. Questions were asked to participants to gain a better understanding of whether they believed that their academic and social experiences were unique to themselves. The questions were also asked to assist in the research to assess the consistency in experiences. The findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“I think we share similar social experiences.” (*Ben, age 15*)

“Yeah. Just really depends on which class you got! Cause people who have the same math teacher will talk about that math teacher. I laugh and joke with my teacher. Yeah, we [students] share a lot of the same experiences.” (*Cheri, age 16*)

“Yes! A lot of them were describing this. A lot of them just deal with it and don’t really care so much that it is going to get done, but some of them want it to improve, and actually have a better experience. Some students do, some don’t, and some just don’t care socially. I mean the ones that do care and kind of share the experiences that I do. They let the teachers know why they don’t like the class if

teachers ask them or this or that. Some of the teachers just shrug it off. The ones that don't care let whatever happens and do whatever they can to try to finish the class as it is. If they learn what they learn they don't care as long as they get the work done to get the grade." (*David, age 17*)

"Yeah, I think I do. Pretty much all my friends at schools learn the same way. Some of them in my class will move to the front as well as me. I can tell that they care and want to learn something in school, but also they go around and talk to all their friends, but when it is in the classroom it is time learn something. You can tell by the grades they get too. Some of them don't care but some are like, 'I should have done better than that!' Yes. I know that for a fact we share the same experiences. The people that I associate with...I talk to everybody at my school and most of my friends I can tell they really care about their school work too. It feels like some freshman this year, they are really up on their game this year. They are not playing this year. They come in there and at every quarter we have honor roll lists. The seniors have little more than half a page and juniors have half a page, and sophomores have half a page, and freshman have two full pages!!!. I am like whoa! Freshman came in here ready. It wasn't just the principal's list, they were getting straight As like whoa! So I know that they are serious about it! Probably more serious about it than I am!! But it is cool. I was surprised about that." (*Ethan, age 17*)

"Yeah, they should. We all do the same things. All the teachers seem really nice, there are not no real mean teachers there, so yeah." (*Faith, age 15*)

“Yes. My two friends we knew each other when we were smaller. We lived in [state name] together. Our parents know each other from Louisiana and all of them came from rough backgrounds and very rough places. To say that they are all college graduates and drilled with the same rules, teachings, and beliefs that I have been drilled with, education is key. I want to say I really do think my peers share the same way about base schools.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“Most of them, yeah. Everybody is friendly; you can’t not be friendly. People in our school say that. I think so.” (*Hal, age 16*)

“Yes, I do. A lot of people who live on base come here and then they move and then their parents end up retiring and they move off base.” (*Ian, age 17*)

“Most of them would say the same things I said and yes, they share the same kind of social experiences. You notice a lot of fights in public schools and there are fights here, but there are not as many. People around, most of them are friendly. When there are new students like I was last year, they try to get to know you instead of trying to make you earn respect and stuff like that.”(*Jason, age 16*)

“Yes. We all know how base school and teachers are. We all kind of have the same thoughts on it.” (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Common /Similar Experiences

The majority of students believed that military base school students share common academic and social experiences. These commonalities were said to be not only among friends but across the overall peer groups. There seemed to be a shared view of base school

experiences although at one time or another each of these students attended different military base, public or private schools.

Summary of Findings - Research Question 3

This section has described the responses in addressing the third research question regarding participants' beliefs of common academic and social experiences in military base schools. The major theme throughout this data focused on common experiences, with most participants commenting that they believe that they share similar experiences in military base schools. Most of them reported that with a small school it was easier to interact with classroom teachers and that the overall school climate tended to provide for accord between teachers and students as well as among students. While there are student disagreements and fights, these appear to be kept to a minimum in comparison to public schools. The majority of the students continued to describe the learning environment as positive. The examination of data continues with the presentation of the fourth research question and the themes that were derived from the analysis.

Research Question 4: How do African American students in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and other students inside and outside of the classroom?

Level of Teacher Expectations – Participants were asked to describe the level of expectation their teachers displayed in the military base classroom and whether or not they felt supported by teachers. Findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“Yes, I feel supported and they really don’t want nobody to fail. They are really trying hard to make the students learn. They extend deadlines for students to do it. I know that happen one time, but not with me!” (laughter) (*Ava, age 16*)

“One of my teachers, like, this past quarter one of them said that I needed to be a leader in the classroom because like the classroom is bad, there is a lot of students that got sent to the office last year. He [the teacher] remembers them because he was an assistant principal last year, but now he teaches [subject]. He told me to be a leader and set the example for other kids so they will fall in line...crack down on their work.” (*Ben, age 15*)

“They display high expectations, now. They do. Before and after we take tests they tell us, ‘I know if you all did not study.’ They will tell us your grades were poor and you know that they will tell you that you should get 100 or something like that. Sometimes I know I am not going to get one so I do not study, but you can tell some of them are. My [subject] teacher is like there are certain tests that we take and if you don’t get an A or B on it you have to retake it until every time you get that on there. And then the grades that you do get are still going on your grade. Some teachers are like that, you can tell that they have high expectations. Most of them actually do though, so I don’t really know of any who don’t. Yeah, you could say that I do feel supported by most of them. Especially if you ask for help cause you know that she [the teacher] likes questions. You ask questions you are going to get more support or you know that that backbone is right there. So yeah, especially if you support them you get a lot of support too.” (*Cheri, age 16*)

“Some teachers want you... all teachers pretty much want you to do high, but when you are doing the work and if you show a little indifference one way or another their opinion just starts to change one way or another. If you are really smart and you are doing your work and start messing up on a certain section they start to doubt you a little, and kind of pay a little less attention unless you push to get them to help you. It’s sort of like there are students who need help and students who want help. Students who want help will usually get it. Students who need help but don’t ask for it won’t, and that is one of the little problems. Another little thing is that some of the teachers have attitudes about the students who need help and don’t ask for it, but improve themselves. I have had friends that didn’t do any of there homework and one day decided that they wanted to go for an A in this class. I had one teacher and he told her that and she just laughed at him as though it was a joke. I felt a little disrespected personally because of that. He was another African American and I told him that he could go for it definitely and she just laughed. I mean, me, I was an A student usually and I pushed for my A as much as I could and he pushed for his and just because he just didn’t do some of the work she probably could have given him a little bit more credibility on some things. It happens sometimes with Black students sometimes. Cause that teacher in particular give me and my friend a hard time. She tried to express to us that black people have a hard time and a higher standard to live up to because the minority is seen as down there. When she said that to us we were a little struck back, we were like well it should not matter because we are trying to do what we can do now. We are trying to improve ourselves and we should not have to

be lifted up to another stereotype. We should just be ourselves. It depends on the teacher, the class, the people in the class. I have had some teachers where if I was the good student and the rest of the class was bad, he just didn't care or she just didn't care. I have had it where if there were a bunch of good students in the class the teacher would be happy, they would be fine, everything was smooth and well. Some teachers had it when they had bad students in the class and made it turn into good students because they wanted that. The teacher wanted that and instilled that into the students to make them want to better themselves. Usually it was by taking an active approach in helping the students. Some of the classes the teacher would see students acting up and asking, 'why do you want to do this?' 'What do you want to do with yourself?' Doing bad is not going to help you at all you might as well do your work and actually get it done so you can get out of this class because you don't want to be back here again. As students start looking at that they were seeing a bigger picture of why we should be good. It made me kind of happy because now I can be in an environment where everybody is focused and we can all get our work done. Usually that means that when I am struggling someone else can help me or I can help somebody else out when they are struggling. It helps me because teaching others kind of teaches you more yourself. In [state name] I went to a public school and of all the schools I have been to, that was by far the worst because ...teachers were alright, but they didn't motivate you too much. A lot of the students were rowdy and didn't care to be in school too much to be in school. Teachers would try to persuade some of the students to stay but they would just backlash at them. Sometimes I was a

little scared because some of the kids, even the African American ones, were a little crazy sometimes, mainly the older upper classmen. I took some of the hard classes like AP [Advanced Placement], at some point I did start to struggle a little and some of my teachers would encourage me to do better, it was not on any grading curve it was just like don't fall back, pick up the pace. They say little helpful things. I tried to do my best, and I will get a little caught behind and I try to catch up but my teachers wouldn't really give me the necessary materials to continue going forward sometimes. Unless I really, really pushed them sometimes they wouldn't give it to me. Actually I have been to public school and private school. In both of those schools it was much easier (than base schools). The teachers usually were always like if you need help or something let me know. They would try to help you after class. They do some of that in the military schools but not so much. It was more of you got to get what is here in front of you now. You will work the rest of it tomorrow. Some of the public school and private school teachers would stay after for maybe like an hour out of their own time and help you. They would sit down and try to figure out what was wrong, and maybe even call on your parents to say 'he needs a little more help here,' or 'he is too smart to be in this one, we are going to bump him up a class.' (*David, age 17*)

“Yeah, I think teachers in DoDEA schools have HIGH expectations for EVERY student in the classrooms from the first day they (students) get in there. As the year goes on they see by your attitude and see how you work with others and your attitude toward them and the classes, then that is when they start to level off their

expectations for you. From first impression it is always high until you show them that you don't want to learn. Like DoDEA and public schools you have a 10 point grading scale 90 – 100 is an A, an 89 is a B. Private schools had a 7 point grading scale, 93– 100 is an A. Anything below 70 is failing so it is a lot harder, plus the teachers were highly educated being a private school teacher. You actually had to learn in that class, you could not mess around or whatever. DoDEA schools we have 30 minutes to EL [Extended Learning] period we can go and learn. Private schools have a whole period for that. Out of all the schools I think I would stay with the DoDEA because it is at the right level that I am at with myself. My attention span with grades, it is at the perfect level for me. I think public school is a little too easy for me and private school wasn't too hard, but it was just so much stuff. It is really College Board, it is really college stuff. DoDEA schools get you prepared to go to college and private schools you are pretty much IN the college. I think I like DoDEA schools better! I think DoDEA schools are more like a private schools. First of all you feel like you are in a safe environment too. DoDEA schools are free. You don't have to pay. I feel like it is like a private school because the teachers are highly educated. They actually know what they are doing and have a curriculum that they fit to you and the guidance counselor asks you if you want to go to college after high school. They stress the 2.0 grade average.” (*Ethan, age 17*)

“All of them expect high because they want to you to do good. They do not want you to fall under. Some public schools want you to go ahead and get out and some teachers do have high expectations and some don't. In public schools it is like I

am going to help you through all of it but it is time for you to get out of high school.”
(*Faith, age 15*)

“High expectations. With the teachers they see the potential in everybody and they expect you to fulfill your potential to that level. They constantly have those that just don’t care about school work or just don’t try, but they are telling them ‘why don’t you try, I know you can do it.’ In the public schools you will find those teachers that just don’t care mostly. No, they give you pity, and why bother with kids that don’t try.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“I think if you show a teacher that you can do good in class that is when they have high expectations. They have low expectation if you slack off in class and don’t put the extra effort they may slip. Teachers [in public schools] were just like oh, the student just wants to come to class and play around, so I think they were thinking okay I just give them the work and they are going to do what they are going to do. When I got there, the students were not the best students. I think that they had just as much respect as the student had for them (in public schools). They would do things to the teachers too. I had an incident where kids would throw water balloons at the teacher. I was like, ‘wow!’” (*Hal, age 16*)

“The expectations of on base versus off base [public schools] are a lot higher. Living off base... I barely ever get homework. They don’t really expect much. They are just trying to push you on to the next level without really expecting you to go to college. A lot of teachers they are not really pushing you on to be or expecting you to do good or go on to the next level. Unless they see someone that they feel has what it

takes, other than that they don't really care. To me they don't show that they care. On base if you don't do this you won't go on to college. To me the expectations are higher. Let's say that I got a D on a big project. Their whole thing would be, okay we are going to contact your parents and we are going to make sure that you get this project done so that you can make a good grade. In public school they are like you are not going to go to the next grade. 'If you don't care, we don't care!' On base even if I don't care they want me to care they are going to try to make me care." (*Ian, age 17*)

"I think they have higher expectations in base schools, mostly by the grading scale. If you look at the grading scale it is higher." (*Jason, age 16*)

I would say yes the expectation is higher. I feel supported. (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Level of Teacher Expectations

Participants reported that they perceived high teacher expectations in military base schools. Expectations may vary somewhat if the student misbehaved. Students felt a sense of support even with high teacher expectations. Many participants stated that they felt that teacher expectations were higher in military base schools than in public schools. there seemed to be a shared view of base school experiences.

Relationships with Teachers – Participants were asked to describe their social relationship with teachers inside and outside of the classroom and how it may impact their academic outlook. Findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“I have a good relationship with the teachers in class because I ask them for help and they give me help. Then outside I can say hi and they will say hi to me. One of my teachers is my coach, so I have a good relationship with her. I define respect by treating me fair, not calling me out of my name, treating me not like you treat your mother, you do not have to call me ‘yes ma’am,’ [but] treating me right. Like I treat them with respect, they treat me with respect. Most teachers treat me with that respect.” (*Ava, age 16*)

“Some of my teachers I can talk to them about things, like if I have any social problems or social troubles I could talk to them. It’s like, when the teachers notice you, some teachers will notice when their students are doing good or when they have problems or something like that, it is just that they care about you. I embrace that I like to talk to them whenever I need it.” (*Ben, age 15*)

“It just depends what teachers I have. One teacher I have is cool he loves the females in the class. He pays us more attention than the boys. When the boys get in trouble they have to do push-ups or something like that! When we get in trouble he tries to let it slide by or what ever, like I get in trouble and I get (punishment) a little lighter. Teachers and coaches from other teams, I get along with them a lot. There are some teachers in school I get along with well, and some of them I just don’t because they are boring. Definitely yes, they respect me more this year than freshman year. Freshman year I would not of thought that they looked at me respectfully. I don’t know, you know how when you are a freshman, you know how they always say freshman are bad and all this other stuff. But it also depends on the type of teacher

you have. Overall respect by teachers depends on the student. Last time my science teacher just talked long, she was boring. We had a dissection and I didn't want to do the dissection. She got an attitude with me because I was afraid of frogs! I don't think she tried to respect me. I don't think that she respected me. There is another teacher who knows everybody in the school. She is a cool teacher, she respects students cause she knows how students are. She understands teenagers a lot! You have some of the older teachers, they just don't understand. Some teachers don't get respected as others who take things seriously. A lot of them try to take things too seriously." (*Cheri, age 16*)

"Usually they like to comment on things that happened during class when we are out of class. 'Oh why was so and so doing this?' 'Make sure you get your work, I saw you didn't finish and it is really important to get this in.' Some of them will just be like 'Hi, I am going home.' Other times maybe during certain sports events they might let you know you are falling behind in this class and if you can't keep up you will be on academic probation. Some do, some don't. The way respect seems to be is a lot of teachers will respect you if you give them the degree of respect they want, but if you criticize them on the way they teach or some of the things they do they sort of backlash at you a little because they feel like you wronged them. Some teachers treat their students depending how well they do their work, and some treat them depending on how well they act. Some treat their work the way they act, so it is interesting. Grading on behavior...a little yes because I have met some teachers who have given me more chances than others just because I am a little more polite to them. I try to

learn and focus on my materials and if I had a hard time it means a second chance and you can turn this work in later. I saw other students that might not care for the work as much and do a half job and might just take the grade it as is and be done. Instead of saying, ‘okay why are you doing your work like this, or you need to do better.’ Sometimes I feel like there is a point where teachers say, ‘this group of students are going to be the ones who do their work and pass, and this group of students are just not going to do their work and not listen to me and I should just push them off to the side and take care of these.’” (*David, age 17*)

“I have a really good relationship with them [teachers] in class because I tell them what my distractions will be and go to them and tell them when I want to move and when I might talk to them [friends] a lot. He [the teacher] will get a lot of respect from me. He actually wants me to learn. He won’t be rude to me and he will teach me. At the ... game he will say “good job!” or something like that. He will encourage you or whatever. They [teachers] really do support me. Most of our teachers at our school coach a sport. They stress being a student athlete comes first, and they tell you everywhere. Every sport you play in, you are a student athlete and don’t forget that! Student comes first. You have got to do good in classes, or you are not going to play a sport. One of my teachers happens to be my coach and he knows what I can do. He knows that I can get A’s in the whole class. If I mess up and get a C- he will probably make me run at practice or something like that to motivate me to get good grades in class so I don’t have to be running at practice.” (*Ethan, age 17*)

“Yeah, I can say hi and they will say hi back to you, ‘how are you?’ We will have some conversation and they will tell you about tests and stuff like that. They are really nice and speak to you as long as you say hi, they will speak back. It is not timid. Yes, I feel respected. They just take time and sometimes I just need help. They just take time to help me and just be there for me. Principals treat us good. There are principals everywhere. We have three principals, a main principal and then two [others]. One principal is at every lunch ... monitoring us. They make sure that we are not getting in trouble. That is why we never had fights in school. There is no reason to fight and never a chance.”(*Faith, age 15*)

“Yes! I have a good relationship with all of my teachers. There are no gaps between my parents and teachers so everyone is in one big happy circle! (laughter) I behave; on most cases so I don’t feel attacked or any case like that, because I do what I have to do. I just feel like it is making new friends in a way, I talk to all of them. Outside the classroom we will talk about sports or anything. Yes, I think teachers respect me.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“I like to be friendly with my teachers. When they grade, I know whether I did something. I deserve the grade. I don’t really argue with teachers about grades. What I deserve is what I get. I know if I have done my work. I may ask a question like, ‘why did I do this, or that?’ I won’t be mean about it though. I see a teacher out of class I say, ‘hey, how you doing?!’ They say, ‘Hey, Hal!!!’ Oh! Yes, they are friendly outside of class. I think I feel supported by teachers. Teachers never point

you out or always get on you. When we see them they never look at you all angry. They say, ‘how are you doing? How was your day?’” (*Hal, age 16*)

“On base I felt a lot more respected than I do in public school. It is because of the small school, teachers know everyone. The teachers get into cahoots with each other and they open up more. My school is bigger now, so the students come in and the students go out. ‘I am here to do my job, you are here to do yours.’ There is not really a lot of talking and everything in public school. I had a few teachers (on base) that respected me outside the classroom. They would come to a few of my [athletic] games. They would come out and talk to you. Being that some of the best teachers would help out and coach, it was a plus for me.” (*Ian, age 17*)

“In public schools I was respected, teachers respected me, but not as much as they do in base schools. Some teachers they will actually talk to you nicer than other teachers because they don’t have the strict voice. They will help you with your homework if you need help. Some teachers would say that is what your parents are for. They will say we will help you, but they won’t help you with their full attention in public schools.” (*Jason, age 16*)

“Yes. I do my work. I do my work in class. Some of the teachers come to games and stuff. They compliment me on some of my work. They say good job. They come to all the games and events.” (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Relationships with Teachers

Whether inside or outside the classroom, positive teacher relationships were perceived by the majority of the participants. Most participants said they felt respected by

their teachers. Some discussed the connection they had with their teachers as student athletes. These teachers (serving as coaches) provided a consistent message about the student's need for high academic performance inside the classroom and while the student participated in athletics.

Relationships with Peers – Participants were asked to describe their social relationship with their peers in the school environment. Many of the participants described their relationships with other teens in military base and public schools. Findings are noted below with the participant pseudonym and age provided at the end of each quote.

“I am a very nice person, so I talk to everybody, any body. I could have a conversation with anybody that I want to. It is not difficult to make friends because people just come to you and say, ‘hi my name is...’ Base kids move all their lives so they are used to it, use to another place, they are used to them being the new person.”
(Ava, age 16)

“I have a pretty open relationship. If somebody needed something from me or if someone just needed help, I would help them. I wouldn't really care. I want to see other people be successful too. I don't want to see anyone drop out [of school]. That is like the worse thing. I want to see everyone go to college and be successful in life. I want to see them making a lot of money and having a good life on their hands.”
(Ben, age 15)

“It is just cool, like ‘hi, how are you!’ They ask you how are you and sometimes they don't care and it is like ‘okay have a good day!’ I try to get along with everyone. I guess I learned this being a base student. Especially when a lot of

people move in and out so you just can't have one set of friends and think that is all you can hang with because it is just not gonna be like that. Like last year I had my whole clique, and now they are all about gone and I am still here. I can't just rely on them. I have to have other people to talk to. I still get in contact with my friends; we go on trips sometimes. But for me I need someone to talk to. I am not going to sit to myself and not talk to you because you are not my friend. I am cool with everybody, especially when I get to the classroom that is when I start talking to more people."

(Cheri, age 16)

I'd say they are pretty good sometimes. A lot of school students are into the 'dumb people' or the 'smart people.' There are some in the middle that are smart but don't like to act it. Usually I think it is because when you dumb yourself down you kind of put yourself on a lower bar and everybody has to hold you to it. Also, people still pick on people who like to learn a lot. It is obvious that people who don't want that will try to avoid it, African Americans in strongly! I myself, I find people picking on me, why is it? Why does it matter? I am just doing what I want to do. It's my life, not yours. Those who hide their smarts will pick on me because they find me as an open target to make themselves seem better among their peers. It extends into the classroom sometimes. People will sometimes come to me for answers specifically, for homework and things. It is like why don't you do this yourself? If I can be this smart why can't you just do it? Some of them would be like I don't want to do the work. They expect for me to help and it's not going to do any good if I help them and give them the answers; they don't learn for themselves. They are not going to be able to

get any credit out of it which is nothing. Our students will not get the education they need to actually survive. With the world going faster and faster we are just getting farther behind. Both military base schools and public schools need to catch up.”

(David, age 17)

“I think that everybody feels safe when they are with friends. You know them for a long time [and] you feel comfortable around them, in comparison to being in the room that you don’t even know. You probably feel safe but feel uncomfortable in being there. You have stuff in common that you like to do. I think it was hard to make friends at first but it stopped when I moved [to an overseas base school] everybody came at me like ‘Oh it is the new kid. What’s up! How you doing, my name is blah blah blah!’ They came at me; wow, it wasn’t that hard to make friends. After that I was like, since they do it to me I will probably do it to other people. I volunteer when new people come in and give them a tour around the school. When I move to different places I just go and introduce myself to groups and say hey, my name is Ethan. I am new here. I just keep walking or sit, and they might say you are a cool kid and I would like to get to know him better. I used to be shy. I would go in class and sit in the back and didn’t say nothing to nobody. When I went to public schools it was kind of hard to make friends cause everybody was on their own agenda. They were like, ‘yeah, whatever. You are new here, whatever.’ Now I am really outgoing. I think it was from playing sports made me outgoing. When you play sports you can’t be quiet. You have to be loud and get along with everybody on the

team. You have to be friendly. I learned how to be really friendly from that. (*Ethan, age 17*)

“Yeah. It is not that big. In base schools it is always nicer. They are nice! I don’t know why. I guess maybe because it is more close-knit and they are family. You have to be nice because your dad or mom is in the [armed services] so if they are mean or bully somebody that might get back to their parents and they can get in trouble. It is usually nice they will take you under their wing. It is good.” (*Faith, age 15*)

“No, it was not hard to make friends. I have a very sociable attitude. I just flow places and start conversation before you know it I make friends. I think it is a combination of both my personality and the military lifestyle. Being that I move around almost every three years I have mastered that. I would like to say that my public school experiences were not always what my parents and I thought they would be. I moved to a public school because my parents thought it was better and I would learn more, but the school that I went to ended up having a worse curriculum and the crime rate was very high. There were constantly kids being arrested for bring weapons to school, fights, anything and everything. There were teacher-student fights, student-student fights. It was a very crazy year. At the end of the school year I remember my parents talking and they said they didn’t know if they wanted me to continue to attend. Now when I look back, I think going to that school kind of made me a different person.” (*Gabe, age 15*)

“I wish a lot more of them [base schools] were bigger! I just always wanted to go to a big high school. This is my first high school. My middle school was large and I always wanted to go to a big school. I think it is for sports, maybe. And I like to make friends. The more people in school the more of a chance I make friends.” (*Hal, age 16*)

“I talk to a lot of people. In base school I was very popular. Everybody showed me a lot of respect and I played sports, I did real good. Academic wise I was pretty good, I got a lot of respect, but off base I am not playing anything in sports and I am still a new face. I say I get less respect.” (*Ian, age 17*)

“It is friendly but there are some people who get on your nerves sometimes. Most of it is pretty friendly and if someone doesn’t know you, they will get to know you by the end of the school year. Overall I think base schools are the better way to go. I think it might be because I have been in it so long, but it also might be because they are more people oriented I guess.” (*Jason, age 16*)

“I would say I get along with my peers.” (*Kalb, age 17*)

Summary of Relationships with Peers

Relationships with peers were mainly described as open with most participants described themselves as friendly. They recognized that the military lifestyle includes being transient and understood that it was easier to make new friends when surrounded by others who comprehended the experience of being a child in a military family. This appeared to impact the overall climate of military base schools, making them more hospitable as compared to student experiences in public schools.

Summary of Findings - Research Question 4

This section has described the responses in relation to the final research question of how African Americans in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and peers inside and outside the classroom. Themes that developed through an examination of the data included a description of the teacher's level of expectations of students in the classroom and whether or not the student felt supported. A second theme surrounded the summative relationship with teachers and if there was a level of respect that they believed teachers displayed toward students. The final theme surrounded peer relationships within the school setting. Most participants in the individual interviews and in the focus group felt that their teachers displayed high expectations in military base schools, especially in contrast to public schools. At times, however, they felt that the high expectation may have fallen if the student's academic performance was lagging or if classroom misbehavior was on the increase. Participants agreed that most of the time they felt that teachers held them in esteem and students appeared to feel positively about the relationship they shared with their teachers. Social relationships with peers were reported as friendly for the most part, sharing an understanding that the military lifestyle often requires one to be the "new kid on the block." In the individual interviews and in the focus group there was an expressed ability to reach out to others who were new in the school, which served in contrast to experiences of being new in a public school.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study on the academic and social experiences of African American students in military base schools. The research data was

collected through student biographical statements, individual interviews, and through a focus group interview. The chapter addressed the research questions presented in the study through themes developed through a process of inductive data analysis.

Chapter Five discusses the implications of the major findings, their relationship to the research literature, and potential implications for research and practice. Policy recommendations that authentically reflect the voices of students will also be presented.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

Chapter Five discusses the major findings from the study of African American student academic and social experiences in military base schools. A summary and discussion of the findings are provided outlining the relationship between these findings and the research literature. Potential implications for policy and research are offered. Practical recommendations that authentically represent the voices of students involved in the study are then presented. The study concludes with recommendations for future research and lessons learned about the research process from the perspective of the researcher.

Summary of Findings

From an educational policy perspective Congress established the Department of Defense domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools in September, 1950 under 10 U.S.C § 2164. In summary, this policy provides the Secretary of Defense with the authority to establish educational programs for dependents of military personnel and civilian federal employees if appropriate educational programs are not available. The legacy of this creation, as documented through the research literature, has resulted in a school system that boasts high academic achievement for all students, yet has been particularly effective in educating a cultural group that has persistently lagged in traditional measures of academic performance. Few, if any, studies specifically address how African American students view their experiences in schools and how this impacts their academic performance.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the academic and social experiences of African American students in military base schools. The goal was to understand the academic and classroom experiences of African American students through their perceptions of the learning environment. This is done in an effort to determine the characteristics that contribute to the positive learning outcomes and school success that have been documented (such as above average standardized test scores, graduation, and matriculation into higher education) (DoDEA Postsecondary Plans and Scholarship Report, 2007; Shaul, 2001; Smrekar et al, 2001; Wright, 2000). The research attempted to describe the lived experiences of individual students while revealing common elements of that experience across the group of students. More specifically, the study attempted to address whether African American students who attend military base schools share similar experiences of school success and to outline elements that they believed contribute to these positive learning outcomes. The summations of the findings seek to reveal the essence of the lived experience of the study's participants as associated with basic interpretative and phenomenological inquiry. The following provides a summary of the findings from the study and a discussion of those findings.

Research Questions and Summary of Findings

Research Question 1: How do African American students perceive their academic and social experiences in domestic military base schools?

Participants were asked to describe their overall impressions of the schools they attended. In sum, many spoke of their academic and social experiences in military base and public schools. The students described the role that teachers play in the learning process as

being important to building relationships they shared inside and outside the classroom. Most participants compared their military base school experiences with public schools, and in a few instances, with private schools. Overall, participants tended to agree that the military base school academic and social atmosphere was different from what they experienced in public schools. Much of this might be attributed to the level of transition and adaptability that they face in being a military child as described by Keller and Decotean (2000). The participants may have also described the academic and social atmosphere as being different in comparing military base and public schools because of the global perspective developed through interaction and exposure to diverse people and encounters (Hylmo, 2002; Keller & Decotean, 2000). The majority of the group found the social experiences to be positive and education to be of a higher quality than that received in public schools. The perception of a higher quality of education in military base schools as compared to public schools is a finding that has not been explored in existing research and is a unique finding from this study.

Participants discussed many of the social aspects in terms of moving from one military base to another and making friends, a finding that is similar to that of Keller and Decotean (2000) in helping the participants to be more outgoing, self-assured, learn how to make friends. Additionally, school quality indicators (such as student pass/fail rates, standardized test scores, graduation and college preparation) were discussed. Responses were mixed regarding whether military base schools do a good job in student dropout prevention, but most believed the schools did well in assisting students in grade promotion. In relation to achievement measures such as standardized tests and college preparation, a few participants

discussed ways in which teachers prepared students for the TerraNova academic achievement test, the PSAT (Preliminary SAT), and the SAT (SAT Reasoning Test – formally known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test). While the research literature documents high levels of performance on the NAEP exam, (Anderson, Bracken, & Bracken, 2000; DoDEA 2007; DoDEA Facts, 2008; NAEP Results, 2008; NAEP Writing Results, 2008; Smrekar et al., 2001), participants in the current study made no reference to this national assessment.

While discussing general school quality indicators, participants often mentioned the importance of teachers. Teachers not only played a key role in helping students prepare for tests, graduation, and college entrance through their daily lessons, but also conveyed feelings of competence and caring. Participants reported that their relationships were positive and productive with most teachers in military base schools, and commented that this was frequently not the case when attending public schools. The combination of competence and caring seemed to positively impact their perceptions of their performance and their belief in their ability to perform well on these quality indicators. Based on their responses, the participants seemed to understand the important links between maintaining an acceptable standard in academic performance, high school graduation, and college entrance.

Merenbloom and Kalina (2006) describe teachers in small schools as being more familiar with family situations and student instructional needs and research on military base schools. Studies have found that DoDEA teachers tend to stay in the same base schools for many years (Smrekar et al., 2001; Wright, 2000). Wright (2000) documents that military base schoolteachers tend to attend higher quality undergraduate teacher education programs, but this does not ensure that teachers will have the social-emotional intelligence that is required

to internalize and facilitate caring behaviors. Findings from the current study are noteworthy because there are two important observations that emerged from participants' responses. The first is that participants perceived military base school teachers to be caring based on their experiences. What this means is that the teachers appeared to be genuinely concerned about the academic and social well being of the students and demonstrated it through their interactions with them. The second observation is the perceived high level of impact that this expression of military base school teachers' caring attitudes had on the participants' personal performance in relation to the school quality indicators in comparison to public schools. The conveyed feeling of caring from base schoolteachers seemed to enhance participants' beliefs in their academic abilities.

Research Question 2: To what factors do African American students who have attended military base schools attribute their academic success?

Each participant was asked to define school success in his or her own terms. The participants described school success by way of personal performance characteristics such as earning good grades (described as A's and B's), graduation from high school, and going to college. Each participant reported that he or she believed that they were successful students. Even if they experienced academic difficulty in the past they expressed affirmative beliefs about their individual academic achievement. Some students still believed that they were successful in spite of eight classes, athletics commitments, and other extra curricular activities. When asked what factors they believe contributed to their academic success, the majority of participants indicated that the teachers were central to their achievement through demonstrating caring and affective behaviors. Participants expressed that caring behaviors

demonstrated by teachers encompassed attending to students' interests, thoughtfulness, pleasure in providing extra time and assistance to students, setting realistic academic goals for students, and promoting student responsibility, self-sufficiency, and problem solving behaviors. Each of the participants reported that they felt motivated to learn. Some of them described their motivation as external, coming from incentives offered by parents; others described more internal motivation in the desire to make good grades to graduate from high school and attend college. These findings were unique, as there were no descriptions found in the research that specifically spoke to how military base school students define success and their motivation to learn, let alone in their own words.

Distractions in the school environment were varied for participants, often depending on whether the school experience was in the military base or the public schools. Sometimes it was dependent on a teacher's mixed directions to a classroom assignment, whereas other times it could be friends in the class who were joking or laughing. It could also be the overall school environment that served as the main distraction when it did not feel safe or comfortable due to student fights or the threat of the use of weapons.

When asked what elements in the school environment contributed to their personal success, most attributed their success to caring teachers who lead interactive, engaging classes. These were teachers who demonstrated caring through social connectedness with teens, expressing interest in student performance as well as being knowledgeable and interested in the subject matter. Some participants expressed that they had quality teachers in military base schools, being familiar with the teachers' educational background and the teachers' ways of relating to students. Some participants stated that not only did they feel at

ease asking teachers for help with classroom assignments but also felt comfortable in approaching teachers to generally converse. These conversations could range from future academic pursuits to the latest school gossip. The participants' recognition of high quality teachers among military base schools in comparison to public school teachers was an unexpected finding. While Shaul (2001) found that almost 70 percent of teachers in military base schools earned beyond a bachelor's degree and that nearly all teachers in these schools are certified in the grade level or subject area they teach, it is important to note that these high school aged participants perceived and acknowledged that their teachers appeared to have a high level of intellectual competence and were well-prepared for instruction.

Participants stated that a positive learning environment felt safe, and described this environment not necessarily as one that is free of conflict, but one where conflict is productively managed. It is a place that is characterized by productive relationships among teachers, between teachers and students, and among students. Participants perceived the environment in base schools as safe. This feeling of safety included not being concerned about the use of metal detectors to detect weapons or being overly concerned about confrontations and fights among students. Only one participant specifically mentioned the policy of students and their parents being released from military base housing and the school system for repeated misbehavior. A few students mentioned the discipline imposed in the family by having a parent in the military and the respect they had for the sense of order that was created. The military base schools strive to create a safe environment for students, as a safe and stable learning environment is part of the guiding principles in the school community strategic plan (DoDEA Community Strategic Plan, 2006). Of interest were the

comments made particularly by the male participants in this study regarding their need for a non-threatening and secure learning environment while female participants mentioned very little about feeling safe in schools.

The number of classes taken per semester in base schools was mentioned several times by the participants. Although some students expressed difficulty in handling eight classes per semester as opposed to four classes in public schools, they found the load worth the sacrifice in preparation for the demands of college. In these ways participants believed that base schools “set them up for life,” in not only being prepared for college, but in providing a sound foundation in preparation for future challenges they would face. With most participants expressing a desire to attend college, it is likely that a college degree is seen as a pathway to a lifestyle that provides for and produces improved opportunities.

Research Question 3: Do African American students in military base schools share similar academic and social school experiences?

Participants were asked if they believed that they share similar academic and social experiences with other students like them in military base schools. Questions were asked to participants to gain a better understanding of whether they believed that their academic and social experiences were unique only to themselves. Although the viewpoint of the researcher is that each of the participants’ experiences were subjectively defined and expressed, the introduction of this question permitted for the observation of potential patterns in understanding, speaking deeper to the essence of the lived experience. Most of the participants believed that their experiences in military base schools were common amongst their peers. Participants shared commonalities in the perception of the school environment as

being secure and constructive and their connections with teachers as harmonious. There appeared to be a sense of productiveness and worth in the school experiences leading to the awareness that the investment of hard work and diligence in schools would produce academic gains and future readiness. Some may argue that this would be an expected finding as Moskos and Butler (1996) and Shaul (2001) speak to the sense of military community values that are translated into the school culture found on base. With a tradition of readiness and training found in the military, this shared system of values and commonality of experiences are part of a larger functional community as referenced by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) where there is a pervasiveness of the value that hard work and diligence can aid in educational success and mobility.

The finding of commonality of experience would also be expected because of what has been documented in the research. Hylmo (2002) describes how children who grow up on military bases develop unique cultural identities because of their exposure to the diverse people and experiences they encounter and share common ways of seeing culture and their place within it. Hylmo (2002) also stated that the expressed commonality of experience is expected because military base children grow up in an environment that is considerably different from their non-military sponsored peers because their reality is substantially impacted by world politics and relations that impact their day-to-day lives.

Small schools appeared to facilitate a sense of cohesion for the participants that allowed them to acquaint themselves with their peers and cultivate an awareness to nurture relationships with classroom teachers. This was noted in participants' reports that a small school made it easier to interact with teachers. The overall school climate tended to provide

for accord between teachers and students and among students. While there were student disagreements and fights, these confrontations appeared to be kept to a minimum in comparison to public schools. Research has found that small schools are associated with student achievement and more productive student-teacher relationships (Bracey, 2001; Fine, 1991; Merenblom & Kalina, 2006).

Research Question 4: How do African American students in military base schools describe their relationships with teachers and other students inside and outside of the classroom?

Interactions with teachers and peers can have a significant impact on school climate and learning outcomes. Participants were asked to describe the level of expectation their teachers displayed in the military base classroom and whether or not they felt supported by teachers. Positive teacher dispositions toward students can increase the likelihood that there will be increased student engagement and a caring school climate and classroom (Osterman & Freese, 2000). Each participant described the level of expectation to be high or above average, especially compared to their experiences with public school teachers. This was noted by students in the use of a rigorous grading system, the continued endorsement of college entrance and attendance, and the perception of personal encouragement to “do good” and fulfill potential. There were a few students who stated that the teacher’s level of expectations may have been described as high upon their initial meeting of the student, but if the student did not seem to display effort or misbehaved the expectations would deteriorate. Despite this, the research participants reported feeling supported by teachers in a variety of direct and indirect ways. These approaches included taking the time to speak with students

before or after class about performance on classroom assignments or the tone of voice and body language used while communicating.

Students reported that they felt respected by their teachers, but there seemed to be an understanding that respect was mutually earned between students and teachers. Classroom interactions also impacted social relationships with teachers, most describing them as congenial. These relationships appeared to have been cultivated inside and outside the classroom during school athletic events before or after school and/or extra-curricular activities. While most conversations typically centered on academics, there was a sense that there was a genuine caring in the fact that students were recognized by teachers outside of the classroom. Research supports that teacher-student relations have a positive influence on adolescence as measured through school conduct, classroom preparedness, and pro-social behaviors (Sanders & Jordan, 2000). Yet the specific elements regarding the teacher-student academic and social relationship are findings of interests from the current study, as the level of detail of these relationships had not been explored from the student's perspective in the literature.

Ferguson (1998) found evidence that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students' beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to help perpetuate the black-white standardized test score gap and are biased by racial stereotypes. Neal (2001) found that teachers were influenced by walking and body movements/language used by some African American students and tended to have low expectations of student who behaved in ways consistent with African American culture, perceiving these students as hostile and low achieving. An interesting finding from the current study that differs from previous research

described above is that participants expressed that they felt respected by their teachers and did not allude to perceiving that negative racial or cultural stereotypes influenced teacher treatment towards students.

Interactions with peers were also examined through asking participants to describe their social relationships with peers who attend military base schools. Most remarked that relations were amicable. In terms of academics there were a few participants who described their willingness to help their peers with class assignments. There was only one instance where a student suggested that he encountered situations where other African American students expressed that high academic performance was not a cultural norm. In this case the student was teased and accused of acting White by his peers, as described by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). In most cases participants did not discuss their race or how it impacts their academic or social experiences among their peers in military base schools.

This finding was of particular interest. It was anticipated that students would speak to some length about the impact of their racial and cultural identity, even in simply acknowledging the goal of the current research study. This is a point of interest as well because the oppositional culture theory as discussed by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and Ogbu (2004) was not studied in an environment such as a military base school setting. It could be that there are fewer cases in which students are accused of displaying Anglo European middle-class cultural norms because there is a value consistency between these cultural norms and those espoused by the military and transferred into school: the investment of hard work and diligence in schools can produce academic gains and future readiness. Brubaker (2004) and Reed-Danahay (2005) contend that minority students who are the most proficient

at espousing Anglo European middle-class cultural values are most successful in schools.

Most students in military base schools may recognize that the investment in this particular set of norms can build their cultural and social capital, leading them to believe that they will experience better academic and social opportunities.

While recognizing that students are transient because of parental military assignments, there appeared to be a profound understanding and familiarity in being the new student in a school. This seemed to impact student interactions, creating a fondness for welcoming others into the school. In some instances participants reported feeling comfortable introducing themselves to new students, remembering instances where they once were the new student on campus. This often served in contrast to experiences in being new in public schools, where the impression was that it was more difficult to make friends because the social environment was characterized as more static.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this qualitative study reveal that African American students who attended military base sponsored schools describe their overall experiences in these schools as generally positive, particularly compared to experiences in public schools. One would probably expect order, discipline, and educational training to be an important part of any military base environment, including being reflected in the school system. As noted by Smreker and Sims (2006) military base schools contain governance structures, educational programs, and accountability systems that work systemically to enhance achievement efforts for all students. Therefore, one would expect to find that all students to perform well in this environment. The question as to how students in these schools perceive their lived

experiences in their own words has received little attention in the scholarly community. The importance of the reflections is found in the meaning that is created for these young people as they speak their voices. Their exchanges suggested to the researcher that they may have had less than positive experiences in public schools.

Teacher-Student Perceptions

Having a caring, supporting teacher appeared to be an important quality for students in the study, impacting the nature of relationships they shared. Reflective practices, as discussed by Friend and Caruthers (2009), contribute to the creation of caring teachers with high expectations. Without this measure of reflectivity and affective behaviors, low expectations for academic success arise. Students are managed as opposed to taught and the experiences students bring to the classroom are not seen as relevant (Friend & Caruthers, 2009). Some students in the current study noted that high academic expectations displayed by teachers tended to wane if the student were not able to maintain good grades or if there were incidences of misbehavior.

High teacher expectations are often correlated with student achievement, and in some cases scores from intelligence quotient tests (Ferguson, 1998; Good & Brophy, 1995). The research suggests that there is a link between teacher expectations and teacher behaviors toward students, which may translate or contribute to distorted student perceptions of his or her academic ability and social inferiority. As cited by Friend and Caruthers (2009), urban school students desire the same quality school experiences as those described by students in the current study:

They want instruction that is active and engaging, makes use of their strengths and talents, and involves them in making choices about what to learn and how to learn.

They want caring teachers who have high academic expectations and desire to know more about their individual cultures.(p. 55)

According to the study participants teachers in military base schools appeared more caring and concerned about their students and treated them with respect. These attributes are essential to facilitating student engagement and academic success.

Findings from this study reflect the idea that military base schools are quality schools. High teacher quality appears to be a signature characteristic with well over half of the teachers possessing a master's degree or above. Anderson, Bracken, and Bracken (2000) cite interesting research in which there appears to be a correlation between the quality of the university teacher education program attended by military base school teachers and the level of their students' academic performance.

Organized and focused professional development has also been a valuable resource in military base sponsored schools that not only seems to benefit the students, but also works as a tool to keep teachers motivated. This is a resource for teachers that appears to be lacking in the public schools of North Carolina according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2003).

Participants throughout the study suggested that for the most part they had positive, constructive relationships with teachers. The students felt that teachers respected them and demonstrated caring and interest in them inside and outside the classroom. Research has found that positive teacher-student relations and constructive behaviors among students

enhances academic achievement as measured in both standardized test scores and grade point averages (Ferguson, 1998). This type of nurturing school community fostering high-expectations and student engagement promotes academic success. Teacher-student relations appeared to have an influence on educational investments for the student in the sample, similar to that found by Sanders and Jordan (2000).

Research at the school level reveals that the relationships shared among teachers and students are important to school success. Teacher perceptions of students have been found to have an influence on African American student success, particularly in reference to performance indicators such as standardized test scores (Good & Nichols, 2001). There is evidence that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors interact with students' beliefs, behaviors, and work habits to help perpetuate the black-white test score gap and are biased by racial stereotypes (Ferguson, 1998). What is of interest in the current study is that few participants discussed their teachers in terms of race. Only one student in the sample recalled an experience where a teacher commented on his race, stating that since he is a black male he would need to work harder in school and that society thought less of his capabilities. On the whole students did not appear to think that their teachers perceived them as being aggressive, low achievers, or potential candidates for special education programs. Research supports the findings shown in the current study that African American students respond well academically to caring teachers who demonstrate high expectations (Kent, 2006). The military culture and community appear to play a large role in the atmosphere of military base schools.

Student Self-Perceptions of Academic Ability

Perceptions of student academic ability are also a notable finding from this study. Each student defined school success in his or her individual terms, yet interestingly enough the definitions were similar in that earning good grades, maintaining the necessary skills and dispositions to do so, and working toward high school graduation were important. Each participant described himself or herself as a successful student. This finding is comparable to what is described in the research literature demonstrating a linkage between student self-concept or self-efficacy and student achievement. Fisher (2000) describes constructs that have shown promise for African American adolescents who perform well academically. These qualities include self concept in relation to academic ability, perceptions of opportunities for success in school, perceptions of future opportunity, and social support from significant others. Students who are academically successful have positive relationships with teachers, received encouragement from them, and believed that their academic goals could be obtained in the present school setting (Fisher, 2000). In the current study the researcher was not granted access to the participant's academic records, yet based on the responses, one would expect that the students' academic performance was of an acceptable standard.

Research points to student self perception and motivation as playing an important role in academic achievement which impacts school outcomes (Lumsden, 1994; Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995; Oyserman & Harrison, 1998). Honora (2002) discusses the manner in which African American students conceptualize themselves, drawing connections to their future and attempting to integrate and manifest these conceptions through their academic performance.

There seems to be an effort to connect current educational outcomes to future goals, much in the way that the participants in the present study discussed the importance of maintaining good grades and aspiring to higher education. This appears to concur with the findings of McClendon and Wigfield (1998) and Nurmi (1991) in that adolescents with an optimistic future outlook facilitate school achievement through long-term goal setting. Findings from the existing study are also consistent with those of Steele (1992) who concluded that students must experience a sense of inclusion and belonging within the academic community to become successful. Participants in the current study reported feeling fully accepted in the military base school community by their teachers and their peers. It appears that participants in military bases schools create relationships within the school environment such that the student's self regard and self efficacy significantly depends on his or her own personal achievement, a finding consistent with previous research (Steele, 1992).

Student Peer Perceptions

A body of research focuses on how peers impact black student achievement, including how accusations of acting White influences African American student performance. Research studies have investigated whether some African American students perceive academic success as acting White in that these minority students condemn academic success because they relate academic success as being counter to their cultural identity. In other words, this theory contends that African Americans who speak; display attitudes, behaviors, or preferences; or engage in activities that are considered Caucasian or White cultural norms are judged as acting White (Alpert, 1991; Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Neal-Barnett, 2001; Peshkin & White, 1990; Suskind, 1998; Tatum, 1997). The

terminology acting White is used mainly in elementary and secondary education research in the discussion of the performance of African American students (Bergin & Cooks, 2001).

The earliest research points to the concept of the formation of a group cultural identity that is characterized by oppositional behavior to the dominant culture (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986).

Interestingly, participants in the current study of military base schools spoke little about their cultural and racial identity, which is a unique finding in the current study. Perhaps this is because participants understood that since the focus of the study was on African American students, race was inherent in and embedded within the expression of their experiences and therefore it did not need to be directly addressed as part of their responses. With this in mind the military was one of the first racially integrated institutions in the United States, and it relies on a great sense of unity and purpose to fulfill its organizational goals (Moskos & Butler, 1996). Much of this mindset of unity is extended into community and school life and it would make sense that less emphasis is placed on racial differences. In the same regard there was only one student who suggested that he was teased for being smart, and that other African American students who were just as smart as he made the decision *not* to perform to their highest potential. This may imply that there were elements of oppositional behavior to the dominant culture present in military base schools, but to a minimal extent. There was also another participant who mentioned a situation where a racial slur was used, and how that impacted his sense of innocence in terms of racial cohesion and the realities of racial prejudice.

Despite racial and cultural differences, some may argue that African American students perform well in military base schools because they learn the necessary skills and

dispositions to perform well in school. These skills are based upon dominant Anglo-middle class cultural values. Since there is less emphasis placed on racial and cultural differences among students in military base schools one may expect more importance to be placed on teaching the dominant cultural norms. Therefore, if these skills are measured in students in military base schools, against the measurement of the same skills in African American students in public schools, differences may be found. African American students in public schools are probably more likely to respond to the school culture in oppositional ways as Ogbu (2004) described, with the rejection of the dominant culture in rejecting what they believe are White attitudes, behaviors, and speech patterns. In other words, African American students who have experiences in military base schools may be less likely to view the dominant culture in racial terms (acting White) and may instead view it in non-racial terms as simply school culture. Much debate and criticism continues to surround the assumptions and theory of oppositional culture (Ferguson, 2001; Hamann, 2004; Tyson, 2002; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005).

According to the research there have been few studies that have investigated the link between school social composition and educational achievement, suggesting that the effects of school social composition are directly related to the influence of peers, even positively effecting low achieving students (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The research does suggest, however, that high achieving and highly motivated students can help to create an environment of success in schools, while low achieving non-motivated students can create a sense of deficiency and hopelessness (Jencks & Mayer, 1990). The description of military

base schools as a friendly, safe, and achievement oriented environment helps to substantiate the existence of documented positive learning outcomes.

Transmission of Cultural and Social Capital

Military base schools are not isolated in demonstrating school success in working with African American students. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) and Coleman and Hoffer (1987) extensively discuss the achievement benefits for African American students and access to greater resources and curriculum choices in private and religious schools. While military base schools are not considered private schools, they possess many of the characteristics of these institutions, with smaller class sizes, a strong, academically focused curriculum, and a tight-knit social culture. While there were only two students from the current study's sample who attended private schools, one compared his experiences most directly to military base schools in terms of curricular goals, teacher expectations, and individual student attention.

It is also worth noting that most military base schools are found in functional communities, as referenced by Coleman and Hoffer (1987), and the value consistency found within the neighborhoods which military base schools help to facilitate. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe the value consistency that was apparent in student responses regarding the definition of school success and the pervasiveness of middle class values of hard work that encourage or facilitate achievement. While there is an acknowledgement that racial and cultural identity may not be directly reinforced in private schools (Ascher, 1986; Fordham, 1991), the greatest gains were the acquisition of Anglo middle class skills and dispositions in a highly directed learning environment. The research literature contends that U.S. schools

are based upon Anglo European middle-class values, and minority students who are the most proficient at espousing these values are most successful in schools (Brubaker, 2004; Reed-Danahay, 2005). Students are said to acquire this knowledge by way of *cultural* and *social capital*, which can often be imparted through the home environment. Hylmo (2002) suggests this commonality occurs because military children “grow up in a reality that is significantly different from that of their domestic peers” which is impacted by an “environment that is embedded in international politics, economics, and socio-cultural relations” (p. 121). Environment seems to profoundly shape the way that these children see the world both culturally and socially. As Ahmed (1999) comments, military children are able to take advantage of some of the social privileges that accompany its status.

In the current study there appears to be a concerted message between home and school. Most participants mentioned the value their parents placed on education in the household and the influence parents have had steering their children’s educational decisions. Research on school failure for minority students repeatedly emphasizes a disconnect between the home and school environment (Bourdieu, 1977; Delpit, 1995; Lareau, 1987; Nieto, 1994). Military base schools tend to contain a shared value system that impacts the fidelity of beliefs and behaviors between home and school. Study participants alluded to acquiring the skills to know how to be successful and much of this could be tied to cultural and social capital as defined by Hemmings (2007). For the students in the present study, this included not only knowing how to make and maintain good grades, but also knowing how to prepare for standardized tests and/or use resources to complete a college application. Students realized that their personal outlook and investments in social resources and networks are a

part of their educational development. In military base schools, much of this comes from the familiarity with dominant cultural norms that are transmitted in the home and through relationships with teachers and adults in the schools. There is some recognition of the creation of cultural and social capital that was evidenced by the study's participants believing that the experiences in military base schools "set them up for success" for the future.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The goal of this research was to gain a clearer understanding of the academic and social experiences of African American students who have attended military base sponsored schools. Recommendations for policy and practice lie rooted in the responses of study participants.

As previously discussed, some argue that the cultural and environmental factors by which the military situates the schools which contribute to student success cannot be replicated with students of similar demographics in public schools. However, state policy makers and school district administrators can strive to make macro level improvements in structural organization and operation as well as micro level improvements that focus on the way that school level principals and teachers care for their students. Parental accountability must also be implemented.

Suggestions for School Systems

School system administrators may want to take more systemic approaches in assuring that various types of data on performance are examined. This requires taking a step past merely disaggregating traditional quantitative standardized test data in using more qualitative data techniques to collect information on what makes a difference in the academic lives of

students. The student experience must not be discounted. Policies throughout the school system must concentrate on the basics of creating school cultures of student support with high expectations for all students. School system administrators should encourage school principals to survey their students to capture confidential interview data to be used toward school improvement. Although some educators may believe students do not have pragmatic ideas regarding what changes can be made, the changes suggested could result in important academic gains for students. Many schools systems have policies that prohibit the surveying of students and families to protect their personal interests; yet if information is collected through the use of responsible research methods it could yield a wealth of knowledge that could be used to facilitate school improvement.

School systems in general may want to take action to extensively investigate the experiences of African American students and other minority groups in environments that may be similar to military base schools, private, or religious schools. In several cases most local public school systems already partner with military base schools on various student related initiatives. Public schools and military base school systems could gain a better understanding of student perceptions and what is believed by students to contribute to their academic achievement in both environments. Discussing these student experiences and sharing this knowledge could enhance the quality of academic and social experiences for all students.

Educators must place greater emphasis on effective strategic planning, described as organizational alignment that has been shown to be highly favorable in promoting student success, particularly influencing minority achievement (Smrekar & Sims, 2006). School

systems that are organizationally aligned concentrate on forming congruence in how each of its components are grouped together to work systemically. It takes into account how individuals, tasks, processes for doing the work, and the environment for which the work is done is structured and work together systemically. Greater focus on organizational alignment can aid a school system in better acknowledging the resources that are available and how to understand the culture for which to better align the school system's organizational supports for improved school level outcomes. Organizational supports are tied to school level processes and outcomes (Ferguson, 1998). It has been recognized in the research that military base schools attribute their success to alignment of their organizational parts. It is suggested here that this type of internal strategic planning be implemented with school systems and schools.

Some may argue that many local education agencies currently function in this way, where each department is thought to work with other departments within the school district. However, in working with local school systems on a daily basis there are noticeable silos created between departments that do not fully support the type of work that is essential to understanding the typical needs of students in schools. Findings from the Smrekar and Sims (2006) study found that military base schools are successful because the organizational structure is genuinely integrated by formal and informal means to address student issues systemically. In this type of system services for students are not isolated and policies support cross-functional duties of school system and school level staff members. While the school systems may be more directive of their school principals and teachers, there could be a better

alignment of goals and more consistent, coherent messages could be communicated regarding student achievement.

Suggestions for School-Level Educators

In the schools and in classrooms, principals and teachers must truly believe that all students can achieve, not necessarily at the same rate and time, but know that it is possible for students. At the same time, school-level educators must also get in the practice of demanding more from their students. Principals and teachers must demonstrate caring, support, and a persistence to cultivate the value of educational self-confidence. These actions go outside of communicating subject matter expertise or simple classroom management. Principals and teachers must get out of the practice of not placing high expectation on students, whether it be scheduling for advanced placement courses or prompting students to take chances to think outside of the box with appropriate support. Complacency with below average student performance is not an option.

Research has shown that minority students, particularly African American students, respond well academically to caring teachers who demonstrate high expectations (Kent, 2006). This was echoed in participant responses in the current study, teachers need to expect more, and be both knowledgeable in their subject matter area and socio-emotionally poised in dealing with students. This requires teachers to reflect upon their nature and adopt behaviors that are supportive, culturally responsive, and understanding of students in classrooms. What was different in the current study findings, however, was the depth to which students described the caring behaviors of teachers. The current study revealed that teachers must be willing to display caring to their student by academically and socially attending to student

interests, demonstrating consideration for their individual needs, and respectfully communicating with students on a one-on-one basis. Teachers also show caring through taking a practical and diagnostic approach in identifying gaps to learning in the classroom, showing kindness in providing extra time and assistance to students prompting the student to be proactive and responsible for their education, and setting realistic academic goals for student learning while also setting expectations high enough to allow the student to demonstrate personal growth. Teachers must reach out to all students, yet African American students appear to need this social support and emotional reinforcement in their academic ability in ways that are deeper and more significant than for other cultural groups of students. This could be based on socio-political history in which African Americans have been situated and the various negative stereotypes and expectations that have come to be commonly associated with African American student performance.

Suggestions for Parents

Smrekar et al. (2001) and Viadero (2000) discuss the corporate commitment on the part of military parents and their employers to support their children in schools in very tangible ways. This includes parents being reminded that part of their place of duty is to be in the schools, attend to developing a parent-teacher relationship, and playing an active role in the schools (Shaul, 2001; Smrekar, et. al, 2001; Viadero, 2000). Although typical civilian employment to some degree provides paid time off for child educational involvement, parents could benefit from a stronger personal commitment to fostering better relationships with their child's teachers, active involvement in their child's classroom, and investing in the school community through volunteer activities that promote education when possible.

The parental role in a child's education is crucial. Parents must instill educational beliefs and attitudes of promise from the onset of learning. All parents must be held accountable for their child's academic growth at the same or higher standard as educators, but this is especially important in the African American community. While a key characteristic of the military base environment lies deeply in education and preparedness, all African American parents must promote concrete attitudes about education as referenced by Mickelson (1990). This would mean helping their child operationalize not only the value of education, but the realistic attitude that the child can fulfill educational and future occupational aspirations. According to Fisher (2000), African American parents with high to middle income levels have a harder time transmitting academic motivation to their children because their children are not often exposed to adequate models for setting goals and problem solving. While this may be a challenge, parents must continually create opportunities for their children in exposing them to a variety of diverse educational experiences to build their child's confidence in his or her ability to learn.

Studies suggest that there may be a connection between academic achievement and certain beliefs, such as those involving educational and occupational aspirations and attitudes toward school (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Dumais, 2002). For example, parents can gradually develop and nurture high expectations from the earliest age, as it will become natural for the child to recognize these as the norm. Parents need to continually create opportunities for their children to build confidence in their ability to learn to show themselves and others how successful they can be. Also, parents need to get in the practice of holding students more accountable in high expectations coupled with appropriate support.

Complacency with their child's below average academic performance must not be an option for parents. Parental accountability in education means more than school choice and understanding the child's test results; it means taking responsibility for holding an elevated set of standards for the child. With true parental accountability there are consequences, and it remains to be seen if it will be socially acceptable to impose financial or social restrictions on parents who do not actively support their children's educational growth.

Suggestions for Policymakers

Finally, policy and practice implication lie in the research that sets the backdrop of this study in the broader scope of examples of African American student achievement. The current study provides a limited exploration on student achievement based upon factors that students themselves perceive as contributing to their academic success. Are policymakers and educational administrators truly taking into account the real, lived experiences of African American students in schools when attempting to implement policies that research finds works best for these students? Although there is a wealth of available research on the achievement gap, there is a general lack of information as to why we as a nation do not see large scale, substantive improvements in the academic performance of African American students, especially males. In reality, some policymakers argue that certain types of students should be denied educational opportunities because they cannot follow dominant cultural norms, resulting in school suspensions and expulsions. Yet, what must be of focus is that educational and school success are paramount to gaining and sustaining positive, productive life outcomes. At this time there are few avenues that will allow for mobility that are not

rooted in an educational foundation that leads to pro-social outcomes and perpetuates long term personal fulfillment and constructive citizenship.

The larger questions that loom include why are policymakers and educational administrators not supporting or properly implementing these suggested findings and why there is not an immediate sense of crisis in the classrooms when African American students persistently fail? While there are success stories that demonstrate that the interventions used with African American students are producing results and are worthwhile, such as in the case of the current study, there are still appalling statistics related to misbehavior, low standardized test performance, low graduation and matriculation rates, school failure, suspension, expulsion, school drop out rates, joblessness, and incarceration, particularly with African American males. With African American males being shown to be less academically supported and possessing a lower self-concept than females the negative results are an expected consequence for these young men (Fisher, 2000). While the majority of participants in the current sample were male, each perceived a much more optimistic future.

Direction for Future Research

While there were substantial challenges obtaining access to study participants in military base schools, the sharing of their experiences and those like them in private and religious schools needs further study. Of particular consideration are life chances and outcomes based on the quality of education the students believe they obtained. It would also be of interest to interview the same set of students in fifteen to twenty years to study their career paths and their perceptions of how their academic and social experiences in military base schools impacted their educational and occupational pursuits. A longitudinal

comparative study of African American students in military base schools and public schools may shed light on whether there is affirmation in the quote from students who claim military base schools “set you up for life.” It will be of interest to see if this promise is fulfilled.

Another direction for further research involves the impact of student beliefs on academic performance within an environment that accounts for race in a relatively neutral manner. These are environments where the traditional assumptions associated with a student’s race are suspended, such as those that surround functional communities as described by Coleman and Hoffer (1987). A central question could relate to whether an environment of racial “neutrality” impacts students’ beliefs about academic performance. Are students who are more cognizant of negative racial associations more likely to have distorted beliefs about their academic aspirations? This begs the question as to whether it is possible to create a sense of racial neutrality in the public schools or in non-functional communities.

In terms of student beliefs about academic achievement and social relationships, continued research in the area of oppositional culture theory and the fear of acting White could be explored in greater depth in military base schools, in private and parochial schools, and in public schools. Studying and comparing how African American students in military base, public, and private schools attribute school achievement, high or low intelligence, and positive and negative school behaviors as related to race and culture merits greater attention. A question related to this is the impact that a mixed race school has on these perceptions. Research documents the academic and social benefits African American students receive in attending mixed race schools (Rumberger & Parlardy, 2005). A comparison study of student

attitudes in various types of schools described above could be timely in light of current local school board decisions that are striving to create community schools that may limit diversity.

The final recommendation that is proposed is straightforward: make what we know work. As stated above, there is a plethora of research available, particularly over the last twenty-five years that addresses the issues of African American student achievement. Researchers need to address the disconnect that appears to exist between theory and practice. While many of the findings may be cost prohibitive, others begin with fostering relationships of understanding and trust. Highlighting the success that military base schools are having in educating African American students is significant because the legacy of racism and segregation in the U.S. has created assumptions regarding the intellectual inferiority of these students that still may very well permeate educational policy. Implementing the next steps in overcoming barriers in the application of new school policy may require more effectively illuminating what works.

Lessons Learned

In conducting this study there were several lessons that were learned in terms of the research process. A well-organized research design is essential. This begins with understanding the philosophical viewpoint and approach to qualitative inquiry. From the perspective of this researcher, there are multiple realities and subjective meanings in experiences. The social constructivist worldview pairs well with both the basic interpretative and phenomenological approaches used in this study, allowing the researcher to understand and interpret the experiences of others. The best research questions for this type of study are general and allow the participant to construct meaning from the situation discussed. The

lesson learned here is that there is an inherent process that is embedded in the research. The research progresses through each phase and is rooted in one's philosophical paradigm and approach to inquiry.

Although there is an inherent process that flows with research, a second lesson learned from this study dealt with handling the unexpected problems that can arise and interrupt the course of the study. The issue of recruitment and access to students who would participate in study activities was a major obstacle, often times feeling insurmountable. There was some anticipation that obtaining access to students who attended military base schools would be challenging because of the current state of national security, yet it was a revelation that multiple alternative routes to recruit students would be necessary. Eight different strategies were outlined once it was finally determined that DoDEA would be unable to grant formal access to undertake the research study in their schools. Although informal networking toward student recruitment began well before data collection, the length of time that it took to gain agreement from an organization to assist in recruitment was unexpected. The belief was that because there were such specific sample criteria to be met, it would be simpler and faster to work through a school system or education/recreation program with a liaison. The liaison served as an important insider and helped to facilitate information to potential participants and parents about the research process. The lesson learned here is that the researcher should realize that the process of investigation is not always linear and one must be prepared to problem solve and create alternative plans in case obstacles arise.

It is believed that part of the issue of recruitment and access dealt with how individuals perceived the goals of the project. Surprisingly, when the project was presented

and discussed with some organizational officials, there was a misconception surrounding the intentions of the study, even referring to it as “racially profiling students” based on their performance. It was also stated that the researcher find “someone who would be sympathetic to the subject,” declared a Caucasian male, suggesting that only African American school leaders would be interested in assisting with the study. It became apparent that the issue of race and achievement remains a sensitive topic, with some individuals resisting the idea that performance gaps still pervasively exist. A few African American adults expressed in passing that the topic of African American achievement is antiquated, and that African American researchers only continue to study the topic because they are trying to work out issues of their own racial identity and personal achievement. Perhaps part of this is true, but the fact remains that while educators may know what methods are most effective to improve African American student achievement, the political environment is still resistant to the implementation of what works.

It is the opinion of the researcher that all school leaders, no matter their race, should be sympathetic to not only understanding the needs of these students, but have the audacity to implement strategies that will improve student achievement. In terms of critics who believe that all is known for improving African American academic performance, the response is that there are ever evolving opportunities to search for improvements, if for no other reason, to keep the issue on the table until more school leaders and policy makers take action for improvement. The lesson learned for the researcher here is to continue to be persistent and passionate in the study of this topic.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to understand the lived academic and social experiences of African American students in military base sponsored schools. This is a body of knowledge where there are few scholarly reports available. The opportunity to conduct original research in this area had its challenges and perhaps this is one of the reasons why there is little published scholarly research. Limitations of this study included its small sample size, including students from one general school community, and the relatively short amount of time for inquiry as based in basic interpretative and phenomenological qualitative research. This study does, however, provide a practical examination of the factors that contribute to perceived school success for African American students that reflects their views, their voices. The findings from this study have been situated within the available body of research related to the topic.

The personal perspective of the researcher is important to note. It was important to keep biases in check throughout the time of the study. Biases were kept in check through the use of the phenomenological technique of reduction and keeping a research journal. Having a profound knowledge and orientation to the topic was valuable simply in bringing this topic to emergence. There is a recognition that military base schools have had a considerable influence on the life of the researcher. While these schools were attended Kindergarten through eighth grade, the alternative at the time was to attend public schools in a low-income, rural school system in the northeastern region of North Carolina, which was home to both of my parents. Each of my parents matriculated through the system and each of my siblings attended schools in this system. While there were long standing rumors that the

quality of these schools was extremely poor, lacking adequate funding and resources, it was not until 2009 that a state superior court judge ordered a hearing to determine if the school system should be taken over by the state. The judge remarked in an letter sent to the school system that the matter of the hearing dealt with the “apparent failure to provide the children who attend the schools within the system with equal opportunity to obtain a sound basic education” (Manning, 2009, p. 1). Based on a history of low state standardized test scores which may have resulted from pervasively failed systems, processes, procedures, and instructional practices that have gone on for a number of years, the judge declared that the school system had committed “academic genocide” that “must be stopped” (Manning, 2009, p. 10).

While upsetting, this was no surprise based on the countless stories heard from immediate and extended family members over the years regarding the quality of education in the school system. What was comforting was the idea that finally the situation in these schools, particularly for African American students, was being brought to a state, perhaps even a national, level of recognition. It was also reassuring to know that the quality of schools I attended and the educational programs on the military base was in stark contrast to the local public schools. Upon reflection there is a profound sense that my life chances were improved from the experiences of attending military base sponsored schools, and I was too was “set up for life” as the participants described in the study. If I would have attended schools elsewhere it would never be known if I would have developed the passion for education and learning as I have known from the very beginning of my educational journey. It will also never be known if I would have had the foundation to work toward the goal of

obtaining this degree. What is known is that with the right foundation all students, regardless of race and cultural background, should be given opportunities to thrive educationally and allow their voices to be heard.

Summary

The final chapter of the research has presented information on the major findings from the study of African American student academic and social experiences in military base sponsored schools. A summary and discussion of the major findings was presented. Findings were situated in the existing research literature and implications for policy and practice were offered. Directions for future research were included. Lessons learned and conclusions from the researcher's perspective were provided.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Policy Creating the Department of Defense Schools

From the U.S. Code Online via GPO Access
[wais.access.gpo.gov]
<http://frwebgate4.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/waisgate.cgi?WAISdocID=340604384153+10+0+0&WAISaction=retrieve>
[Laws in effect as of January 3, 2006]
[Document affected by Public Law 6]
[CITE: 10USC2164]

TITLE 10--ARMED FORCES

Subtitle A--General Military Law

PART III--TRAINING AND EDUCATION

CHAPTER 108--DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE SCHOOLS

Sec. **2164.** Department of Defense domestic dependent elementary and secondary schools

(a) Authority of Secretary.--(1) If the Secretary of Defense makes a determination that appropriate educational programs are not available through a local educational agency for dependents of members of the armed forces and dependents of civilian employees of the Federal Government residing on a military installation in the United States (including territories, commonwealths, and possessions of the United States), the Secretary may enter into arrangements to provide for the elementary or secondary education of the dependents of such members of the armed forces and, to the extent authorized in subsection (c), the dependents of such civilian employees.

(2) The Secretary may, at the discretion of the Secretary, permit dependents of members of the armed forces and, to the extent provided in subsection (c), dependents of civilian employees of the Federal Government residing in a territory, commonwealth, or possession of the United States but not on a military installation, to enroll in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to this subsection. If a member of the armed forces is assigned to a remote location or is assigned to an unaccompanied tour of duty, a dependent of the member who resides, on or off a military installation, in a territory, commonwealth, or possession of the United States, as authorized by the member's orders, may be enrolled in an educational program provided by the Secretary under this subsection.

(b) Factors for Secretary To Consider.--(1) Factors to be considered by the Secretary of Defense in making a determination under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(A) The extent to which such dependents are eligible for free public education in the local area adjacent to the military installation.

(B) The extent to which the local educational agency is able to provide an appropriate educational program for such dependents.

(2) For purposes of paragraph (1)(B), an appropriate educational program is a program that, as determined by the Secretary, is comparable

to a program of free public education provided for children by the following local educational agencies:

(A) In the case of a military installation located in a State (other than an installation referred to in subparagraph (B)), local educational agencies in the State that are similar to the local educational agency referred to in paragraph (1)(B).

(B) In the case of a military installation with boundaries contiguous to two or more States, local educational agencies in the contiguous States that are similar to the local educational agency referred to in paragraph (1)(B).

(C) In the case of a military installation located in a territory, commonwealth, or possession, the District of Columbia public schools, except that an educational program determined comparable under this subparagraph may be considered appropriate for the purposes of paragraph (1)(B) only if the program is conducted in the English language.

(c) Eligibility of Dependents of Federal Employees.--(1)(A) A dependent of a Federal employee residing in permanent living quarters on a military installation at any time during the school year may enroll in an educational program provided by the Secretary of Defense pursuant to subsection (a) for dependents residing on such installation.

(B) A dependent of a United States Customs Service employee who resides in Puerto Rico, but not on a military installation, may enroll in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) in Puerto Rico in accordance with the same rules as apply to a dependent of a Federal employee residing in permanent living quarters on a military installation.

(2)(A) Except as provided in subparagraphs (B) and (C), a dependent of a Federal employee who is enrolled in an educational program provided

by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) and who is not residing on a military installation may be enrolled in the program for not more than five consecutive school years.

(B) At the discretion of the Secretary, a dependent referred to in subparagraph (A) may be enrolled in the program for more than five consecutive school years if the dependent is otherwise qualified for

enrollment, space is available in the program, and the Secretary will be reimbursed for the educational services provided. Any such extension shall cover only one school year at a time.

(C) Subparagraph (A) shall not apply to an individual who is a dependent of a Federal employee in the excepted service (as defined in section 2103 of title 5) and who is enrolled in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) in Puerto Rico, Wake Island, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, or the Virgin Islands.

(D) Subparagraph (A) shall not apply to a dependent covered by paragraph (1)(B). No requirement under this paragraph for reimbursement for educational services provided for the dependent shall apply with respect to the dependent, except that the Secretary may require the United States Customs Service to reimburse the Secretary for the cost of the educational services provided for the dependent.

(d) School Boards.--(1) The Secretary of Defense shall provide for the establishment of a school board for Department of Defense elementary and secondary schools established at each military installation under this section. The Secretary may provide for the establishment of one school board for all such schools in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and one school board for all such schools in Guam instead of one school board for each military installation in those locations.

(2) The school board shall be composed of the number of members, not fewer than three, prescribed by the Secretary.

(3) The parents of the students attending the school shall elect the school board in accordance with procedures which the Secretary shall prescribe.

(4)(A) A school board elected for a school under this subsection may participate in the development and oversight of fiscal, personnel, and educational policies, procedures, and programs for the school, except that the Secretary may issue any directive that the Secretary considers necessary for the effective operation of the school or the entire school system.

(B) A directive referred to in subparagraph (A) shall, to the maximum extent practicable, be issued only after the Secretary consults with the appropriate school boards elected under this subsection. The Secretary shall establish a process by which a school board or school administrative officials may formally appeal the directive to the Secretary of Defense.

(5) Meetings conducted by the school board shall be open to the public, except as provided in paragraph (6).

(6) A school board need not comply with the provisions of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.), but may close meetings in accordance with such Act.

(7) The Secretary may provide for reimbursement of a school board

member for expenses incurred by the member for travel, transportation, lodging, meals, program fees, activity fees, and other appropriate expenses that the Secretary determines are reasonable and necessary for the performance of school board duties by the member.

(e) Administration and Staff.--(1) The Secretary of Defense may enter into such arrangements as may be necessary to provide educational programs at the school.

(2) The Secretary may, without regard to the provisions of any other law relating to the number, classification, or compensation of employees--

(A) establish positions for civilian employees in schools established under this section;

(B) appoint individuals to such positions; and

(C) fix the compensation of such individuals for service in such positions.

(3)(A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), in fixing the compensation of employees appointed for a school pursuant to paragraph (2), the Secretary shall consider--

(i) the compensation of comparable employees of the local educational agency in the capital of the State where the military installation is located;

(ii) the compensation of comparable employees in the local educational agency that provides public education to students who reside adjacent to the military installation; and

(iii) the average compensation for similar positions in not more than three other local educational agencies in the State in which the military installation is located.

(B) In fixing the compensation of employees in schools established in the territories, commonwealths, and possessions pursuant to the authority of this section, the Secretary shall determine the level of compensation required to attract qualified employees. For employees in such schools, the Secretary, without regard to the provisions of title 5, may provide for the tenure, leave, hours of work, and other incidents

of employment to be similar to that provided for comparable positions in the public schools of the District of Columbia. For purposes of the first sentence, a school established before the effective date of this section pursuant to authority similar to the authority in this section shall be considered to have been established pursuant to the authority of this section.

(4)(A) The Secretary may, without regard to the provisions of any law relating to the number, classification, or compensation of employees--

(i) transfer employees from schools established under this section to schools in the defense dependents' education system in order to provide the services referred to in subparagraph (B) to such system; and

(ii) transfer employees from such system to schools established under this section in order to provide such services to those schools.

(B) The services referred to in subparagraph (A) are the following:

- (i) Administrative services.
- (ii) Logistical services.
- (iii) Personnel services.
- (iv) Such other services as the Secretary considers

appropriate.

(C) Transfers under this paragraph shall extend for such periods as the Secretary considers appropriate. The Secretary shall provide appropriate compensation for employees so transferred.

(D) The Secretary may provide that the transfer of an employee under this paragraph occur without reimbursement of the school or system concerned.

(E) In this paragraph, the term ``defense dependents' education system'' means the program established and operated under section 1402(a) of the Defense Dependents' Education Act of 1978 (20 U.S.C. 921(a)).

(f) Substantive and Procedural Rights and Protections for Children.--(1) The Secretary shall provide the following substantive rights, protections, and procedural safeguards (including due process procedures) in the educational programs provided for under this section:

(A) In the case of children with disabilities aged 3 to 5, inclusive, all substantive rights, protections, and procedural safeguards (including due process procedures) available to children with disabilities aged 3 to 5, inclusive, under part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1411 et seq.).

(B) In the case of infants or toddlers with disabilities, all substantive rights, protections, and procedural safeguards (including due process procedures) available to infants or toddlers with disabilities under part C of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1431 et seq.).

(C) In the case of all other children with disabilities, all substantive rights, protections, and procedural safeguards (including due process procedures) available to children with disabilities who are 3 to 5 years old under part B of such Act.

(2) Paragraph (1) may not be construed as diminishing for children with disabilities enrolled in day educational programs provided for under this section the extent of substantive rights, protections, and procedural safeguards that were available under section 6(a) of Public Law 81-874 (20 U.S.C. 241(a)) to children with disabilities as of October 7, 1991.

(3) In this subsection:

(A) The term ``children with disabilities'' has the meaning given the term in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401).

(B) The term ``infants or toddlers with disabilities'' has the meaning given the term in section 632 of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1432).

(g) Reimbursement.--When the Secretary of Defense provides educational services under this section to an individual who is a dependent of an employee of a Federal agency outside the Department of Defense, the head of the other Federal agency shall, upon request of the Secretary of Defense, reimburse the Secretary for those services at rates routinely prescribed by the Secretary for those services. Any payments received by the Secretary under this subsection shall be credited to the account designated by the Secretary for the operation of educational programs under this section.

(h) Continuation of Enrollment Despite Change in Status.--(1) The Secretary of Defense shall permit a dependent of a member of the armed forces or a dependent of a Federal employee to continue enrollment in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) for the remainder of a school year notwithstanding a change during such school year in the status of the member or Federal employee that, except for this paragraph, would otherwise terminate the eligibility of the dependent to be enrolled in the program.

(2) The Secretary may, for good cause, authorize a dependent of a member of the armed forces or a dependent of a Federal employee to continue enrollment in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) notwithstanding a change in the status of the member or employee that, except for this paragraph, would otherwise terminate the eligibility of the dependent to be enrolled in the program. The enrollment may continue for as long as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(3) Paragraphs (1) and (2) do not limit the authority of the Secretary to remove a dependent from enrollment in an educational program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) at any time for good cause determined by the Secretary.

(i) American Red Cross Employee Dependents in Puerto Rico.--(1) The Secretary may authorize the dependent of an American Red Cross employee described in paragraph (2) to enroll in an education program provided by the Secretary pursuant to subsection (a) in Puerto Rico if the American Red Cross agrees to reimburse the Secretary for the educational services so provided.

(2) An employee referred to in paragraph (1) is an American Red Cross employee who--

(A) resides in Puerto Rico; and

(B) performs, on a full-time basis, emergency services on behalf of members of the armed forces.

(3) In determining the dependency status of any person for the purposes of paragraph (1), the Secretary shall apply the same definitions as apply to the determination of such status with respect to Federal employees in the administration of this section.

(4) Subsection (g) shall apply with respect to determining the reimbursement rates for educational services provided pursuant to this subsection. Amounts received as reimbursement for such educational services shall be treated in the same manner as amounts received under subsection (g).

(Added Pub. L. 103-337, div. A, title III, Sec. 351(a), Oct. 5, 1994, 108 Stat. 2727; amended Pub. L. 104-106, div. A, title X, Sec. 1075, Feb. 10, 1996, 110 Stat. 450; Pub. L. 104-201, div. A, title XVI, Sec. 1608, Sept. 23, 1996, 110 Stat. 2737; Pub. L. 105-261, div. A, title III, Sec. 371(a)-(c)(2), Oct. 17, 1998, 112 Stat. 1988, 1989; Pub. L. 106-65, div. A, title III, Secs. 352, 353, Oct. 5, 1999, 113 Stat. 572; Pub. L. 106-398, Sec. 1 [[div. A], title III, Sec. 361], Oct. 30, 2000, 114 Stat. 1654, 1654A-76; Pub. L. 108-446, title III, Sec. 305(a), Dec. 3, 2004, 118 Stat. 2804.)

References in Text

The Federal Advisory Committee Act, referred to in subsec. (d)(6), is Pub. L. 92-463, Oct. 6, 1972, 86 Stat. 770, as amended, which is set out in the Appendix to Title 5, Government Organization and Employees.

The effective date of this section, referred to in subsec. (e)(3)(B), is the date of enactment of Pub. L. 103-337 which was approved Oct. 5, 1994.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, referred to in subsec. (f)(1), is title VI of Pub. L. 91-230, Apr. 13, 1970, 84 Stat. 175, as amended. Parts B and C of the Act are classified generally to subchapters II (Sec. 1411 et seq.) and III (Sec. 1431 et seq.), respectively, of chapter 33 of Title 20, Education. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see section 1400 of Title 20 and Tables.

Section 6(a) of Public Law 81-874 (20 U.S.C. 241(a)), referred to in subsec. (f)(2), was repealed by Pub. L. 103-382, title III, Sec. 331(b), Oct. 20, 1994, 108 Stat. 3965.

Amendments

2004--Subsec. (f)(1)(B). Pub. L. 108-446, Sec. 305(a)(1), substituted ``infants or toddlers'' for ``infants and toddlers'' in two places, ``part C'' for ``part H'', and ``1431 et seq.'' for ``1471 et seq.''.

Subsec. (f)(3)(A). Pub. L. 108-446, Sec. 305(a)(2)(A), substituted

``section 602'' for ``section 602(a)(1)'' and ``1401'' for ``1401(a)(1)''.

Subsec. (f)(3)(B). Pub. L. 108-446, Sec. 305(a)(2)(D), substituted ``or toddlers'' for ``and toddlers'', ``632'' for ``672(1)'', and ``1432'' for ``1472(1)''.

Pub. L. 108-446, Sec. 305(a)(2)(B), (C), redesignated subpar. (C) as

(B) and struck out former subpar. (B) which defined the term ``children with disabilities aged 3 to 5, inclusive''.

Subsec. (f)(3)(C). Pub. L. 108-446, Sec. 305(a)(2)(C), redesignated subpar. (C) as (B).

2000--Subsec. (i). Pub. L. 106-398 added subsec. (i).

1999--Subsec. (c)(3). Pub. L. 106-65, Sec. 353(1), struck out par. (3) which read as follows: ``A dependent of a Federal employee may continue enrollment in a program under this subsection for the remainder

of a school year notwithstanding a change during such school year in the

status of the Federal employee that, except for this paragraph, would otherwise terminate the eligibility of the dependent to be enrolled in the program. The preceding sentence does not limit the authority of the Secretary to remove the dependent from enrollment in the program at any time for good cause determined by the Secretary.''

Subsec. (d)(1). Pub. L. 106-65, Sec. 352, inserted at end ``The Secretary may provide for the establishment of one school board for all such schools in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and one school board for

all such schools in Guam instead of one school board for each military installation in those locations.''

Subsec. (h). Pub. L. 106-65, Sec. 353(2), added subsec. (h).

1998--Subsec. (a). Pub. L. 105-261, Sec. 371(a)(1), (2), designated first sentence as par. (1) and second sentence as par. (2).

Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 105-261, Sec. 371(a)(3), inserted at end ``If a member of the armed forces is assigned to a remote location or is

assigned to an unaccompanied tour of duty, a dependent of the member who

resides, on or off a military installation, in a territory, commonwealth, or possession of the United States, as authorized by the member's orders, may be enrolled in an educational program provided by the Secretary under this subsection.''

Subsec. (c)(1). Pub. L. 105-261, Sec. 371(c)(1), designated existing

provisions as subpar. (A) and added subpar. (B).

Subsec. (c)(2)(B). Pub. L. 105-261, Sec. 371(b), added subpar. (B) and struck out former subpar. (B) which read as follows: ``A dependent referred to in subparagraph (A) may be enrolled in the program for more than five consecutive school years if the Secretary determines that, in the interest of the dependent's educational well-being, there is good cause to extend the enrollment for more than the five-year period described in such subparagraph. Any such extension may be made for only one school year at a time.''

Subsec. (c)(2)(D). Pub. L. 105-261, Sec. 371(c)(2), added subpar.

(D).

1996--Subsec. (d)(7). Pub. L. 104-201 added par. (7).
Subsec. (e)(4). Pub. L. 104-106 added par. (4).

Effective Date of 1998 Amendment

Pub. L. 105-261, div. A, title III, Sec. 371(c)(3), Oct. 17, 1998, 112 Stat. 1989, provided that: ``The amendments made by this subsection [amending this section] shall apply with respect to academic years beginning on or after the date of the enactment of this Act [Oct. 17, 1998].''

Savings Provision

Section 351(c) of Pub. L. 103-337 provided that: ``Nothing in section **2164** of title 10, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall be construed as affecting the rights in existence on the date of the enactment of this Act [Oct. 5, 1994] of an employee of any school established under such section (or any other provision of law enacted before the date of the enactment of this Act that established a similar school) to negotiate or bargain collectively with the Secretary with respect to wages, hours, and other terms and conditions of employment.''

Transfer of Functions

For transfer of functions, personnel, assets, and liabilities of the United States Customs Service of the Department of the Treasury, including functions of the Secretary of the Treasury relating thereto, to the Secretary of Homeland Security, and for treatment of related references, see sections 203(1), 551(d), 552(d), and 557 of Title 6, Domestic Security, and the Department of Homeland Security Reorganization Plan of November 25, 2002, as modified, set out as a note under section 542 of Title 6.

Appendix C.

Individual Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The script and questions below were prepared for the semi-structured interviews that will be conducted with the study participants ages fourteen through eighteen years old.

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me to share your experiences. I would like to get to know you better by talking to you about your experiences being an African-American student who has attended school on a military base and public schools.

Specifically, the purpose of this interview is to gather a clearer understanding of your academic and classroom perceptions and experiences. This includes your thoughts about how you perform in your classes and thoughts about how your teachers instruct you. I am also interested in the relationships you share with your teachers and classmates. I want to know what your typical day is like, as well as your overall impressions of attending base schools and public schools.

Please know that I consider all of your responses voluntary and I ask for your informed consent to use portions of this interview for a graduate school level research report. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential. Portions of our discussion will be used directly in the final report. Do you have any questions?

Our conversation will last about an hour. I will be audio taping this session and will write down a few notes throughout our conversation. I hope this is not a distraction to you. I can assure you that your identity and responses will only be known by me. Please be as open as possible. You are in no way being judged by your responses.

Do you have any questions? (Address all participant questions)

Let’s begin.” (The interview will begin with the following statement and questions as a warm up)

“Tell me about yourself. (Allow student to speak about himself or herself)

How many base schools have you attended, how many public schools have you attended?
Do you feel that you are a successful student?

Common Experiences

- Do you believe that you share similar classroom (academic) experiences with other students like you in these schools? Do you believe that you share similar social experiences with other students like you in these schools?

Social Relationship Questions (teachers and peers)

- How would you describe your relationship with teachers inside the classroom? Do your teachers treat you with respect? Explain.

- How would you describe the level of expectation displayed by teachers? Did you feel supported?

- How would you describe your relationships with your peers?

After the interview participants will be thanked for their time and responses. Participants will have the opportunity to share further insights and ask the interviewer questions.

Demographic information such as age and gender will be collected at the time the sample is selected.

Upon the conclusion of the interview I will thank the participant for his or her time and responses and ask if the participant would be willing to review a written summary of the interview in the near future.

Appendix D.

Focus Group Interview Protocol

The script and questions below were prepared for the focus group interview that will be conducted with the study participants ages fourteen through eighteen years old.

Introduction: “Hello. My name is Audrey and I am a graduate student at North Carolina State University. I would like to get to know you better by talking to you about your experiences being an African-American student who has attended school on a military base and public schools.

All of you are in high school, but in different classes or schools. In a few minutes, I am going to ask you some questions about your schools, classrooms, teachers, and classmates. There are no wrong answers to the questions I will ask you. I just want to hear what you think or feel about the questions I ask. Also, you will not be graded on your answers. In fact, your teachers, your parents, and your classmates will not know how you answered any of the questions I will ask. If you have any questions about what I just said, please raise your hand now.

Specifically, the purpose of our conversation is to gather a clearer understanding of your academic and classroom experiences. This includes your thoughts about how you perform in your classes and thoughts about how your teachers instruct you. I am also interested in the relationships you share with your teachers and classmates. I want to know what your typical day is like, as well as your overall impressions of attending base schools and public schools.

Okay, when I ask a question you don't have to raise your hand to answer. But it is very important that I hear all of your answers. So when you have something to say, please wait until the person talking stops talking or until I call your name. I want you to remember one last thing before we begin. Some of you may agree with some of the answers you hear others saying, and you may disagree with some of the other answers people give. It is important that you let me know when you agree and when you disagree with each other. Are there any questions about this?”

Please know that I consider all of your responses voluntary and I ask for your informed consent to use portions of this interview for a graduate school level research report. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential. Portions of our discussion will be used directly in the final report.

Our conversation will last about an hour. I will be audio taping this session and will write down a few notes throughout our conversation. Mary, who is my assistant, will be

- How would you compare your experiences in military base schools with your experiences in public schools? Do you learn different things that help you to be more successful in the future in one school or the other? Do you think that base schools and public schools equally prepare you for future challenges? If so, in what ways? If not, how could either one improve?

Common Experiences

- Do you believe that you share similar classroom (academic) experiences with other students like you in these schools? Do you believe that you share similar social experiences with other students like you in these schools?

Social Relationship Questions (teachers and peers)

- How would you describe your relationship with teachers inside the classroom? Do your teachers treat you with respect? Explain.

Appendix E. Institutional Review Board Approval

North Carolina State University is a land-grant university and a constituent institution of The University of North Carolina

Office of Research
and Graduate Studies
Division of Research Administration

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

Campus Box 7514
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7514
919.515.2444 (phone)
919.515.7721 (fax)

From: Debra Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board

Date: July 8, 2009

Project Title: Voices of Promise: African American Student Academic and Social Experiences in Military Base Schools

IRB#: 1008-09-06

Dear Audrey Martin-McCoy

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on June 18, 2010 and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:

1. You must use the attached consent forms which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00003429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.

4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Sincerely,



Debra Paxton
NC State IRB

Appendix F

Letter of Invitation for Study Participation

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I would like to invite your child to take part in a study being conducted as part of my dissertation at North Carolina State University. This study is being conducted in an effort to better understand the academic and social experiences of African American high school students who have attended schools on military bases. The purpose of the study is to gather a clearer understanding of your child's perceptions of their classroom and overall school experiences. This includes thoughts about how he or she performs in classes and interact with teachers. The study will try to understand the relationships shared with teachers and classmates to show a typical day in the school life of your child. It has been identified that your child may also have experience in attending public schools. The study also seeks to gather your child's overall impressions of attending base schools and public schools.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and can be ended at any time. Please read the enclosed *North Carolina State University Informed Consent Form for Research*. The *Informed Consent Form for Research* must be signed by you (if your child is under the age of 18), and your child prior to participation.

Participation in the study will include your child taking part in a brief written warm up activity that will help me build rapport with your child. It will consist of a few open ended questions that will take no more than 30 minutes to complete. Your child will also participate in a one hour individual interview and may be randomly selected to participate in a one hour group interview with other children participating in the study. All students completing the written warm up activity and the individual interview will receive a debit card valued at \$25.00. Five to six students will be randomly selected to participate in the focus group interview. Those who complete this interview will receive a second debit card valued at \$10.00 for their additional time. Participants who do not complete either interview will not receive monetary compensation. All participants will be offered an electronic copy of the final research report.

What is said during the individual interview will be kept confidential. Direct quotes from your child may be used in the final research report. Your child's name will **not** be used in reporting the results and any information identifying your child specifically will be changed so that your child will not be identifiable. Pseudonyms will be used instead of your child's real name. All information linking your child's name to this study will be destroyed seven years after the completion of the report.

Your child will be a valuable contributor and I would like to include them in this study. To provide consent for participation, I will need for you and your child to sign the

enclosed informed consent form and return one copy to me in the self addressed stamped envelope included with this letter **by Monday, October 26, 2009**. Upon receipt of the consent form I will send your child the brief warm up activity (via e-mail or U.S. mail, whichever he or she prefers). Once your child lets me know that the warm up activity is complete, I will set up the specific date, time, and location of the individual interview and state whether he or she has been selected for the focus group interview.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at (919) 878-7441 or (919) 880-9610. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Audrey Martin-McCoy, M.Ed.

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Voices of Promise: African American Student Academic and Social Experiences in Military Base Schools

Principal Investigator: Audrey Martin-McCoy

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Lance Fusarelli

We are asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this research study is to better understand the academic and social experiences of African American high school students who have attended schools on U.S. military bases.

INFORMATION

If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher will initially ask you to answer a few questions in writing to get to know you better. After this, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview that will last about an hour. A few weeks later some participants (five to six) will be randomly selected to participate in a group interview with other study participants that will last about an hour. The individual interview and the focus group interview will be tape recorded. You may be contacted by the researcher (by phone or e-mail) within two weeks of the date following the individual or focus group interview to seek any clarifying or follow up information. The total amount of time required for your participation in this study will be approximately three (3) hours over the course of two months.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

RISKS

To lessen any possible discomfort you may experience during the individual interview, the interview will occur at the Stone Street Youth Pavilion or any other agreed upon location that works well for both you and the researcher. The time of the interview will be scheduled at your convenience, but will not be scheduled during school instructional time. A comfortable, friendly, and non-threatening atmosphere will be set for the focus group interview. The focus group interview will be held at the Stone Street Youth Pavilion.

BENEFITS

The information that you share during this study will provide teachers, principals, and policy makers with your perspective to provide suggestions to improve student school experiences. This information will be particularly useful in understanding how school experiences may be similar or different for African American students who attend military base schools and public schools across the country.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely, in a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. Electronic files will be stored on an electronic storage system in which only the principal research has access. Direct quotes from participants may be used in reports about the research results. An electronic report of the research results will be made available to participants at the end of the study. All identifying information will be removed from all communications and tape recordings. All audio tapes and back up audio tapes, electronic data, and print files (handwritten and electronic hardcopies) will be destroyed and disposed seven years after the completion of the study.

COMPENSATION

Study participants who complete the written warm up activity and the individual interview will receive a debit card valued at \$25.00. Study participants who complete the written warm up activity, the individual interview, and who are randomly selected and complete the focus group interview will receive a second debit card valued at \$10.00. If you withdraw from the study prior to either interview phase you will not receive any compensation.

CONTACT

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-4514).

CONSENT

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature _____ **Date** _____

Parent's/Guardian's signature _____ **Date** _____

Investigator's signature _____ **Date** _____