A CASE STUDY EXPLORING URBAN AFRICAN-CENTERED CHARTER SCHOOL PERSONNEL'S DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT OF A COLLEGE-GOING ETHOS

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A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

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Developing college access in high schools for students from marginalized backgrounds (i.e., low socioeconomic, people of color, and first generation) is important because these students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than White, wealthier, and non-first-generation students. This qualitative case study examined how an African-centered charter high school’s personnel developed students’ college-going aspirations and how the school’s organization, governance, practice, mission, and curriculum transmitted and supported a college-going ethos. This study used a social constructivist paradigm to understand and interpret how African-centered personnel developed college-going aspirations within their students. The selected site was an urban public African-centered coeducational charter high school with a postsecondary education focus located in Northeastern United States. The school has excelled academically both in terms of graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment. The school’s first graduating class in 2000 reported 92.6% successfully graduated and 77% of the graduates progressed to a postsecondary destination. From 2002 to 2010, this school had 100% graduation rates and from 2004-2010, 100% of the graduates progressed to a postsecondary destination.

This study relied on active inquiry that encompassed 13 semi-structured interviews with school personnel, document analysis, and observations of professional development workshops and African-centered practices. The participants revealed that a college-going ethos was a result of all school constituents investing in the school’s educational philosophy. This site exemplified the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” in its academic environment. The majority of school constituents, families, community, personnel, and alumni had a common sense of purpose: preparing their students for postsecondary education. The school’s collaborative college-going approach entailed the following: the school’s mission and vision was exemplified in all school literature, school personnel were active agents in the school’s college-going culture, and students had access to the school’s college preparation resources.
The school operated under two types of cultures: 1) the college-going culture that the personnel transmitted and supported, and 2) an African-centered culture that exposed students to the rich history, culture, and traditions of the motherland Africa. In describing a college-going culture within an African-centered environment, participants expressed the need for personnel to support students’ college-going aspirations due to the potential impact of advancing not only the individual but also the African American community as a whole. Personnel did not want students to view their racial or ethnic background as a deficit or disadvantage, but as a catalyst for academic success.

This study contributes to the scholarly community by addressing cultural dynamics within higher education and highlighting culturally relevant educational approaches. The findings provide insight into ways school personnel can adapt or revise the school’s policies and practices to ensure that the school develops and supports students’ college-going aspirations.

*Keywords:* college-going; Afrocentric; ethnocentric; African-centered; ethnic-centered; college-preparatory; success; culturally relevant education
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family, especially all of my nieces and nephews who inspired me to strive for academic excellence. My family has taught me the value of hard work, determination, and continues to serve as my greatest inspiration for academic and professional excellence. I truly hope I continue to serve as a positive role model for them and for future students.

Additionally, this dissertation is dedicated to the Lancaster Partnership Program, which provided the support and resources for me to develop college-going aspirations. A special recognition goes to Dr. Leophus “Skip” King, a friend and a mentor, who instilled in me the value of education. Though you are gone, you are not forgotten. I will continue your legacy of inspiring youth from marginalized populations to pursue postsecondary education and become the change we want to see in our communities.
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Asante sana (Thank you very much)

Christina Wright Fields
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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

Ni jukumu la jumuia yote kumwelimisha motto. (It takes an entire village to educate a child).

_African Proverb_

Statement of the Problem

The United States continues to face the challenge of improving secondary education and increasing student readiness for higher education and work. Many Americans encounter challenges regarding accessibility and preparation for higher education. Approximately 40% of students with annual family incomes of less than $20,000 enrolled in postsecondary education immediately following high school versus 84% of students with annual family incomes of more than $100,000 (Bozick & Lauff, 2007). Additionally, Black, Latino, and Native American students’ development of college-going behaviors in high schools is important because non-White, non-Asian American students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than do White and Asian American students. Only 47% of African American, 45% of Hispanic or Latino, and 38% of American Indian or Alaska Native enroll in postsecondary education immediately following high school versus 67% of White students and 77% of Asian or Pacific Islanders (Bozick & Lauff, 2007). Postsecondary enrollment continues to be an unattainable goal for many Americans due to individuals’ lack of access to social and cultural capital.

Higher education and K-12 education develop the foundation for economic advancement for individuals, society, and the world. Students’ access to and success in college are “substantially influenced by prior academic achievement” (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009, p. 1). Numerous factors including difficulties adjusting to college, economic hardships, and academic under-preparedness contribute to the underrepresentation and lack of retention or attrition of
marginalized students in postsecondary education (i.e., low-income, first generation, and students of color).

President Obama’s 2010 State of the Union address affirmed that “in the 21st century, the best anti-poverty program around is a world-class education” (Obama, 2010). Hagedorn and Tierney (2002) made a point similar to President Obama’s statement by concurring that “a college degree can no longer be considered a luxury, but is rather a necessary passport to the middle class” (p. 3). A main goal for America’s educational system is to have every student graduate from high school ready for college and a career. Many families lack the knowledge or resources that provide students with the skills necessary to be active agents in a college-going culture. In general, schools have crucial and irreplaceable roles to play in guiding each student’s choice about whether or not postsecondary education is an option (McDonough, 2005). Educators, families, friends, and community members support students’ development of college-going behaviors both inside and outside the academic environment.

The literature on college access and college choice is extensive, but there is limited research on how African-centered charter high school personnel develop college-going aspirations of students. The first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992. Charter schools are publicly funded independent schools governed by a group or organization that function outside of district and state bureaucracies, and allow schools to have a greater level of autonomy than public schools (Farmer-Hinton, 2006; Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). Charter schools have the ability to develop a specific and defined mission statement that guides their practices and addresses the needs of the students and families they serve. Miron and Nelson (2002) described charter schools as “a new breed of public school—a hybrid that mixes elements of
traditional public schools (universal access and public funding) with elements usually associated with private schools (choice, autonomy, and flexibility)” (p. 3).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how personnel at one African-centered charter high school transmit and support a college-preparatory ethos. This study also examined how the school mission, physical setting, governance, values, and strategies utilized by African-centered personnel support college readiness. College-going cultures, African-centered education, and social and cultural capital were used to formulate an understanding of the phenomenon of how personnel at African-centered charter school develop students’ college-going aspirations. I discuss cultural capital due to its connection to social capital.

**Background of the Study**

To understand how African-centered charter high school personnel develop students’ college-going aspirations, it is important to examine the literature on college-going cultures, ethnocentric education, charter schools, and social and cultural capital. Horace Mann, often referred to as “the father of the public school,” was an important advocate of common schools or free public elementary schools in the United States (U.S). Mann argued that public schooling provided opportunities for poor children, children with disabilities, and children of color to “raise their social condition regardless of birth and socioeconomic background” (Kubow & Fossom, 2007, p. 10). The common schools would become the “great social equalizer” due to benefits at both the individual and societal levels. Mann believed that children from low socioeconomic classes could obtain knowledge and skills to advance their social mobility and at the societal level, a skilled labor force would stimulate economic growth and allow citizens to participate in
political processes (Kubow & Fossom, 2007). Mann wanted public schooling to be inclusive and have the ability to support and develop an individual’s upward mobility.

In Fall 2012, over 49.8 million students attended public elementary and secondary schools in the US; of these 14.8 million were in grades nine through twelve (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). About 3.4 million students will graduate from high school in 2012-2013, including 3.1 million students from public high schools and 283,000 from private high schools (Hussar, 2013). The status dropout rate represents the percentage of 16-24 year olds who have not enrolled in school and who have not earned a high school credential—either a diploma or a traditional equivalent such as a general education development (GED). In 2010, the status dropout rates for Asians or Pacific Islanders and Whites (4% and 5%, respectively) were both lower than the status dropout rates for Blacks (8%) and Hispanics (15%) (Aud et al., 2012). The percentage of American college students who are Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Black continues to increase. From 1976 to 2010, the percentage of Hispanic students increased from 3% to 13%, Asian or Pacific Islanders rose from 2% to 6%, and the percentage of Black students rose from 9% to 14%; these percentages did not include nonresident immigrants (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). Postsecondary enrollment for Hispanics, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Blacks continues to increase, but at a disproportionate rate to their overall population growth in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

The educational reform legislation, the “No Child Left Behind” (or NCLB) Act of 2001, mandated stricter accountability regulations that focused on closing the achievement gap of minority students. NCLB promised to increase the number of students who graduate from college. Additionally, under the NCLB legislation, children who enroll in schools identified as
needing improvement have the choice to enroll in charter schools located within their district (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

**Charter Schools**

Given the challenges faced by at-risk students regarding academic achievement and college enrollment, charter schools have become an alternative solution to promote educational reform. The charter school movement dates back to the early 1990s. A provision passed in 1991 in Minnesota allowed licensed teachers to create innovative schools (charter schools) through a contract from a public school board (Brouillette, 2002). Charter schools are alternative options for children from failing or low-performing public schools (Hoxby, 2004). Charter schools become options for students who may be disadvantaged because they lack the avenues to escape a failing school, meaning they are unable to relocate to another area.

Charter schools resemble public schools in that they cannot charge tuition and must be open to all kinds of students (Nathan, 1996). In 2009–10, charter schools operated in 40 states and the District of Columbia (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Currently, approximately 5,700 charter schools serve about 2 million students across the country (Center for Education Reform, 2012a). The majority of charter school students are racial or ethnic minorities (52%), at-risk (50%), or low-income (54%) (Allen & Consoletti, 2010, p. 12). Charter schools continue to serve a large at-risk student population and are not always taking the top students. While the school utilized in this study reflects these characteristics in that it serves primarily Black, low-income, and marginalized student population. The school serves as an exemplar urban charter school because of its unique African-centered mission and virtually 100% graduation and college acceptance rates.
**Ethnocentric Schools**

Charter schools provide an ideal conduit for the establishment and growth of culturally based education models. Not all charter schools are ethno-centered; however, the school utilized in this study identified as such. Ethnocentric schools serve as an alternative for families who desire ethno-centered education that incorporates a particular culture into schooling. Ethnocentric schools “seek to create social change by teaching children from their ‘centeredness’ rather than their ‘marginality’” (Carpenter, 2006, p. 14). Organizations and communities created ethnocentric schools because they did not want to accept the mentality of assimilation but rather began advocating for schools that reflect “distinctiveness of their own cultures and the contributions they can make to a pluralistic American culture” (Buchanan & Fox, 2004, p. 78).

Generally, members of racial or ethnic minority groups create schools that integrate their cultural heritage and serve their communities. Ethnocentric schooling in the United States began during the Black Power movement of the 1960s as a reaction to a Eurocentric common school curriculum (Cervantes, 1984).

Ethnocentric schools operate on the foundation that culturally relevant pedagogy leads to higher self-esteem and eventually higher academic achievement among youth of color (Antrop-González, 2006). Additionally, ethnocentric schools may adapt the curriculum to emphasize the contributions of their ethnic group. Ethnocentric education allows an educated ethnic person to develop a core understanding of his or her own peoples’ contributions to local, national, and world civilization as part of the curriculum (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). The school utilized in this study implements an African-centered curriculum; thus, I will explain this type in more detail.
**African-Centered Schools**

Numerous ethnic, racial, and religious groups have focused on the articulation of pedagogical principles specific to their cultural group. These groups include native Hawaiian, Native Americans, and Latino/Hispanic students. Catholics instruct students in Catholic-centered education by “purporting the primacy of Catholicism” and Jewish-centered schools instruct students that they “should participate in the larger society, but they should pledge allegiance to Jewish needs and causes” (Shockley, 2007, p. 104). African-centered education is similar, only instead of instilling senses of Catholic, Jewish, Native American, or Latino allegiance, it instills a sense of African allegiance. African-centered education emphasizes a Pan-African orientation that aims to unify and uplift people of African descent. Additionally, African-centered education intends to develop students’ pride in the motherhood continent of Africa (Shockley & Frederick, 2010).

African-centered education focuses on the origins, current status, and future of the African world (Akoto, 1992). African-centered education embraces the rich history, culture, and traditions of the motherland Africa. Dr. Molefi Asante described Afrocentric education as the transmission of ideas and ideals that are rooted and grounded in the historical experiences of African people. The transmission of those ideas and ideals represent a centering on the agency and the perspective of African people as subjects in human reality rather than as objects or on the margins of Europe. (Personal communication, February 1, 2013)

Children of all ethnic backgrounds can benefit from this educational experience because African-centered education involves an inclusionary process where “all representative groups are placed,
not above or below a group, but alongside the rest of humanity” (Detroit Public Schools, 1992, p. 4).

**Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this study was: How do the personnel at an African-centered charter school try to influence students’ college-going aspirations? The following five sub-questions further supplement the main research question:

1. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school support a college-going culture?
2. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school perceive the impact of their interactions on students’ college-going process?
3. How does an African-centered charter school’s culture influence personnel’s attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding students’ college aspirations?
4. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school utilize social and cultural capital to develop students’ college-going aspirations?
5. What challenges do personnel at Ubuntu (pseudonym for the school utilized in this study) face in enacting a college-going culture within an African-centered environment?

**Significance of the Study**

I seek to understand how African-centered charter school personnel develop students’ college-going aspirations. I hope that the perspectives of African-centered personnel will serve to support the development of similar ethnocentric schools that focus on college preparedness. Additionally, the personnel’s perspectives may offer additional academic success strategies within the study site’s environment. This study also provides information regarding the personnel’s perspectives on African-centered curriculum and student academic success, which is
valuable because educators can gain insight as to how to design and implement culturally responsive policies and practices that facilitate students’ college-going aspirations.

**Definition of Terms**

**Academic preparedness** can define one or more of the following: high school GPA, high school rank, college entrance test scores, high school college preparatory courses, advanced placement courses, the quality of high school attended, and quality and intensity of high school curriculum (Swail, Reed, & Perna, 2003).

**African-centered education** is multicultural education with an emphasis on African and American culture. African-centered education emphasizes the belief that all humans have their physical, social, and intellectual origins in Africa. In African-centered education, the child is at the “center” of education and through an inclusive process, all representative groups become placed not above or below any group, but alongside the rest of humanity (Detroit Public Schools, 1992, p. 13).

**Afrocentric schools** have curriculum and student activities designed with the “intent to instill knowledge of and to foster understanding, respect, and pride in, African and Black traditions, history, culture, and language” (Hunt, 2010, p. 31).

**Charter schools** are legally and fiscally autonomous educational entities functioning within the public school system under charters (Vergari, 1999).

**College-going culture** reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from postsecondary academic institutions as those experiences pertain to the students’ current and future lives (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).
College preparation programs are programs that enhance a school’s regular activities and generally designed for low-income youth who otherwise might not be able to enroll in postsecondary education (Hagedorn & Tierney, 2002).

Cultural capital is the ability to understand and practice the norms, discourse patterns, and language of a dominant culture (Bourdieu, 2007; Cervantes, 1984; Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2005).

Cultural integrity emphasizes programs and teaching strategies that support cultural validation by engaging students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities (Tierney & Jun, 2001).

Ethnocentric schools provide a social environment that encourages cultural traditions and interpersonal relationship styles created to improve student self-esteem and promote cultural identity (Buchanan & Fox, 2003).

Ethnocentric charter schools are “charter schools whose mission is the promotion and study of one ethnic group as a means of providing students with a link to their cultural heritage, sometimes including language” (Buchanan & Fox, 2004, p. 80).

 Personnel include all constituents employed at the school (i.e., teachers, administrators, custodians, etc.).

Social capital describes the available resources an individual has access to within his or her social network that can contribute to personal development and achievement (Coleman, 1988).

Student college choice is “a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university, or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton, & Coppersmith, 1989, p. 7).
Student Success (postsecondary) describes “academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance” (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006, p. 7).

Student Success (secondary) describes student engagement, achievement of educational goals, post-high school preparation, satisfaction, and persistence.

Underrepresented students are students from marginalized backgrounds and may include first-generation college attendees, low-income, and non-White students. These students come from historically underrepresented backgrounds in postsecondary institutions.

Study Delimitations and Limitations

I delimited this qualitative study to personnel in a selected African-centered charter high school in the Northeastern U.S. Students’ voices were not included in this study because this study sought to understand how African-centered charter high school personnel developed and supported the college-going aspirations of students. In addition, this study did not include parents or community liaisons. This study is limited to participants at an African-centered charter high school and does not cover African-centered primary or middle schools. Additionally, this study is limited to a charter school environment and may not be generalizable to a public school context. Because of purposeful sampling, the results may not be generalizable to other situations or populations (Merriam, 1998). Case study research, while an appropriate methodology for examining how African-centered charter high school personnel develop college-going aspirations, was not without limitations. A major limitation of this single-case study is the lack of generalizability because of its unique context. The findings from this study may prove useful to similar ethnocentric schools that desire to develop and support college-going aspirations.
Overview of Study

This study has five chapters. In Chapter 1, I presented the introduction, statement of problem, and the purpose of the study. Additionally, in this chapter I identified the research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, delimitations, and limitations of the study. In Chapter 2, I cover the review of literature, research, and theoretical frameworks relevant to the topic of study. I present the methodology, procedures, and data analyses in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, I describe the study’s context and participants. In Chapter 5, I discuss the findings of the research study and highlight the personnel’s perspectives and aspects of the African-centered education programs that enhance college-going culture. Finally, in Chapter 6 I present the study and findings, as well as provide implications and recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter includes an extensive review of the literature relevant to college-going cultures and postsecondary aspirations of low-income and underrepresented students. I divide this chapter into five sections that include: a) precollege experiences; b) social and cultural capital; c) college-going cultures; d) charter schools; and e) ethnocentric education.

Introduction

Past research indicates that the level of academic preparation in high school is positively related to high school graduation rates (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000), college enrollment (Perna, 2000), and college persistence rates (Horn & Kojaku, 2001). Better academic preparation leads to greater success in postsecondary education, at both two-year and four-year institutions. Greene and Winters (2005) reported that approximately “40% of White students, 23% of African-American students, and 20% of Hispanic students who started public high school graduated college ready in 2002” (p. 3). Students from marginalized backgrounds are less likely to be prepared to pursue postsecondary education because they have not obtained the minimum set of skills and credentials required to attend a four-year institution, and indeed, they enroll at four-year institutions at lower rates than their White peers (Pryor, DeAngelo, Palucki Blake, Hurtado, & Tran, 2011).

In order to improve college completion and attainment, society must increase the number of students who graduate from high school and enroll in postsecondary education. The first challenge to obtaining a bachelor degree is becoming academically prepared during secondary education. Kirst and Usdan (2009) asserted, “Improving educational opportunity requires both access and better preparation, so that students gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college and earn their certificates or degrees” (p. 8).
To understand how ethnocentric charter schools facilitate student college preparedness and postsecondary aspirations, it is important to examine the literature on pre-college experiences, college preparation, college choice, cultural and social capital, charter schools, and ethnocentric education. Understanding these bodies of work will allow individuals to understand how culture can enhance college-going environments. *Student college choice* is the process that results in students’ decisions to continue their formal education (Hossler et al., 1989). The student college choice process is a complex and interwoven byproduct of numerous family and school-based factors, including students’ academic ability, the amount and quality of parental encouragement and involvement received, their early educational and occupational aspirations, the amount information available about college, and their acquisition of college qualifications (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Past research has shown that precollege experiences and student and family interactions at the secondary level greatly improve collegiate experiences and outcomes. Precollege programs help motivate students, encourage them to think about the possibility of college, as well as offer crucial academic support and college knowledge to students and families. Two research studies (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001) indicated the following as strong predictors of college attendance and completion, particularly for minority and low-income students: a) academic preparation, b) social support, c) access to information, d) parental involvement and knowledge about college, and e) financial aid.

**Precollege Experiences**

Annually, approximately 60% of first-year college students discover that they are not academically prepared for postsecondary studies despite being fully eligible to enroll (Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Students’ exposure to rigorous academic curriculum can positively increase their postsecondary academic success. The quality of the academic
experience and intensity of high school curriculum positively influences almost every dimension of success in postsecondary education (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). Students who secure college qualifications during high school are more likely to enroll in higher education than their peers (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Students are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education when they have access to college preparation resources, such as college entrance exam preparation, advanced courses, and pre-collegiate counseling. Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) acknowledged that high school students develop predispositions to attend college, search for general information about college, and make college attendance choices while undergoing the college-choice process.

**College Choice, Social Capital, and Cultural Capital**

Numerous impediments to higher education exist for low-income and underrepresented youth that can reduce their college-going rates. Addressing these impediments can increase, to some extent, the college going rates for students from marginalized backgrounds. Families from low socioeconomic backgrounds and from underrepresented groups tend to be less knowledgeable of social and educational systems and to have less access to important information and resource networks. Low-income and underrepresented families typically lack the cultural capital—knowledge of how the system works—and social capital—access to these important social networks (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Accounting for social and cultural capital is crucial to understanding how students’ high school environments’ facilitate their postsecondary aspirations. A primary objective of social capital is to enable students’ access to cultural capital (Coleman, 1988). Students from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds generally experience inadequate counseling that decreases their precollege preparations. These students may also encounter less support from
teachers that then can limit their expectations and aspirations. Developing college-going behaviors and plans enhances a student’s ability to secure the critical cultural capital needed to be successful in higher education. Educational and career aspirations and outcomes correlate to the social and cultural resources embedded in adolescents’ social networks, academic curriculum, and social class (Smith-Maddox, 1999).

**College Choice**

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) proposed a three-stage model of college choice that included predisposition, search, and choice. Each stage facilitates students’ behaviors and attitudes for enrolling in postsecondary education. In the first stage, predisposition, students determine whether or not they desire to pursue postsecondary education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The high school’s college-going culture influences students’ predisposition because postsecondary institutions generally have little direct impact on student college choice during this stage. Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) acknowledged that “students’ family background, academic performance, peers, and other high school experiences influence the development of their post-high school educational plans” (p. 9).

During the second stage, students search for college-related information. Schmit (1991) identified three types of information gathering in the search stage: attentive search, active search, and interactive search. In attentive search, students are not actively seeking information but are more likely to pay attention to discussions about postsecondary education if the topic arises. During the active search stage, students are actively seeking out discussions about postsecondary educational options. Interactive search involves student-initiated dialogues with various constituents (i.e., parents, school personnel, peers, etc.) and can include sending for college information or visiting campuses. Students’ searches help them determine what characteristics
they desire in postsecondary institutions and which postsecondary institutions offer them (Hossler, et al., 1999). McDonough’s (1997) research findings revealed that aspects of the students’ search processes (e.g., number and nature of college visits, questions asked of college representatives) varied based on students’ socioeconomic status (SES). McDonough argued that students from high SES families had more useful and refined search processes than students from low SES families. Students from high SES families typically have parents or relatives who had experience in similar college preparation situations.

In the choice stage, students select a postsecondary institution to attend. College-going cultures in schools greatly influence students during all stages of the college choice process because cultural and social capital play prominent roles.

**Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital is the idea that the curriculum, language, and school values reproduce the realities of power and influence within a culture. To varying degrees, students acquire cultural capital or the ability to understand and practice the norms, discourse patterns, and language of a dominant culture (Bourdieu, 2007; Cervantes, 1984; Pai, Adler, & Shadiow, 2005). Cultural capital in the United States is associated with the values, language, behaviors, and norms of the middle upper class Whites. Historically, the primary purpose of schools was to meet the needs of middle upper class Whites, thus the knowledge that students acquired in formal schooling ignored the perspectives of various underrepresented cultural groups. Currently these underrepresented cultural groups are the largest percentage of nation’s student population.

Cultural capital includes the credentials students have acquired prior to making their college choice—these credentials encompass support from others as well as academic and extracurricular experiences that students exchange for college admission (Nora, 2004). Cultural
capital is a prerequisite for upward mobility and is explicitly viewed through academic achievement and implicitly viewed through role socialization. Preference for a postsecondary education and advanced degrees is one form of cultural capital that allows middle-class and upper middle-class families to retain their economic status (Hossler et al., 1999).

Educational attainment of groups directly correlates to the amount of cultural capital they possess. Classes differentiate from one another in terms of the overall amounts of capital (economic and cultural) controlled by individuals or families (Bourdieu, 2007). Middle and upper class families transmit cultural capital to their children, that they hope sustains their class status, privilege across generations, and positions them for college access and success. Students and families from disadvantaged backgrounds may possess lower levels of college knowledge because they are inexperienced or unfamiliar with the college-going process. McDonough (1997) acknowledged, “Those with high cultural capital have clear strategies of how much and what kind of schooling each generation should have” (p. 9). Students who have the types of cultural knowledge that the dominant group values tend to have greater access to the necessary resources that foster college choice. Individuals with upper class backgrounds tend to acculturate into the dominant culture early, which results in an unequal distribution of cultural capital in society. Schools’ cultural environments create and perpetuate prestige, social standing, and evaluations based on the degree to which students possess dominant cultural capital (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shuan, 1990).

School systems are extensions of the society in which students must learn how to persist and succeed. Before students can “excel in an environment, they must have a sense of who they are or a cultural base to orient themselves to prevent becoming lost or discouraged” (Robinson & Biran, 2004, p. 51). As students develop a sense of their identity, they also begin to develop a
sense of purpose and reinforce their motivation to excel in environments. Robinson and Biran (2004) emphasized, “Identity is what anchors a person to a cultural reality, and it is what helps to maintain a focus that motivates academic success” (p. 51).

Tierney and Jun (2001) expressed that the objective of college preparation programs is to enable students “to affirm their culture en route to acquiring the cultural capital necessary to succeed in college” (p. 210). Hagedorn and Tierney (2002) further affirmed that college preparation programs are structural responses “to the low-income children’s deficit of cultural capital—a response that stimulates the conditions to deliver the social and academic capital necessary to succeed in college” (p. 4).

In terms of cultural capital, college preparation programs connect students to social networks and try to develop the cultural capital that it takes to survive in what many working-class youths perceive as an alien environment-college campuses—or it might focus on psychological and emotional support structures for adolescents who do not have an adult in their lives who has gone to college or who understands how to go about getting into college. (Tierney & Jun, 2001, p. 210)

Tierney and Jun (2001) defined cultural integrity as “those programs and teaching strategies that call upon students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities” (p. 210). Cultural integrity describes how a student’s cultural background are sometimes perceived as a disadvantage or deficit but rather as a critical component needed for the acquiring of cultural capital and achieving success. Kunjufu (2001) affirmed the need for teachers to “be cognizant of the child’s culture and learning styles before a curriculum is designed” and “to include the capital of the child in the curriculum design” (p. 46). The cultural integrity framework recognizes the cultural groundwork
of the personal, social, and institutional factors that interact to develop and support access to college (Rueda, 2005).

Social Capital

*Social capital* describes the resources an individual has access to within his or her social network that can contribute to personal development and achievement. Social capital is useful for understanding college choice for three reasons:

a) Social capital provides the currency students can use to make decisions about going to college;

b) Social capital is available outside of the home, whereas socioeconomic status is not; and

c) Social capital provides a mechanism for the interaction of students and their families that goes beyond the discrete effects usually considered as determinants in the educational aspirations literature. (Hossler et al., 1999, p. 152)

Gaining access to college is “not solely a function of the student’s academic achievement, but is also contingent on having the right social connections” (Slay, 2012, p. 23). Social capital in an educational environment emphasizes how schools facilitate students’ pre-college preparation, expectations, and postsecondary enrollment. For example, when school personnel have consistently high expectations that all students will attend college after high school graduation, teachers, and staff will reinforce the norms of school attendance and class participation, encourage appropriate course taking patterns, and disseminat[e] information about enrollment in and graduation from higher education institutions. (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 28)
Individuals acquire social capital through their relationship with other individuals and the formation of networks. The student relationships with adults and peers from the school encourage student academic development that relates positively to students’ college-going aspirations and pursuit of postsecondary education (Coleman, 1988; Hossler et al., 1989). Reid and Moore (2008) conducted a college access study and reported that teachers, counselors, and school mentors influence African American first generation college students’ postsecondary pursuits. The participants expressed that these adults encouraged them to achieve academically, consider higher education and provided consistent emotional support through the college preparation process.

Social capital describes the social and academic support networks that influence the college transition of underrepresented students. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) emphasized the importance of school-based social capital in which school personnel can help to promote college-going as a viable postsecondary option and share college preparation and college choice information through their relationships with students. School personnel have the potential to serve as an alternative support network for students to develop the norms and access the resources for college-going behaviors.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) identified two types of social networks that influenced minority students’ access to social capital—institutional agents (teachers or counselors) and protective agents (community or family members). Institutional and protective agents provide academic and social support to students outside of the school by encouraging students’ academic achievement and college-going behaviors. Academic support generally refers to the “formal and informal strategies that build, strengthen, and promote students’ mastery of subject matter and skill development through deliberate activities, structures, policies, and expectations” (Savitz-
Social support describes the “strategies that foster and fortify social networks, school connectedness, self-confidence, and academic motivation through intentional services, behaviors, structures, and expectations” (Savitz-Romer et al., 2009, p. 6). These networks increase the likelihood of college attendance and provide opportunities to achieve academic success.

Social capital positively correlates with high school graduation and college enrollment. Perna and Titus (2005) researched how high school characteristics facilitated college enrollment of high school graduates. Their findings indicated that regardless of students’ social, economic, cultural, and human capital, the likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education after high school seems related to the number of resources accessed by students through social networks at the school. Perna and Titus (2005) acknowledged that in terms of the social capital that is available at the school attended, students who attended high schools in which many parents contacted the school about academic matters are more likely to enroll in a four-year college than they are not to enroll. However, students who attended high schools in which a large number of parents contacted the school about behavior problems were less likely to enroll in a four-year college than they are to enroll.

Noeth and Wimberly (2002) investigated the college-planning activities of African American and Latino high school students from 23 urban high schools in the Midwestern and Southern regions in the United States. Their findings revealed that students received detailed support and guidance in college preparation and planning activities from school personnel. Students accessed the social capital at their schools to develop their college-going aspirations and college preparation.
O’Connor’s (2000) study of African American high schools girls residing in disadvantaged communities also highlights the importance of development of social networks with school personnel for students to develop and realize their college-going aspirations. Students in this study benefited from school-based advocates (personnel) who provided college preparation guidance and encouraged students to remain on track with their college-going aspirations. The college preparation guidance included sharing information about which courses to take for college admission, preparing and taking college entrance exams, and understanding college financial aid. College preparation becomes successful when the school makes it a priority and integrates it into school’s infrastructure.

Positive relationships exist between social capital and educational aspirations, including parental expectations (Muller & Ellison, 2001) and parental-school involvement (Smith-Maddox, 1999). Hossler et al. (1999) concluded that parental involvement, student academic success, peers, and high school track were significant factors in students’ college choice. This study did not find a significant relationship between students’ educational aspirations and the amount they talked to teachers and counselors. Lastly, Hossler et al. (1999) reported that parents who attended college are familiar with the experience and are better equipped to explain to their children how the college system is structured, as well as how it works, and how the student can prepare for it.

**Developing a College-Going Culture**

Education is the deliberate transmission of culture and schooling is a formal process that facilitates cultural transmission (Pai et al., 2005). Education’s primary purpose is the reproduction of culture, more specifically the replication of the dominant culture. Pai et al. (2005) defined culture as the knowledge, beliefs, values, skills, and behaviors of a social group.
School culture generally mirrors the dominant culture in U.S. society, White middle-class norms and values. The dominant culture at traditional U.S. schools naturally teaches students the values of individualism and competitiveness, rather than cooperation and teamwork. The school utilized in this study encourages cooperation and teamwork among all school constituents. In addition, traditional schooling develops further inequality by “valuing the social and cultural experiences of the dominant culture or the intellectual and economic elite and devaluing those of the lower class” (Smith-Maddox, 1999, p. 171). The lack of synchronization between school culture and culture of the students can lead to potential misunderstanding of actions and misinterpretation of communication between school personnel and students (Ware, 2006).

Culture facilitates how learning is organized, how curriculum is developed, and how pedagogy is valued. Culture is a valuable function of student success, but is often disregarded (Ware, 2006).

Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin (2003) noted programs that incorporate students’ diverse backgrounds and cultures into academic and social activities most effectively communicate college-going behaviors. De La Rosa and Tierney’s (2006) research shows that a high school’s environment influences students’ development of career and college aspirations as well as academic preparation for college. High schools need to develop and maintain a college-going culture that encourages at-risk students to develop the competence to pursue college.

Deal and Peterson (2009) identified six cultural elements in school success: 1) a shared sense of purpose; 2) teacher involvement in decision-making; 3) collaborative work around instruction; 4) norms of improvement; 5) professional learning by staff; and 6) a sense of joint responsibility for student learning. Vargas (2004) concluded that underrepresented students do not naturally obtain college knowledge, since most students come from families with limited or no college experience. Oakes, Rogers, Lipton, and Morrell (2002) defined college-going culture...
as one “where adults and peers see college-going as expected and attainable, where they see the effort and persistence that preparation for college requires as normal” (p. 108). College-going cultures encourage students to view college-going behaviors as normal values, beliefs, and expectations. Corwin and Tierney (2007) further reaffirmed “a strong college culture is tangible, pervasive and beneficial to students…and is inclusive and accessible to all students (p. 3).

Corwin and Tierney (2007) described college-going culture as activities in high school that cultivated students’ aspirations and behaviors that were conducive for preparing, applying, and enrolling in college. According to McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) the following conditions need to exist in order to achieve the goal of preparing all students for a full range of postsecondary options: 1) school leadership is committed to building a college culture; 2) all school personnel provide a consistent message to students that support their quest for a college preparatory K-12 experience; 3) all counselors are college counselors; and 4) counselors, teachers, and parents are partners in preparing students for college (p. 8).

These four conditions are not sufficient to define college-going culture because of the complexity and diversity of students, personnel, communities, and schools. Oakes et al. (2002) noted the importance of establishing a multicultural, college-going identity that developed “confidence and skills to negotiate college without sacrificing one’s own identity and connections with one’s home community” (p. 108). A multicultural, college-going identity integrates students’ multiple worlds while supporting their identity development and college-going behaviors. Corwin and Tierney (2007) researched previous college readiness studies and reported that the following five elements were present in building a college-going culture and increasing college access: 1) academic momentum; 2) an understanding of how college plans
develop; 3) a clear mission statement; 4) comprehensive college services; and 5) coordinated and systemic college support. (p. 3)

Academic momentum describes how school cultures promote college-going by offering challenging academic courses (college preparatory) instructed by qualified teachers (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). The second element, an understanding of how college plans develop, recognizes that these plans begin with college aspirations. Schools with a college-going culture expect that their students will attend college and students share those expectations. Once these expectations are developed, students participate in precollege activities that may include completing appropriate coursework, taking all required exams, and exploring various college options (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

The third element describes the importance of schools having a clear mission statement that articulates college expectations, goals, benchmarks, and action plans. The school’s purpose and mission serve as the foundation of its culture because both shape and reflect what the school hopes to accomplish (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Some schools integrate culture into their missions by involving students’ parents and/or their families because this integration encourages and supports students’ relatives’ development of the cultural capital needed to help their children attend and succeed in college.

The fourth element, comprehensive services includes three components: 1) guidance, 2) preparation, and 3) information and resources (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). School personnel can provide guidance regarding college application and financial aid process. Academic preparation is a key indicator of college readiness and greatly influences college persistence. Information and resources provide the knowledge needed to navigate the college-going terrain. The fifth
element focuses on support; an effective college-going culture effectively engages all stakeholders in developing and achieving college goals.

Tierney and Corwin’s (2007) model is similar to an earlier college-going culture model developed by McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) called the “Nine Principles of College Culture.” Their model was created from previous research and lessons learned from more than four years of partnership work between a public research university, a non-profit public interest organization, and numerous urban K-12 schools. The partnership developed the Creating a College Culture Project with the general goal of ensuring that the schools involved devoted energy, time, and resources toward college preparation so that all students were prepared for a full range of postsecondary options upon graduation (McClafferty et al., 2002). This model was created to allow schools to assess the extent to which they are currently supporting a college culture and the strategies they can implement to strengthen that culture. McClafferty et al. defined a college culture as consisting of the following nine principles: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 9).

These nine principles intend not to be mutually exclusive but rather are a highly integrated and complementary system. The first principle, college talk, indicates that “college culture requires clear, ongoing communications with students about what it takes to get to college, so that they understand what is required and expected of them if they want to stay on a college path” (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 10). College talk is present in the daily practices of school personnel and manifested through their interactions with students. McClafferty et al. (2002) described college talk as being both verbal and non-verbal communication between
teachers, students, and parents. Examples of non-verbal communication are newsletters, blogs, and posters. Both types of communication convey college expectations to students. Personnel must be knowledgeable and proactive in sharing college-going information with students and ultimately reinforce these expectations through their dialogues with students.

Students, families, administrators, and community members are all stakeholders who play a critical factor in developing a college-going environment. Clear expectations, the second principle, indicates that all students are to be prepared for a full range of postsecondary options and the explicit goals of this preparation must be clearly defined, communicated, and a part of the daily culture of the school, such that students, family, teachers, administrators, and staff recognize the role that each plays in preparing students for college. (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 12)

Developing these expectations as early as possible can allow students to continue to be motivated to participate in college-going behaviors especially when school constituents nurture and support the students. It is not sufficient to have these expectations; the school must provide information and resources that support a college-going culture.

McClafferty et al. (2002) described information and resources as students having access to comprehensive, up-to-date, and easily accessible information and resources related to college. School counselors and personnel incorporate this information into their daily interactions with students. Schools also provide this information to parents and families by way of college preparation workshops.

The fourth principle, a comprehensive counseling model, enhances college culture by having all counselors be college counselors, which means they encourage college-counseling
opportunities and are informed about college issues (McClafferty et al., 2002). The comprehensive counseling model highlights the need for high school counselors to become knowledgeable about college admissions and preparation. This model should incorporate all school personnel because each school constituent interacts with students in various ways. Encouraging all students to pursue higher education cannot be the responsibility of only the college counselor; it needs to be a primary goal of all school personnel. Testing and curriculum, the fifth principle, acknowledges that standardized tests (i.e., PSAT, SAT, and ACT) are crucial steps on the path to college and that schools must provide the necessary resources to ensure that students are prepared for the test and that testing fees are not a barrier to any student’s ability to take the test (McClafferty et al., 2002).

The sixth principle, faculty involvement, reflects the importance of school faculty being active partners in the creation and maintenance of a college culture (McClafferty et al., 2002). Research shows that students who feel supported by their teachers and possess college aspirations generally attended schools in which these types of teacher-student relationships were developed and educators appeared caring and supportive (Croninger & Lee, 2001). These students were more likely to attend college. School educators should be up-to-date regarding college preparatory information (i.e., admissions, financial aid, institutional types, etc.) and take advantage of opportunities through professional development to obtain this information.

Additionally, school educators should integrate college-going information into their regular classroom activities as well as be available to families for academic advising. Along with faculty involvement, it is crucial that family involvement, the seventh element, exists as well. Corwin and Tierney (2007) noted that students benefit from the involvement of their family members. Parents and other relatives should become informed partners in the process of
building a college-going culture and be provided with “opportunities to obtain knowledge about the college-going planning process as well as be made aware that their children are ‘college material’” (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 21).

The eighth principle, college partnerships, highlights the importance of creating links between the school and local higher education institutions. These partnerships include campus visits, academic enrichment programs, or college fairs. Ultimately, the goals are to raise awareness and aspirations towards college. The last principle, articulation, indicates the importance of students having “a seamless experience where a college message is communicated from kindergarten through 12th grade” (McClafferty et al., 2002, p. 25).

Administrators should develop and facilitate a college-oriented agenda for the school community. These individuals articulate college goals, forge relationship with community colleges and four-year institutions, facilitate a school-wide plan to increase college going, select key individuals to implement the plan, and develop accountability benchmarks (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Also, teachers are important component of college-going culture because students interact with these stakeholders daily. Corwin and Tierney (2007) affirmed that teachers “have the potential to motivate students by sharing personal college experiences . . . and prepare students for eligibility requirements and the academic challenges they will face” (p. 10). Another stakeholder, counselors, offer guidance about college and financial aid as well as advise students with course selection that creates college readiness.

Additionally, support personnel can support the college-going culture as well because of their daily interactions with students. Webb and Norton (1999) acknowledged,

[A] very important group of employees cannot be overlooked in any consideration of the administration of human resources . . . that group of employees traditionally known as
classified or noncertified personnel, and more recently as support personnel. This group of employees makes up 31% of the full-time staff of the public schools and is composed of such employees as secretarial and clerical personnel, instructional and library aides, transportation staff, food services employees, plant operation and maintenance workers, and health and recreational staff. (p. 454)

Limited research has focused on how support personnel influence students’ academic achievement and their critical role in the school’s culture. Conley, Gould, and Levine (2010) acknowledged, “the longevity of support personnel represent the history and cultural experience of those involved with the school in the past and present, as well as those who will be part of that school in the future” (p. 211).

School educators’ pre-conceived notions of students who are likely to succeed can positively influence the extent of number of their daily interactions with these students. Consequently, if educators have low expectations of low-income students and racial and ethnic minority students, they may unintentionally limit their interactions with these students, potentially limiting these students’ success (College Tools for Schools, 2009). These stakeholders must acknowledge that at-risk students encounter numerous challenges during the pursuit of higher education.

Past research by Noeth and Wimberly (2002), Stanton-Salazar (1997), and Perna and Titus (2005) emphasized the need for secondary schools to develop environments that reinforce the importance of a postsecondary education for all students. At-risk students, who often are people of color, low-socioeconomic status, and first-generation, face numerous challenges during the pursuit of higher education. Adelman (1999) commented, “the impact of a high school curriculum of high academic intensity and quality on degree completion is far more
pronounced—and positively—for African American and Latino students than any other pre-college indicator of academic resources” (p. vii). Intense academics are a key component of college-going cultures. Challenging academic preparation, peer social networks, and knowledge about postsecondary education and access to pre-college information are strong predictors for college attendance and completion (Martinez & Klopett, 2003). Developing a college-going culture influences students’ college aspirations and expectations that then can enhance academic success and postsecondary enrollment.

**Charter Schools**

Charter schools have the ability to create a unique mission statement that describes the purpose of their institution as well as their target populations. Charter schools offer an opportunity for “innovation and autonomy within the public school system” (Kana‘iaupuni & Ishibashi, 2005). Additionally, charter schools vary regarding how they address education achievement gaps whether it be through cultural immersion activities, talent development models (e.g., math and science academies, college preparatory schools), school organizational designs (e.g., block scheduling, small schools), innovative curricular or instructional methods, or a combination of these various efforts (Farmer-Hinton, 2006). Charter schools may differ by their mission or focus (i.e., ethno-centered curriculum; science, technology, engineering and mathematics; and college-preparatory). The school utilized in this study has a mission that focuses on providing students with an African-centered post-secondary focused education.

Charter schools facilitate innovative practices in school management, curriculum, and use of technology. From 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools grew from 0.3 million to 1.6 million students (Aud et al., 2012). The percentage of charter schools with enrollments of 300–499 students increased from 12 to 21% during 1999-
2000; the percentage with 500–999 students, from 9 to 14%; and the percentage with 1,000 students or more, from 2 to 4% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

The percentages of students in public charter schools who were White, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native decreased between 1999–2000 and 2009–10 (42 vs. 37, 34 vs. 30, and 2 vs. 1%, respectively) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012). Also, the percentages who were Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander increased between 1999–2000 and 2009–10 (20 vs. 26 and 3 vs. 4%, respectively). Charter school enrollment demographics continue to be a concern because of “their potential to further stratify schools along racial, socioeconomic, and other class-based lines” (Cobb & Glass, 1999, p. 2). This stratification may be due to parents selecting schools that reflect their racial or ethnic backgrounds or ethnocentric curriculum. The percentage of charter schools that were high-poverty schools, where more than 75% of students were eligible for free or reduced price lunch (FRPL), was 33% in 2009–10 and the percentage of charter schools that were low-poverty schools, where 25% or fewer of students were eligible for FRPL, was 19% (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012).

Nathan (1999) provided the following principles of the charter idea

- Charters are public schools. They are non-sectarian and may not have admissions tests. No one is assigned to work in or to attend, charter schools. Charters may be newly created schools or schools that have converted to charter status;
- Charters are accountable for improving student achievement, a responsibility specified in three-to-five year contracts that they sign with their authorizing (sponsoring) organization;
• In exchange for this explicit accountability, charter schools receive waivers from most state and local operating rules, regulations, and contracts;

• Various public bodies have the authority to authorize others to create new charter schools or to convert existing district-controlled schools into charter schools (p. 24)

The charter movement is helping students and families by changing the educational system. Nathan (1998) asserted, “the current public education system features a deeply inequitable school choice system; based on wealth and residence. . . . Charter schools decrease this inequity” (p. 74). Charter schools operate on three basic principles: choice, freedom, and accountability (Center for Education Reform, 2012b). Charter schools are similar to public schools in that they are open to all who chose to attend without regard to race or ethnicity, religion, or academic ability and are paid for by tax dollars (Billingsley, Bragato, Patterson, Rice, & Riley, 2000; Nathan, 1996). Charter schools are free from board control and often teacher unions, and often make their own decisions about curriculum, staffing, and student rules (PBS, 2009). Some charter schools receive federal Public Charter School Program funds and are required to accept students based on a lottery (Bulkley & Fisler, 2003). Schools can control the requirements and application process, which narrows the range of students who seek admission. Charter schools participate in their states’ accountability systems and adhere to many state and federal regulations (Hoxby, 2004). Unlike traditional public schools, their authorizers can close charter schools if they do not perform well.

Because charter schools are public schools, they are financed by the same per-pupil funds that traditional public schools (Nathan, 1996). Nationwide, on average, charter schools are funded at 61% of their district counterparts, averaging $7,612 per pupil compared to 73% at
conventional district public schools, or $10,441 per pupil (Center for Education Reform, 2012b). When a student leaves a traditional public school, the public funds allocated for that student now belong to the charter school rather than to the school district (Vergari, 2002). Schools continually face the opportunities of attracting new students as well as possible threats with losing students due to competition.

Charter schools tend to be much smaller than district-run schools, with an average size of 137 versus 475 students (RPP International, 2000), which allows for more personalized instruction and advising than larger public schools. Another difference between charter schools and regular public schools is that charter schools “exist on a fee-per-student basis, meaning if they can attract students, they can grow” (Hoxby, 2004, p. 4).

Charter schools have the autonomy to develop and implement innovative practices and approaches that support academic achievement and improve student performance. These unique institutions aim to close gaps in various education outcomes (e.g., dropout rates, college access, student test scores, and special education referrals) (Farmer-Hinton, 2006). A school’s charter is granted with the expectation that the school will develop and implement strategies that raise student achievement and meet other measurable goals as outlined by the charter. The “charter” is a formal, legal document, similar to a contract between the school’s board, personnel, and the public body that authorizes and monitors its functions (Finn, Manno, & Vanourek, 2000). Generally, charters have terms of three to five years, and schools that fail to achieve the contracted improvements are closed by the sponsoring organizations (Nathan, 1996). Five key features distinguish charter schools:

- They can be created by almost anyone;
They are exempt from most state and local regulations, essentially autonomous in their operations;

They are attended by youngsters whose families choose them; and

They are staffed by educators who are also there by choice. (Finn et al., 2000, p. 15)

Since their development, charter schools have encountered numerous debates over school effectiveness and academic achievement. Many charter schools are too new to have established track records and may struggle to become a sustainable organization. Of the approximately 6,700 charter schools that have ever opened across the U.S., 1,036, or about 15 percent, have closed since 1992 (Center for Education Reform, 2011). Charter schools close due to five primary causes: 1) finances, 2) mismanagement, 3) substandard academic performance, 4) inadequate facilities, and 5) district obstacles (Center for Education Reform, 2011). Financial challenges are the main reason charter schools close, mainly as a consequence of low student enrollment or inequitable funding. Approximately a quarter of all closed charter schools close because of ethical violations (Center for Education Reform, 2011). These ethical violations have included to misbehaviors that have included misspending, misrepresentation, or lack of accountability. The third challenge, academic performance, focuses on inadequate student learning and academic proficiency. Charter schools rarely receive facilities funding to cover the cost of acquiring and maintaining facilities, and they are responsible for locating their own suitable buildings (Center for Education Reform, 2011). This leads charter schools to having limited options for facilities that often result in the charter schools being located in older or smaller buildings that may not meet all of their needs. Locating, paying for, and maintaining the facilities continue to be a challenge for numerous charter schools because of nonexistent or
inadequate funding. Many schools have been forced to close because they could not pay for
their facilities. The last challenge, district obstacles, describes instances where local school
boards or state entities have intentionally developed problems with the charter school,
compromising its ability to remain operational (Center for Education Reform, 2011). Charter
schools face numerous governance and logistical challenges including staff turnover, financial
constraints, space acquisition, and adhering to school mission (Farmer-Hinton, 2006). Charter
schools are diverse and tend to differ from state to state and from district to district, making it
challenging to develop accurate generalizations. Charter schools encounter many obstacles and
are not guaranteed success or longevity, making it especially important to understand what
makes some schools so successful.

Most of the literature on charter school effectiveness focuses on academic achievement
(Lawton, 2009). The research on charter schools has revealed mixed results ranging from
somewhat positive, to no impact, to negative impacts. These disparities exist because of the
complexity of charter schools due to their various types, student demographics, length of
operation, and different mandated state regulations. Past research conducted on academic
achievement in charter school tended to report findings that highlighted schools with inadequate
academic achievement (King, 2004). Booker, Gilpatric, Gronberg, and Jansen (2007)
investigated the impact of charter school attendance on student performance on five cohorts of
students in Texas. The first finding was that students performed poorly in their first year at
charter schools, regardless of whether the charter school itself was new or had been operating for
two or more years. The second finding was that students who remained enrolled in charter
schools beyond their first year recover with more positive performance in subsequent years. The
third finding showed that the overall impact of charter attendance typically improved with the
length of time students attend a charter. The last finding was that students who enroll back at a traditional public school appear to recover from their performance drop in the first year of charter attendance.

Hanushek, Kain, Rivkin, and Branch (2007) examined the average quality differences between charter and public schools for all students and by demographic characteristics and initial achievement. Their findings indicated that charter schools’ performance generally begins below that of regular public schools in the early years of operation, but in later years, there were no significant sector differences, controlling for the selective nature of the student population.

As the number of charter schools in the U.S. increases, the number of charter school governance models and administrative structures permitted by state laws continues to increase. An authorizer is “an entity or body approved by state legislature to bring into existence charter schools” (Center for Education Reform, 2012a). Authorizers develop processes and approve charter schools as well as are accountable for managing and monitoring schools’ progress in complying with all applicable laws. Local school boards are the most common charter school authorizer. Carlson, Lavery, and Witte (2012) analyzed the relationship between charter school authorizers and student achievement. They utilized a 10-year panel dataset from Minnesota, a state that allows four distinct types of authorizers—local school boards, postsecondary institutions, nonprofit organizations, and the Minnesota Department of Education. Their findings indicated that there was no statistically significant relationship between charter school authorizing type and mean levels of student achievement.

Postsecondary institution authorized charter schools generally reported higher levels of student success when compared to their closest traditional public schools with similar demographics. In 2010, Central Michigan University’s (CMU) charter school students
outperformed their peers in district schools on all 18 Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) tests (Center for Education Reform, 2012a). Continuously enrolled CMU charter school students exceeded the statewide average in math and reading, and 85.5% of CMU charters made annual yearly progress (AYP) compared with 79.1% statewide. At State University of New York-authorized charters in New York, 80% of students in grades three through eight scored at or above proficiency in English Language Arts compared to 77% of all public school students. Additionally, in math 92% of SUNY-authorized charter students scored at or above proficiency compared to 86% of all public school students (Center for Education Reform, 2011).

There is limited research examining whether or not charter schools promote college-going behaviors and academic success for low-income underrepresented students. Farmer-Hinton (2006) explored the organizational challenges of a recently chartered school and the pragmatic challenges the school faced during the implementation of their mission to turn disadvantaged students into college-bound students. The findings from this study showed that the staff experienced several organizational challenges that prevented them from fully understanding and implementing the school’s mission. The organizational challenges included making adjustments for students who are below grade level, and lacking a common approach to student—staff relations.

More research could provide additional information to understand how some of these diverse institutions are excelling academically. Research on charter high schools is limited due to their creation in the last decades. The charter school movement “has become one channel whereby an increasingly diverse public school population can translate demography into curriculum” (Buchanan & Fox, 2003, p. 2).
**Ethnocentric Schools**

Historically, public schools focused on building democracy and assimilating minorities into the homogenized dominant American culture. Schools are “shaped by cultural practices and values and reflect the norms of the society for which they have been developed” (Hollins, 1996, p. 31). These institutions existed to reinforce and reproduce social norms relating to the economic and class structure. Akoto (1992) acknowledged,

> Education, formal, or informal, lies at the very core of the nation building effort, as it involves the codification, perpetuation, interpretation, and transmission of national history and culture, which are the fundamental building blocks and cohesive force of the Nation. (p. 41)

Schools maintain the status quo in society by limiting individuals’ freedom and opportunity depending on whether or not an individual possesses cultural capital, thus maintaining our society’s class system (George & Aronson, 2003). Schooling reinforces or legitimates the dominant culture’s knowledge, language, behaviors, values, dressing, or ways of talking. Moreover, schooling further perpetuates hegemony by allowing the dominant culture to capitalize on its ideologies through the passive acknowledgement of minority groups. Groups or individuals who are marginalized in society generally continue to be marginalized in schools.

Ethnocentric schools challenge schooling processes as the stronghold of the status quo that reproduces the United States’ stratified racial and economic system (Farmer-Hinton, 2008, p. 73). The school utilized in this study identifies as an ethnocentric charter school, more specifically an African-centered charter school. Buchanan and Fox specifically defined ethnocentric charter schools as “charter schools whose mission is the promotion and study of one
Research on ethnocentric or ethno-centered charter schools or schools that focus on serving a particular ethnic group continues to be limited. Buchanan and Fox (2004) acknowledged that ethnocentric schools highlight change in “one or more of these areas: social environment, values, content, pedagogy, and language” (p. 79). Many of these schools have high percentages of ethnic or racial minority students due to the ethnocentric curriculum or school location.

Asante (1992) affirmed that students who are “centered in their own cultural information are better students, more disciplined, and have more motivation for school work” (pp. 29-30). The social environment in ethnocentric schools embraces cultural traditions and personnel adopt interpersonal relationship styles that aim to improve student self-esteem and promote cultural identity (Buchanan & Fox, 2004). Some ethnocentric schools adjust the academic content to reflect the contributions of their ethnic group, whereas others implement different pedagogies and teaching practices that may be better fits with ethnocentric curriculum’s cultural teaching and learning. Alridge (1999) affirmed that

On a curricular level, African-centered education would teach students about the cultural and historical accomplishments of African countries and use African and Black American culture and history as frames of reference. This provides learning experiences that foster positive self-images for African American students. (p. 188)

Lastly, these schools may incorporate native languages in instruction (Buchanan & Fox, 2004). College preparation inequities are the “civil rights issues of our time” (Boo, 2004, p. 165); therefore, it is crucial to improve ethnic and racial minority students’ academic success and
college-going aspirations in our nation. Ethnocentric schools implement teaching strategies that are congruent with students’ diverse learning styles. Kana’iaupuni and Ishibashi (2005) reported that Native Hawaiian students who attended charter schools performed better on standardized measures of achievement and were less likely to be chronically absent from school than were comparable students in mainstream public schools. These findings reinforce the critical role charter schools play in offering educational alternatives for many culturally diverse students whose “cultural roots and socioeconomic background may create a poor fit for conventional public school classroom approaches” (Kana’iaupuni, & Ishibashi, 2005, p.2). The Betty Shabazz International Charter School in Chicago reported that their students using the curriculum at Shabazz outperformed many of their neighborhood peers on the 2006 Illinois Standards Achievement tests (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010).

Ethnocentric schools employ “preferred ways of processing and acting on information that reflect the cultural heritage of their target population” (Buchanan & Fox, 2003, p. 3). These teaching strategies could include incorporation of the literature and the history of specific racial/ethnic populations. Ethnocentric pedagogy acknowledges that racism and worldwide Eurocentric hegemonic attitudes and practices still exist in daily school practices (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994).

**Afrocentric, Africentric, and African-Centered Schools**

Carter G. Woodson’s (1933) *The Mis-education of the Negro* framed the comprehensive critical and educational perspective of the Afrocentric school (Hunt, 2010). His work articulated the need for people of African descent to develop and facilitate African-centered education that emphasized their social and political liberation. Akoto (1992) and Murrell (2003), both
prominent Africentric educators, believed that Black students have significant problems because of the mismatch between Black cultures and the culture offered and/or adhered to in schools.

Afrocentric schools developed out of the Independent Black School Movement that grew out of the Black empowerment struggles and initiatives of the 1960s (Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994). Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) reaffirmed that African-centered education was developed as a response to community needs. During the 1980s and 1990s, the school district of Milwaukee developed African-centered schools to address the needs of African American males with the creation of two African American male immersion schools. The schools integrated the history and culture of African Americans into the curriculum. According to Nobles (1989):

*Afrocentric, Africentric or African-centered* are interchangeable terms representing the concept which categorizes a quality of thought and practice which is rooted in the cultural image and interest of people of African ancestry and which represents and reflects the life experiences, history, and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of analyses. Afrocentricity is therein the intellectual and philosophical foundations upon which people of African ancestry should create their own scientific and moral criterion for authenticating the reality of African human processes. It represents the core and fundamental quality of the "Belonging" of people of African ancestry. (as cited by Madhubuti & Madhubuti, 1994, pp. 7-8)

Afrocentricity does not divide society; rather it provides African American children with the cultural and academic knowledge to reorient their educational experience. The number of African-centered, Africentric, or Afrocentric schools in the U.S. is unclear because of the inconsistent use of these three terms. Additionally, there is not a commonly accepted definition of what differentiates African-centered, Africentric, and Afrocentric education.
Pedagogy and Curriculum

African-centered education embraces a “holistic approach that integrates academic growth, cultural connection, and development of personal responsibility, concern, and respect for the community, family, teacher, and peers” (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010, p. 785). Hunt (2010) defined Afrocentric schools as having curricula and student activities that are designed with the “intent to instill knowledge of, and to foster understanding, respect, and pride in, African and Black traditions, history, culture, and language” (p. 31). An Afrocentric curriculum allows students to view themselves and their ancestors through the curriculum. Asante (2009a) emphasized that “when Black people view themselves as centered and central in their own history then they see themselves as agents, actors, and participants rather than as marginal on the periphery of political or economic experience” (para. 4). School personnel in African-centered schools incorporate aspects of African culture into daily school activities.

Shockley and Frederick (2010) highlighted seven fundamental constructs of Afrocentric education:

- Identity—the importance of identifying the Black child as African;
- Pan-Africanism—the idea that all Black people in the world are Africans;
- African culture—the long-standing tradition of Blacks using African culture to sustain themselves and bring order to their lives and communities;
- African values adoption and transmission—inclusion of an African ethos into educational process for Black children;
- Black nationalism—the idea that Blacks, regardless of their specific location, constitute a “nation;”
• Community control with institution building—the ability to make important decisions about the institutions that exist in one’s community; and

• Education as opposed to schooling—education is the process of imparting on children all things they need to provide leadership within their communities and within their nation, while schooling is a training process. (pp. 1213-124)

Shockley and Frederick’s (2010) seven constructs serve as an approach to allow Blacks to culturally reattach themselves to their African cultural heritage. Murrell (2003) developed the five essential practices of teaching and learning in African-centered pedagogy (see Appendix A). The five practices are 1) identity, 2) community 3) engagement and participation, 4) practice, and 5) meaning-making (Murrell, 2003, p. 51). Identity describes practices or actions that allow students to explore and define themselves. Shockley (2007) affirmed, “identity is primary because if the Black child does not know who he or she ‘is’ that child cannot know his or her purpose” (p. 105). Children understand their identities in relation to themselves and others. Community, the second practice, describes activities and arrangements that organize the intellectual and social life of a community of learners. The third practice, engagement and participation, is a set of interactions that encourage and promote the interest, engagement, and participation of students with each other and with the learning activity. The fourth component, practice, involves making students aware of their appropriation of symbols, signs, and other representations of meaning in the act of expressing and creating new meanings. The last practice, meaning making, involves activities that make explicit cultural models and cultural patterns to amplify the interpretative frameworks of learners.

Afrocentric schools embed the five Afrocentric practices into the school’s infrastructure, educational curriculum, pedagogy, activities, rituals, and customs. Afrocentric pedagogy seeks
to develop “a climate that enhances teacher—student rapport and helps to develop a community of leaners who are caring and fair to one another” (Grant, 2008, p. 893). African-centered school personnel are responsible for supporting students’ academic achievement as well as identifying culturally with African American students, allowing them to teach effectively about their culture, life, and their role in society (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010).

Murrell (2003) cited the following three principles of practice as important for African-centered pedagogy:

1. Accomplished teachers of African American children create the context, environment, and cultural community in their classrooms that provide the social and intellectual worlds for learners where rich moments of discovery, learning, and development take place.

2. Accomplished teachers of African American children understand the distinction between education and schooling. . . . Education is a broader process than schooling—and it is education that African American children really need. Education is understood as a total process of promoting the intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and social development of young people and the stewarding them into capable, caring, and character-rich adulthood.

3. To be able to create the appropriate context and cultural community, the figured world of learning and achievement, the teacher must assess and understand the deep structure of African American culture, history, language, and life. (p. xxxix)

Asante (2003) acknowledged that Afrocentric pedagogy teaches students “to question the approach they take to reading, writing, jogging, running, eating, keeping healthy, seeing, studying, loving, struggling, and working” (p. 45). Grant (2008) reinforced Asante’s argument by stating
An Afrocentric curriculum helps students develop self-esteem, individual agency, the expectation of high achievement, and future career and social goals. Afrocentric pedagogy encourages critical inquiry. Students are taught to understand that to learn how to think for themselves is just as important as what they learn (p. 893).

Afrocentric pedagogy encourages students to understand how their identity influences their daily life both inside and outside the school.

**Daily Practices**

Harambee assemblies are a component of African-centered schools’ daily practices. These assemblies serve to open or close the school day or can be utilized at any time there is a desire to center or focus the students. Harambee is a Kiswahili word meaning “let’s pull together.” The main purpose of the harambee is to “reinforce core cultural values and encourage unity” (Detroit Public Schools, 1992, p. 6). During harambee assemblies students “may: express gratitude for things that are important to them, make positive affirmations, sing ‘Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing,’ honor ancestors, show respect for elders, and reflect on the core cultural values of the *Nguzo Saba* or the Principles of *Ma’at*” (Detroit Public Schools, 1992, p. 6).

African-centered schools generally have a pledge, motto, school song, and identification signals through which students learn community values, codes of conduct, and institutional allegiance (Gay, 2000). African-centered education encompasses rich African principles and values by including the Kemetic principles of *Ma’at* and the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa, often referred to as the seven principles of a Black value system, *The Nguzo Saba* (Marks & Tonso, 2006). The principles of *Ma’at* signify truth, balance, order, and harmony. These principles serve as the foundation of African-centered curriculum. Marks and Tonso (2006) indicated that “truth deals with the accuracy and validity of the content, balance ensures that cultural diversity
is equally represented in the materials, order keeps information sequential and in perspective, and harmony eliminates bias and allows for properly representing groups” (p. 491). Maulana Karenga created *Nguzo Saba* in 1966. *Nguzo Saba* is a value system that is emulated by the students and infused by African-centered schools into their curriculum and school ethos: 

- *umoja*—unity; *kujichagulia*—self-determination; *ujima*—collective work and responsibility;
- *ujamaa*—cooperative economics; *nia*—purpose; *kuumba*—creativity; and *imani*—faith (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010; Marks & Tonso, 2006; Karenga, 1966). *Nguzo Saba* reconnects African Americans to their African heritage by “restructuring it in the context of their experiences with racism, slavery, and European worldview and culture” (Johnson, 2001, p. 415).

In 1993, there were fewer than 20 African-centered public schools nationwide, but in 1999, there were approximately 400 African-centered public schools (Murrell, 1999). The increase in the number of African-centered schools may relate to the increase in activism within African American communities and educational reform. African-centered school constituents support the core aims of African centered pedagogy and implement practices that reinforce and encourage students’ character development and academic success (Merry & New, 2008).

African-centered education is facing challenges regarding resources (i.e., funding, teacher training, and curriculum materials), personnel recruitment, and retention (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010). Lee (1992), as cited in Durden (2007), declared, “without a dedicated and knowledgeable teaching staff and stable leadership, the essence of an African-centered experience becomes fragmented” (p. 30).

**Summary**

Student retention is one of the most important issues facing higher education today. Educating secondary students about higher education early in their academic career cultivates
their college aspirations. Secondary and postsecondary institutions share the dual responsibility of ensuring that students are prepared, supported, and are ready to pursue postsecondary education. There continues to be extensive research on college-going culture, but limited research has examined how charter schools develop college-going cultures. This research becomes further limited with respect to the varying charter types and their development of college preparation curriculum. Ethno-centered charter schools provide activities and curricula that develop cultural capital and potentially serve as resources for social capital by supporting students’ and families’ acquisition of college-going information.

Murrell (2003) provided information on the development and implementation of African-centered education programs but there continues to be limited information on how ethno-centered education programs influence high school students’ college aspirations. Understanding how these unique education programs promote a culture of college readiness and success, the focus of this dissertation, may enhance students’ postsecondary enrollment and persistence. This research may be useful in expanding these distinctive programs nationwide.

Additionally, limited research exists examining how various school constituents facilitate or support students’ postsecondary aspirations. Furthermore, very few studies have focused on how ethno-centered schools with college preparatory programs integrate culture in order to increase access and completion of college. There is limited research regarding how schools and school personnel utilize cultural and social capital to develop college-going cultures that potentially increase access and aid in the completion of college for at-risk students. This study aims to understand how an African-centered charter school builds a college-going culture. Additionally, this study examines how charter school personnel work to provide students with the cultural and academic knowledge for college planning and preparation. This study will also
examine how the school’s mission, values, and strategies utilized by charter school personnel transmit and support a college preparatory ethos. Examining the charter school culture will allow education researchers to understand how these schools are implementing the ideas advanced by the effective school literature and the achievement gap literature (King, 2004).
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

I chose a qualitative approach to understand how African-centered charter high school personnel develop and support students’ college-going aspirations. I desired to understand how school personnel constructed reality and developed meaning of their African-centered academic environment and their experiences within that world (Merriam, 1998). The purpose of this case study was to examine how personnel at one African-centered charter high school developed college-going aspirations in students, including what role the culture of the charter school played in fostering student’s postsecondary aspirations. This study examined how the school mission, physical setting, governance, values, and strategies utilized by personnel transmitted and supported a college-preparatory ethos. Additionally, this study described what components of African-centered schooling personnel saw as contributing to the academic achievement of African American students. Through reflection on their experiences, the participants were able to describe the strategies and practices they perceived as promoting college-going behaviors.

In this chapter, I explain the social constructivist paradigm, my role as the researcher, and the study’s methodology. Next, I describe my data collection procedures and analyses. I conclude by discussing how I ensured quality of analysis and ethical considerations.

Review of Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was: How do the personnel at an African-centered charter school try to influence the students’ college-going aspirations? The following five sub-questions supplemented the main research question.

1. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school support a college-going culture?
2. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school perceive the impact of their interactions on students’ college-going process?

3. How does an African-centered charter school’s culture influence personnel’s attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding student’s college aspirations?

4. How do personnel at an African-centered charter school utilize social and cultural capital to develop students’ college-going aspirations?

5. What challenges do personnel at Ubuntu face in enacting a college-going culture within an African-centered environment?

Philosophical Framework

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge and ontology relates to the nature of reality (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). My beliefs about reality and knowledge within that reality shaped my research. I believe people construct multiple realities differently, depending on the meaning they make of their academic environment. Moreover, I believe that knowledge is a social reality that I must interpret independently. Focusing on the context in which my participants work (an African-centered charter school) allowed me to understand my participants’ historical and cultural settings (Creswell, 2007). I observed school activities, interviewed participants, and spent time at the African-centered school to co-construct understandings of my participants’ multiple realities. I believe that multiple realities are present in my participants’ quotes.

This study was set in a social constructivist paradigm to understand or interpret how African-centered personnel developed college-going aspirations within their students. Social constructivism emphasizes that meanings can develop through interactions with others and are not simply imprinted on individuals (Creswell, 2007). Constructivism “seeks to understand
individual social actions through interpretation or translation” (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 19). Truth was relative and dependent on participants’ perspective. The personnel in this study brought their own unique experiences and backgrounds with them as they developed students’ college-going aspirations. Understanding how personnel support students’ college-going aspirations entailed me getting as close as possible to the participants being studied, which included conducting interviews, document analysis, and observing workshops and African-centered activities.

**Theoretical Framework**

College-going cultures, African-centered education, and social and cultural capital were used to formulate an understanding of the phenomenon of how personnel at African-centered charter school develop students’ college-going aspirations. My theoretical perspective influenced how I approached and designed my study. College-going cultures describe environments that develop and encourage students’ college preparation, academic achievement, and postsecondary enrollment. Social capital enhances social support networks by allowing individuals to develop norms, values, and beliefs valued by the dominant society. Cultural capital focuses on how an individual develops the knowledge of how cultural systems work, which can entail the individual adopting the dominant culture.

**Case Study Methodology**

I chose to use case study for this study because I wanted to explore a bounded system (a case) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, and documents) (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative case studies “can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Case studies are particularistic because they concentrate on a particular situation, event,
or phenomenon. In my study, I focused on an African-centered charter school personnel’s development of students’ college-going aspirations. My case study was descriptive when it emphasized information-rich descriptions of a particular phenomenon (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Participants in my study shared their perspectives on how they developed new meanings or interpreted their academic environment’s influence on the development of students’ college-going aspirations. Lastly, case studies are heuristic when they develop new meanings of a situation or perhaps confirm what is already known. The complex relationship of an African-centered environment and students’ development of college-going aspirations does not happen in vacuums rather many variables are at play.

This particular case study is best described as *instrumental*, because it is used not only as a means of understanding how African-centered personnel create a college-going culture but also as an opportunity to develop findings that are transferable to similar charter schools. I chose a specific site because it was an African-centered charter school that I could access, not because there was something that made it special or different from other African-centered charter schools. Instrumental case study is “less about the case itself and more directed toward understanding of an issue” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 55).

Case studies are distinguishable from other qualitative approaches because this methodology focuses on an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system. A bounded system can be an individual, a specific program, a process, an institution, or a relationship (Jones et al., 2006). Case studies provide detailed information based on a particular or unique context that can lead to insight for further research or practice. Additionally, case studies investigate real life examples that illuminate meanings or understandings of a rare or
exemplary phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This case study may provide additional insight about college-going practices that may be applicable or useful to other ethnocentric schools.

The case study approach was appropriate because I desired to describe and understand how African-centered personnel develop college aspirations of charter high school students and how the charter school environment enhances college-going aspirations. I engaged participants in numerous dialogues to understand the school personnel’s perspectives of an African-centered program on college-going behaviors.

**Context for the Study**

This single case study investigated how charter high school personnel developed students’ college-going aspirations in the context of an African-centered environment. The site selected for this study was *Ubuntu* (a pseudonym) Charter High School, an urban, public, African-centered, coeducational charter high school with a postsecondary education focus, located in the Northeastern United States (please see chapter 4 for Ubuntu’s full description). Ubuntu (an African term) means, “I am because of who we all are.” The criteria utilized to select this site included: a) the school has an African-centered curriculum, b) the school has a college preparatory mission, and c) the school administration provides and supports access to the school and personnel to conduct my research.

**Description of the Participants**

The participants in my study are the personnel of Ubuntu and included principals, teachers, and administrators. The charter school has over eighty personnel that include teachers, administrators, and support staff (i.e., bus drivers, para-professionals who assisted classroom teachers or served as school substitutes, maintenance staff, and the parent ombudsperson). I
interviewed 13 members from various departments (i.e., teachers, administration, counseling services, etc.). Participants were Ubuntu employees for at least six months or more.

**Data Collection Methods**

Sampling occurred on two levels, through selection of the case and selection of the participants within the case (Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009). I conducted purposeful sampling to ensure that my participants were from a self-defined African-centered charter school allowing them to provide information-rich descriptions. This study utilized convenience sampling because of the availability and resources available at the site.

There were a number of gatekeepers that I had to approach in order to conduct my research including the school CEO and the school’s board of trustees. Initially, I contacted the African-centered charter school CEO to obtain personnel contact information (i.e., names, email gender, and department) for recommended participants (see Appendix B). I looked for variation by gender, years of service, role, department, and race/ethnicity.

The design of this study called for active inquiry through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and direct observations of Afrocentric education. Utilizing multiple sources of evidence in case studies “allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues” (Yin, 2003, p. 98). In January 2013, I began data collection at the charter school after receiving HSRB approval. I conducted interviews and observations over the course of four weeks, during the school hours of 10:00 am to 5:00pm from Monday through Friday. This amount of time was sufficient for me to gain an in-depth understanding of the school’s day-to-day operations, meet with a variety of school personnel, and observe the typical functions of the school. Through my examination of these interviews, document analyses, and observations, I responded to my study’s research question: How do the personnel at an African-
centered charter school try to influence the students’ college-going aspirations? The triangulation of data allowed me to confirm my emerging findings by obtaining thick descriptions that reflect the college-going culture of an African-centered school. Data collection ended when the data information became saturated, that is, when my participants’ responses began to be repetitive and information became overlapping.

**Interviews**

Yin (2003) acknowledged, “one of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p. 89). I sent emails to prospective participants to explain the purpose and significance of the study as well as formally request their participation (see Appendix C). Additionally, I placed notes in participants’ mailboxes to follow up the emails. Prior to beginning my data collection, I discussed with the CEO my research study, tentative time commitments (i.e., interviewing and member checking), and potential to have access to my completed study (see Appendix D). I expressed that I would like to interview at least 10 school personnel, but had HSRB approval for up to 15 participants (see Appendix E). I planned to obtain the free period for each potential participant in order to request an interview during those free hours. I collected data on the school site through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants. Many interviews occurred before or after school hours. Interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour, while the CEO interview lasted about two and half hours. I divided the CEO interview into two segments due to time constraints.

At the beginning of the interview, I reiterated the study’s purpose and significance. I informed the participants that their involvement was confidential and voluntarily as well as that at any time, they had the right to decline participation. I conducted the interviews in a vacant office in the school and interviewed only one participant at a time. Once participants agreed to
participate in the study, I assigned them pseudonyms and they completed demographic questionnaires (see Appendix F). I assigned participants pseudonyms to support confidentiality. Additionally, I utilized demographic questionnaires to gain descriptive data from participants. Gender, race/ethnicity, schooling, and years employed were queried to assess information concerning specific aspects of participants’ diversity.

I obtained permission to record the conversation and make memos. The memos allowed me to develop follow-up questions or points that I desired to return to for clarity. I sometimes had to ask participants to clarify and expand on statements, thus allowing me to capture information-rich descriptions. I informed the participants of their right to stop me anytime during the interview.

I asked participants to discuss their perceptions of how the school’s African-centered education program enhances students’ college-going behaviors. My interviews were purposive and flowed like a conversation. The interviews included a mixture of more and less structured interview questions (Merriam, 1998; see Appendix G & H). I viewed my participants as partners in the process of developing the evidence that illustrated their experiences. I asked my participants to discuss any challenges and recommendations for improving the African-centered education program. Finally, I allowed participants to share any thoughts that I had not brought up during the interview by checking in with participants at the end of the interview. I asked participants if there was anything else they would like to share with me that I did not ask during the interview or if there were particular school documents that I should request for document analysis.
**Document Analyses**

Documents are a “wide range of written, visual, and physical material relevant to the study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). I utilized both internal documents and external communications. The internal documents included memos or other communications circulated inside the organization, teacher lesson plans, the student handbook, brochures, annual reports, strategic plans, the mission statement, and statements of educational philosophy and pedagogical approaches. The external communications consisted of materials produced for public consumption including letters to parents, curriculum materials, and the school’s website.

An advantage of utilizing documents rests on the fact that they are “a ready-made source of data easily assessable,” they are unobtrusive, and do not usually depend on participant cooperation (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). These documents provided potential insight about governance structures, guiding principles, and organizational values. A review of these documents informed my study regarding understanding the official perspectives on programs, curriculum, and administrative structure. These documents offered insight about which services and policies the school implemented. Document analysis can provide data that offer “descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126). I looked at:

- What types of workshops were available for students (i.e., career, financial aid, SAT preparation)?
- What mentoring occurs (i.e., ongoing one-on-one, group, professional relationships)?
- What types of tutoring or academic support (i.e., Math, English, other subjects, college entrance exams)?
• What social or cultural events (i.e., cultural events, holiday celebrations, and social events)?

• What types of counseling services for students (i.e., academic advising or college student shadowing)?

• What campus visits/tours?

• What kinds of summer academic day or overnight camps?

• What types of workshops for parents or guardians (i.e., financial aid, college prep, career choices, SAT/ACT information, study skills)?

• What types of ongoing parent support (i.e., conferences, support groups, and financial aid guidance)? (See Appendix I)

Observations

I conducted direct observations that included public spaces (i.e., lobbies, hallways, entrances, gymnasium, cafeteria, and library), personnel offices, and the college center. The school has an in-house college access center that provides additional college preparation resources and support for students and families. Observations have two distinguishing features. First, observations take place in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data present firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview. (Merriam, 1998, p. 94)

I observed the African-centered personnel in their environments to understand firsthand what strategies or approaches they implemented to develop and foster students’ college-going aspirations. Yin (2003) described the limitations of observation as being laborious, selective in
the content observed, costly in observers and hours needed, and reflexive in that the observer’s presence may alter the course of events or participants’ behaviors.

Merriam (1998) recommended observing the following items to understand the context more fully: physical setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversations, subtle factors, and my own behaviors (pp. 97-98). I gathered field notes by observing as an “outsider” (see Appendix J). I investigated how the school environment conveyed cultural or college-going messages through its design.

The functionality of school physical environments can support or constrain certain activities as well as convey important nonverbal symbolic messages (Strange & Banning, 2001). I began conducting observations immediately after securing access to the school around January of 2013. The school provided me with a private administrative office within the school’s general office suite to conduct the study. During the first two days of data collection, I focused on familiarizing myself with the school’s structural organization and interacting with individuals who could potentially serve as participants in the interviews. Prospective participants stopped by the office to schedule times for interview participation. Additionally, I was visible at professional development activities and other school activities (i.e., libation ceremony, lunch, etc.) I observed the personnel interactions with students, families, community liaisons, and each other to understand these activities and messages. I conducted observations in public spaces, such as the cafeteria, school office, hallways, library, and the personnel break room.

I looked for physical artifacts that were placed in the school for intended purposes (i.e., to give directions, to inspire, to warn, or to accommodate) (Strange & Banning, 2001). These artifacts conveyed nonverbal messages about the school’s culture and were present in one of the four forms: signs and symbols, artwork or posters, graffiti, and specific physical structures. I
desired to confirm both enacted and espoused values of African-centered education and college preparatory ethos. After numerous visits to the school, I noticed that school personnel became more comfortable and welcoming with my presence in the school. I combined information obtained from observations with data from interviews and document analysis to develop a holistic view of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

**Positionality**

The role of the researcher as an instrument of data collection requires the researcher to acknowledge his or her own personal experiences, values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases that can contribute to and alter how the data is interpreted (Yin, 2003). It is important to disclose characteristics of both my professional and personal backgrounds that influence my perspective as a researcher on this topic.

I identify as a low-income, first-generation college attendee, as well as an African American or Black woman. Thus, my positionality had significant influence on why the personnel in my study may have felt comfortable with me and agreed to participate in the study. I can relate to the importance of interacting with school personnel to develop my own college-going aspirations. I grew up in a low-socioeconomic, single-parent house in an urban environment in Northeastern U.S. My mother emigrated from Jamaica to obtain a better life for herself and her future children. She successfully graduated from high school, but did not attend postsecondary education. My mother was unfamiliar with the college preparation or application process. I had to access social capital through social networks available at my school (i.e., counselors, teachers, pre-collegiate program etc.) in order to increase my cultural or cultural capital and potential success in postsecondary education. Accessing social capital and acquiring cultural capital positively influenced my college-going aspirations and college preparation. I
developed college-going aspirations and college preparation through my academic and social networks both inside and outside of school. My academic success has further supported my passion to assist others in their pursuit of social and cultural capital.

I completed a minor in African American studies during my undergraduate studies. I enrolled in numerous African-American studies courses that focused on the historical and cultural context of African Americans. These courses allowed me to better understand the challenges (i.e., access to education, citizenship) faced by African Americans in the U.S. It was liberating to discover more about my African American heritage. This newfound knowledge influenced my understanding of my own cultural identity.

After completing my baccalaureate, from 2005-2008, I was employed at Drexel University as an academic coordinator for science and health care enrichment programs with selected middle and high schools in the city, from 2005-2008. I was not a member of the formal city school administration or teacher, but I served as supplemental instructor to the science, health care, and pre-college curriculum. I would advise my students on college preparation and provide overall academic and personal support. I worked closely with teachers, students, and administrators to develop the curriculum that occurred year-round for high school students and school year only for middle school students. I learned firsthand how to develop and support students’ college-going aspirations through my interactions and dialogues.

I believe my college-going aspirations grew because of my interactions with school personnel. In understanding how personnel develop and transmit a college preparatory ethos to students similar to me, I assumed all school personnel strive to develop and support students’ college-going aspirations, that students are more successful when they develop college-going aspirations, and that schools with a college preparatory ethos are more successful at sending
students to college. Additionally, I have a desire to see postsecondary-focused high schools succeed. As a qualitative researcher, I share my assumptions and biases to be forthright and transparent.

I have addressed the issues of *positionality* or the relationships between my participants and myself by positioning myself within the study and admitting my values and biases about the study. I participated in bracketing (*epoche*) to acknowledge my understanding, beliefs, biases, assumptions, and presuppositions as well as expose any “pre-understandings” and their potential influence on the study (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). Additionally, I used the reflexive techniques of writing memos during interviews and journaling. Reflexivity is the “process of critical self-reflection on one’s biases, theoretical predispositions, and preferences” (Luttrell, 2010, p. 3). I wrote memos during the interview that allowed me to capture my thoughts when they occurred as well as reflect upon them later. These reflective comments included any suppositions or preliminary judgments about the data. I reflected daily through journaling throughout the research project. The journal served as a mode of archiving, note-taking, and questioning that proved useful as the project progressed. For example, after reviewing one of my journal entries I realized that multiple times a participant mentioned to me a lesson plan that illustrated the required Afrocentric infusion. I obtained a copy of this lesson plan and incorporated it into my document analysis. Another entry reflected on my first interview with the school’s founder or CEO. These reflections served as a guide for the development of future questions for the second founder/CEO interview. I also included any hunches or tentative conclusions that arose throughout the study. These techniques allowed me to recognize how my personal feelings or perspectives influenced this study.
Data Analysis

The study resulted in 13 face-to-face interviews, numerous observations, and document analysis notes. All interviews were audio recorded and I transcribed them verbatim. I read the interview transcripts and confirmed with participants that I recorded and transcribed the data accurately. The interviews highlighted areas where the school personnel believed they had been most successful in supporting and transmitting a college preparatory ethos. After verification, I read the transcripts numerous times for general understanding of the interview data, and I examined trends to discover key categories that emerged from the transcripts. Observations and documents were gathered and stored both as electronic files and as hard copies. The data I collected, analyzed, and interpreted needed to ensure that the participants’ *emic* perspectives were accurately and fully represented (Jones et al., 2006). Data collection and analysis were an on-going and simultaneous process throughout the course of the study. I reviewed the transcripts repeatedly as I completed additional interviews for comparison and contrast.

I holistically analyzed the entire case by comparing and contrasting the data from all three methods (interviews, documents, and observations) as I developed emerging themes from the study. Merriam (2009) recommended identifying elements in the data that are responsive to research questions. I sorted through the data to find responses to my specific research question and numerous sub-questions.

I utilized QSR International’s computer software program Nvivo10 to code the data and conduct thematic analysis. The software was extremely helpful in examining and grouping the bulk of the data. I recoded the transcripts with these key categories and then compiled data within these coding categories that eventually resulted in themes. I determined which elements were themes by how often they occurred in the transcripts.
Yin (2003) suggested that the case study database contain the collections from multiple sources: case study notes (i.e., interviews, observations, or document analysis), case study documents (annotated bibliography), and narratives. I developed both an electronic and hard copy management system accessible to only myself. This database stored my case study notes from interviews, observations, document analysis, and my researcher narratives. The organization of the data complimented my theoretical frameworks framing the study.

Research sub-question 5 emerged because I asked participants, “What challenges existed to building and sustaining a college-going culture?” During data analysis, I noticed numerous themes about challenges or barriers to a college-going culture began to emerge. Participants responded with similar answers that highlighted three central themes, namely finances, reorganization, and assumptions. I integrated these themes into the study by creating an additional research sub-question, “What challenges do personnel at Ubuntu face in enacting a college-going culture within an African-centered environment?”

**Provisions of Trustworthiness**

Credibility was supported by providing participants with the data and data interpretations (member checks) to verify their plausibility, check my subjectivity, and enhance the trustworthiness of the study’s findings (Jones, 2002). As a way of checking my interpretive work, I provided a case report or a draft of my findings to participants. I sent this report to my participants and asked them to read the draft to determine whether my rendition of the school’s college preparatory ethos “rang true” for them. My participants verified the findings or themes that originated from their transcripts, thus supporting the study’s credibility. It was important that the participants’ stories were recognizable to those who tell them and that the themes
emerged from their own words are held together as coherent and believable to individuals who read this study (Jones, 2002).

I solicited feedback from an expert in the field of Afrocentric education and college preparation throughout the duration of the project. I reviewed the interview guide with the expert and revised the questions accordingly. I added supplemental questions at the recommendation of the expert. Prior to the interviews, I practiced the questions with another person who was not familiar with the study.

I participated in peer debriefing to assess my reasoning and interpretations of the transcripts. My peers reviewed some raw data (i.e., interviews, observations, and documents) and my interpretation from the raw data. My colleague in higher education challenged my assumptions as well as helped me to refine my method (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, my researcher journal provided reflective commentary that included my impressions regarding data collection and analysis. By obtaining thick information-rich descriptions through verbatim transcription, I supported credibility during the study.

I provided the readers with the context of the case study and readers can make choice if it is transferable (Shenton, 2004). I provided sufficient information about myself and the study context, participants, and researcher-participant relationships. I strengthened dependability by providing an audit trail through chronology (journal) of my research activities and processes. I enhanced confirmability by documenting how the activities and processes influenced my data collection and analysis (i.e., themes and codes). I shared my audit trail with an Afrocentric expert for feedback and validation. Lastly, I have openly discussed my beliefs and assumptions about research generally and this study in specific. I expected that participants were better able
to understand how they develop college-going aspirations as well as understand how their charter school’s culture supports students’ postsecondary aspirations.

**Ethical Issues**

I treated people ethically by doing several things. I provided all participants with informed consent and thoroughly explained the study. The informed consent allowed participants to understand my commitment to following ethical guidelines during the interviews and in the overall study. I supported beneficence by explaining the study’s purpose and significance. I informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study without penalty.

I was sensitive to the fact participants may feel threatened or uncomfortable by certain questions. Merriam (1998) acknowledged that interviews might have longstanding psychological effects if specific memories or gathered information is difficult for the interviewee to share. I hoped to minimize these ethical concerns by being cognizant of verbal and nonverbal behaviors of the interviewees. If participants felt uncomfortable during the interview, I reassured them that their participation with the study was voluntary and that they had the option to skip questions or end the interview.

African-centered personnel who agreed to be a part of the study may have felt at risk if I interpreted or construed their statements as damaging or negative towards the school. Given this possibility, I assigned pseudonyms to personnel who participated. I utilized a pseudonym for the institution where I conducted the study. Additionally, I protected the anonymity of the “case” by altering the names of administrative and academic units, programs, or organizations that were distinctive to the institution and therefore might make the case readily identifiable.

I held all responses in confidence and took several precautions. Only I knew the names associated with the data collected. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts for
accuracy. Additionally, I handled all ethical concerns carefully. I was aware of the consequences of discussing sensitive issues of school culture, student interactions, and workplace dynamics. These sensitive issues can put schools and individuals at risk. The research study presented minimal risk to participants and only summarized data was included in the study. I expressed to participants that their views would not jeopardize their work or employment at the charter school. I conducted my research with the approval of the Institutional Review Board Protection of Human Subjects to protect the rights and interests of the participants in this study. In addition, since I interviewed and observed a charter school, I gained approval from the school’s board of trustees.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I outlined the methodology of this study, beginning with a description of the research design and the statement of the central research question and sub-questions guiding the study. I discussed my philosophical framework guiding this study as well as provided a contextual description of the site and participants. I shared my subjectivities by describing my role as the researcher and my positionality for desiring to conduct this study. The data collection section explained the interviews, document analysis, and observations that constituted the data of the study. I described my data analysis techniques as well as addressed my provisions of trustworthiness. In chapter 4, I will present the study’s context.
CHAPTER IV. STUDY CONTEXT

It’s just something that’s inside that makes it special. So I encourage people when they look at Ubuntu to come here because you just have to experience that. We understand since this is a student centered environment, that it’s a holistic approach to education. So it’s not just about the Xs and Os, or the pluses and minuses on a chalkboard. It’s about dealing with the whole child, and that is what you see when you are here. . . I think that’s why we’ve been successful and wish you could bottle it or put ingredients on it and say it’s this, this, and this. But it just boils down to if you really care about the students you are working with, they’ll do anything for you.

--Aman, school administrator

In this chapter, I describe the characteristics of the charter school selected for this study. I present background information gathered from the school observations, in-depth interviews with school personnel, and documents obtained from the state’s department of education and the school itself. The school’s background, history, setting, demographic characteristics, and academics provide valuable insight into the school’s culture. I provide additional detail regarding the Afrocentric infusion and college-going cultures. In the first section of this chapter, I review the history of the school, mission statement, enrollment data, and educational philosophy. In the second section, I provide information about participants in the study, including their racial and gender background as well as their highest level of education, length of employment, and what role they play in the school’s environment.

I decided to call the charter school utilized in this study Ubuntu, which means, “I am because we are” and is derived from the Xhosa culture. Ubuntu charter school’s context emphasizes the importance of community both within and outside of the school.
Ubuntu’s Background

The power of sisterhood, the power of prayer, and the pure tenacity of commitment contributed to the founding of Ubuntu Charter High School (Ubuntu). The founder and CEO put out “a call” to a few select friends whom she knew were centered in the African traditions of teaching and relocating the genius of African children. The founder of the school described relocating the genius of African children as “placing students at the center of education and helping children to understand that they are brilliant and that they have ancestors that are multi-geniuses. They are more than what is shown in books, which is typically just slavery” (personal communication, February, 17, 2013). These select friends commonly referred to as the “founding scholars.” The founding scholars together with the CEO began writing, creating, and compiling data. They submitted a proposal to the city school district for the establishment of Ubuntu Charter High School.

Ubuntu opened in 1998 with 200 students. Ubuntu collaborated with a non-profit organization that works with charter schools and community development organizations. Together, they became the first in the state to build a charter school from the ground up. Ubuntu is an African-centered, culturally responsive, community based, public charter high school serving grades 9-12 with a focus on math, science, and technology ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011). Originally, when the school opened, the founder of the school decided it would be an African-centered as opposed to Afrocentric. The school’s founder desired for the “school to center everything in African culture and helping the school constituents to understand that they as a people go back to the continent of Africa and meeting those needs” (personal communication, February, 17, 2013). Subsequently, the school’s founder has said that
the school has transformed to become Afrocentric and many Africentric scholars have identified the school as such.

Ubuntu has 30 teachers and approximately 82% have certification ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011). The school currently enrolls 525 students and has approximately 500 students on the waiting list. The school’s student—teacher ratio does not exceed 25:1. Ubuntu’s student profile is about 99% Black and 1% Hispanic ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011). Approximately 92% of the students come from low-income families that are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch.

Ubuntu teaches and practices the principles of Ma’at: truth, balance, order, reciprocity, righteousness, justice, and harmony. These principles serve as the foundation of Ubuntu’s African-centered curriculum. Ubuntu’s education program also emphasizes the seven principles of Nguzo Saba, a value system that serves as the cornerstones of the school’s community. The seven principles are emulated by students and are infused into the curriculum and school ethos:  
*umoja*—unity; *kujichagulia*—self-determination; *ujima*—collective work and responsibility; *ujamaa*—cooperative economics; *nia*—purpose; *kuumba*—creativity; and *imani*—faith (Hopson, Hotep, Schneider, & Turene, 2010; Marks & Tonso, 2006). Ubuntu’s collective paradigm develops and supports individual success for the benefit of the community and overall race, as opposed to the dominant paradigm that emphasizes individualism. Ubuntu emphasized the Nguzo Saba principles by widely espousing and enacting them. *Ujima* was enacted at Ubuntu by having all school constituents support the school’s mission of providing “a program for urban learners that has high expectations and centers learning around the needs of the students” ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011, p. 4). Kuumba was enacted by encouraging teachers to create “outside the box” lessons that exposed students to new
information or different ways of thinking. In one lesson about the Caribbean African diaspora movement, students learned new styles of dance, cuisines, languages, and historical contexts.

Ubuntu’s slogan is “independent public school—developing intellectual warriors.” The school’s vision is to “groom the graduates of [Ubuntu] to be successful lifelong learners and valuable members of the world community.” Ubuntu is designed to be a culturally responsive school that

- Encourages the on-going participation of elders in all aspects of the schooling process;
- Provides multiple avenues for students to access the learning that is offered, as well as multiple forms of assessment for students to demonstrate what they have learned;
- Provides a high level of involvement of professional staff who are of the same cultural background as the students with whom they are working;
- Provides facilities that are compatible with the community environment in which they are situated; and
- Fosters extensive on-going participation, communication, and interaction between school and community personnel. ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011).

Lastly, the charter school has a college access center on site to develop and support students’ college-going behaviors.

The Setting

The school is located in an urban city in Northeastern U.S. The school is a part of a larger collection of schools in an African Center School network that supports interaction of programs and ideas between similar Afrocentric and African-centered schools in the city. The school is located alongside row homes in a predominately non-White neighborhood and faces many of the same challenges common to other urban high schools—poverty, violence, and
economic disparities. Prior to the development of the new building, the school was located across the street from its present location. When Ubuntu opened its doors in 1998, the school was a collection of modules or trailer-like buildings. The old location is now the personnel’s parking lot. Ubuntu’s current location was once an abandoned lot and now has become a state of the art, $10 million dollar, community based center of education. Ubuntu commemorated its 10-year anniversary with the celebratory grand opening of the new high school building. The new facility serves as an additional resource for the community that it was originally created to serve. Community organizations are encouraged and supported to utilize the space and resources of the school.

**Infusion of African Culture**

Ubuntu infuses African-centered culture into the daily practices. The school maintains the cultural heritage of Africa as the reference point for all instruction. Afrocentrism is also present through the school’s language, rituals, school practices, physical infrastructure, and community interactions. The school’s song encompasses a selection of verses about African ancestry, discovering truth, learning from their past, and building a nation through education for society. The school’s calendar infuses aspects of Afrocentrism. The school’s newsletter incorporates Afrocentricity by citing dates in *Kemet*. For example, October 14, 2007 becomes 15 *Hetheru* 6247 and November 6, 2007 is 7 *Kahera* 6247. Additionally, Ubuntu utilizes the Kemetic Calendar to identify classes. The current year’s graduating class identifies as 6253. Ubuntu acknowledges that there was life 4,240 years prior to this year, 2013. Additionally, the school newsletter includes information about African symbols. One newsletter includes the definition of *Akoben* symbol, which is a picture of a war horn and symbolizes “a call to action, readiness to be called to action, readiness, and voluntarism” (school newsletter).
A curriculum scholar coordinator works with each content area to guarantee that instruction is culturally centered and sensitive to all humankind. Teacher lesson plans include a required Afrocentric Infusion component. For example, one teacher infused African culture in an English class by incorporating critical reviews and readings of African authors. In history, teachers may incorporate Afrocentric ideas and facts to support an infusion, such as connecting Greek art and sculptures to Egyptology. Ubuntu celebrates Kwanzaa, a weeklong festival featuring seven days of celebration. Kwanzaa is derived from the Swahili phrase, *matunda ya kwanza*, meaning “first fruits.” Ubuntu students pour libations and participate in a candle lighting ceremony. Students, staff, and parents can participate in graduation trips and professional development trips to Ghana, West Africa.

African pride and unity symbols are visible in the school’s daily events, practices, and overall physical environment. The building does not have typical school wall colors of white or beige; rather they match those of the African unity flag (red, black, green, and gold). These colors promote nationalism and self-determination by providing students with a sense of identity, purpose, and direction. The walls are gold color and the lockers are red. Many of Ubuntu’s classroom signs and murals display the eye of Horus, an ancient Egyptian symbol of protection, royal power, and good health. Some of the walls in the schools have other murals that depict Africa or education.

The main entrance of the school leads to a hallway that leads to the school’s gymnasium and the main office on the right. In this hallway, there is a picture of the CEO or founder of the school as well as information for students, parents, and community members regarding upcoming meetings, gatherings, or school policies. Numerous pictures of personnel, community, and students adorn the hallway.
The office has numerous personnel who are at the main desk and located in Kemet (Egypt) Way or the Administrative wing. Kemet Way has pictures of young and old women and men of African descent. The entryway of the office has a table full of trophies from the school’s sports teams and recognition banners. The computers, telephones, and furniture in the office appear up to date. The personnel are dressed in professional attire as well as many individuals wearing colorful African garb. Some of the tables in the office are covered with kente cloths and one table has a large Ankh (Ankh symbol represents life) sculpture. The staff are friendly and welcoming, and greet everyone by sister, brother, mama, or baba. The walls in the office are posters, portraits, and sayings that support an African-centered environment.

To the right of the office is the gymnasium that serves multiple purposes for both sporting events and school assemblies. There are signs on the walls in the gymnasium that display Kemet nation names (i.e., Zulu, Ashanti, Songhai, Nubia, etc.) to indicate advisory subgroups for the grades. Once students receive their nation names, they identify with it. The gymnasium is red, black, and gold in color. All of the students are dressed in the school’s uniform or traditional African clothing, (dashikis or African shirts) and some are wearing kufis (African hats); black bottoms (i.e., pants or skirts) and shoes accompany the dashikis and/or kufis. Additionally, Ubuntu graduates do not wear traditional cap and gowns during commencement, but rather African garb.

The library is located further down from the gymnasium. Outside of the library’s entrance are signs displaying the Afrocentric creed, Nguzo Saba, and affirmation statement. Molefi Asante created the Afrocentric creed in 1994 (Asante, 2005). The Afrocentric creed reads

I have faith in myself
I have faith in my teachers
I will accept my duties and responsibilities
I respect others and seek their respect
I have respect
I have self-control
I can learn if I study hard
I will learn because I will study hard
I love myself, and loving myself, I will be myself and know myself
I am the one who is talking

The Afrocentric creed encourages students to have faith in themselves and their teachers. Additionally, the Afrocentric creed encourages students to be responsible, respect each other, have self-control, and love themselves.

The affirmation statement is the same statement recited during the daily harambee. The affirmation statement reads

We are descendants of Great African Fathers and Great African Mothers. We will have the pride, strength, and power of the motherland. To help us do the things we must do. Because we must understand, I am because we are and we are because I am. When I shine, the nation shines. And when the nation shines we all shine [sic].

The second floor of the school resembles more “traditional” high schools because this is where the majority of the classrooms are. Ubuntu students named two of the hallways on this floor after the current President and first lady, “Barack Lane” and “Michelle Way.” In most of the classrooms’ seating arrangement reflects a nontraditional setup with desks in circles or small groups of four to six students. Having the desks in circles encourages unity and openness in the
classroom, as well as supports students working together and supporting each other. All of the classrooms are brightly colored just like the hallways and have many windows to provide ample amounts of sunlight. The brightly colored rooms create a positive environment for students.

The classroom decorations vary according to the class content. Most of the classrooms have posters, sayings, or other African artwork that support academic success and African-centered principles. Students see positive African-centered pictures and artifacts in their learning environment, which allows them to appreciate their culture and most importantly exposes them to it. The school has one classroom dedicated to laboratory sciences and three computer labs. Overall, the school’s environment supports an African-centered culture in regards to décor, attire, and speech.

**College-going Culture**

Ubuntu’s college-going culture and African-centered environment work collaboratively to develop student academic success. The school expects personnel, students, and families to be active participants in the school’s college-going culture. Ubuntu developed a four-year college preparation curriculum centered on the belief that their students are college bound. Ubuntu requires all students to meet the following requirements for graduation:
## Table 1

*High School Graduation Requirements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Minimum Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Major Courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. English (English 1, English 2, English 3, English 4)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Math (Algebra 1, Algebra 2, Geometry, Pre-Calculus)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Science (Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Social Studies (African History, American History, World Cultures, Civics)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Major Elective Courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. English Electives ([Northeastern State Standardized] Reading 1, 2, 3, SAT English)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Math ([Northeastern State Standardized] Math 1, 2, 3, SAT Math)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Social Studies (Social science 1, 2, 3, Sociology)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Core Courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Language (French 1, French 2, or Spanish 1, Spanish 2)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Health/PE (Health, Physical Education)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Electives (Technology, Music, Performing Arts, Major Electives)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Non-Course Credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Community Service</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Senior Multidisciplinary Project</td>
<td>.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Ubuntu Student handbook)
Ubuntu high school graduation requirements meet [Northeastern] state flagship university, state university, and two-year college admission requirements.

Announcements about students’ college admissions are routine practices at Ubuntu. When students share the great news with their peers or school personnel, they are most likely to receive a hug, handshake, or high-five as a part of the congratulations. The names of students admitted to post-secondary institutions are printed on signs and posted on the college acceptance board in the school cafeteria, allowing students to stay reminded of their peers’ successes as well as offer encouragement for them to be successful too. The admittances are also included in the graduation booklet.

The school’s newsletter provides the community with up-to-date information about school activities and academics as well as offers guidance regarding college preparation. One newsletter had a section on test taking that differentiated between the SAT I and the SAT II, provided test-taking tips, and listed test dates for students. In addition, the section encouraged students to contact the appropriate school administrator for additional information regarding test registration. Ubuntu requires students to take either the SAT and/or ACT test their junior year, thus providing students with this information in the newsletter is beneficial. Students are eligible to receive fee waivers for the cost of each test.

Another school newsletter included the requirements for seniors to graduate. The school divided the graduation requirements into five units with different deadlines. The first unit included a résumé, cover letter, 20 scholarship applications, college essay, SAT application, 5 completed college applications, research topic, internship approval form, short-term goals, and long-term goals. The second unit contained five more completed college applications, outline of research paper, evidence of sources, and references. The third unit encompassed a rough draft of
a research paper and 20 scholarship applications. The fourth unit included interview transcripts, site evaluation, senior intern feedback, and final research paper. The last unit encompassed the revised final research paper, PowerPoint, and community service worksheet.

Many classrooms displayed some visual imagery about college-going. One classroom contained college paraphernalia of the teacher’s alma mater. A few personnel displayed their diplomas in their offices as well. College-going was infused into both the actual school’s physical infrastructure and curriculum. In English class, students are required to write essays similar to ones utilized for college admission applications.

**College Access Center**

The college access center provided the most college-going visual artifacts for Ubuntu. School posters, flags, and college preparation informational signs cover every wall of the college access center. All of the tables contained college-going brochures or information about prospective schools, financial aid, or entrance exams. The college access center displayed numerous posters and college flags of various types of postsecondary education. Additionally, there were signs describing college preparation information about required exams, college success tips, and financial aid. One poster read “The Roadmap to College.” The college access center also displayed posters that had positive messages stating: “Excuses stop here,” “Dreams are not something to wait for, they are something to work for,” “Success: don’t just wish for it, work for it,” and “Your choices, your actions, your life.” The signs reinforced Ubuntu’s educational goal of encouraging and developing student success. The college access center had four computers to assist students with accessing college websites and completing school and financial aid applications.
The college access center provides support regarding postsecondary education for the student but also the family as well. The college access center addresses all correspondence to both the student and family, acknowledging that college success is a team process. The college access center’s administrator meets with students early in their academic career to familiarize students with their resources as well as encourage students to begin thinking about post-secondary education. During their junior year, students are required to visit the college access center during the spring to obtain college preparation information, SAT or ACT registration packets, and a practice test booklet. They are required to complete the packet at home or arrange an appointment to complete it online. Both juniors and seniors visit and meet with college/vocational education representatives and attend college tours to better inform them as they choose an appropriate career and post-secondary school. The college access center provides seniors with a college planner, scholarship information, and a senior survey. The senior survey provides the college access center with a better idea of what colleges to include in the seniors’ only college tour in the fall.

Ubuntu seniors are required to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The center provides students with a FAFSA checklist to guide them through the process and hosts help sessions for parents and students. Parents are strongly encouraged to read over the checklist and/or attend multiple help/completion sessions. Students who have little or no financial support are encouraged by school personnel to apply for at least sixty scholarships. If students are unsure about which college to apply to, they are encouraged to apply to at least fifteen now because they can choose later.

Ubuntu’s college access center hosts numerous college awareness events and activities. The center presents an annual college awareness week that includes a college fair where college
enrollment officers would visit the high school to talk to prospective students. The college center would also hang posters in the hallway during college awareness week that remind students of different tasks to complete to become college ready or tips to be successful while in college. Additionally, during the college awareness week the school would present a school spirit day, where personnel could wear their alma mater shirts and students could wear their favorite college shirts too. Throughout the year, the center invites various post-secondary institutions to come to Ubuntu to do presentations. The center hosts numerous scholarship information sessions to educate students and families about the application process.

**JAAMA Empowerment Program**

The JAAMA Empowerment Program (*jaama* is Swahili for family) is an academic enrichment program for ninth through twelfth grade students. The program utilizes assistance of community partners to promote achievement of individual and family stability. JAAMA students receive homework assistance, tutoring, study and test-taking skills, college preparation, recreational and cultural trips, as well as college tours. JAAMA parents receive workshops, academic support, and college preparation information. JAAMA participants are eligible to receive discounted rates for the school’s annual college tours. Participants also have the opportunity to fundraise to assist with the cost of the college tour trips.

**Umoja Dollars for Scholars Scholarship Foundation**

Umoja Dollars for Scholars Scholarship Foundation is a community-based organization that collaborates with Scholarship America, a national organization that provides assistance with college readiness, post-secondary information, and scholarships. The foundation’s college readiness component includes mentoring, tutoring, and community service. The Nguzo Saba principles serve as the foundation for Umoja’s work. Umoja provides additional support and
financial resources to help children from the local community attend post-secondary institutions. Umoja facilitates “Dollars for Scholars” drives that encourage individuals in the community to donate at least one dollar for the children. Ubuntu’s performing arts department and a local theatre presented and performed a special show to benefit scholarships for the Umoja Foundation. Local businesses contribute to the scholarship fund by giving a named scholarship or to the general scholarship foundation.

**Daily Practices**

Like all charter schools, Ubuntu utilizes a lottery system to select students who apply for admission. Ubuntu operates on a non-traditional school day: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Ubuntu choose these hours in response to a study on safe schools by Dr. Heidi Hayes Jacob and the Department of Education. The study found that the learning capability of secondary students tends to heighten during the latter part of the traditional school day and students are less likely to be in harm’s way during the 3:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. high-risk time of day. Ubuntu choose these unique hours to meet the needs of their students. Students have expanded access both before school (8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.) and afterschool (4:00 to 9:00 p.m.). The school is open 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday and during the summer for non-proficient students who attend an extended year. Having the school open outside of the non-traditional school day provides resources and personnel to encourage student success. Students who do not have access to technology can come before or after school or on a Saturday to utilize technology at the school. School facilitators or teachers meet daily from 8:45 a.m. to 9:45 am for group meetings. The school day begins with libation ceremony from 10:00 a.m. to 10:20 a.m. and the first class starts at 10:20 am. The libation ceremony is a commemoration where the school community honors the accomplishments and acknowledges challenges faced by their African ancestors.
Libation is the practice of pouring water or liquid to the earth to pay homage or give reverence to the deeds, challenges, inventions, and struggles that their African ancestors experienced. This ceremony emphasizes the community’s present existence as a continuation of their past existence. The libation ceremony concludes with drumming, which signals students to disperse to their first period classes to begin their school day.

**Governance**

Ubuntu’s school mission is similar to other charter schools because it highlights improving students’ academic achievement and focuses on a specified content area. Ubuntu’s mission is to provide a standards driven, high quality educational program for urban learners based in the African principles of Ma’at and Nguzo Saba (Ubuntu newsletter, 2008). The school aspires to nurture lifelong learners who are valuable members of the world community.

Ubuntu has benefited from stable leadership at the board and administrative level. The Board of Trustees is composed of eleven diverse individuals from different part of the region with different professional expertise. The Board of Trustees functions primarily as a policy-making body and provides administrative oversight regarding financial and programmatic issues. Additionally, the board is responsible for implementing long-range planning and resource development, overseeing and evaluating the work of the principal, and authorizing the school’s annual budget. Ubuntu’s board also exercises legal power and responsibility for the school.

Ubuntu operates on the premise of community engagement and collaboration. All constituents (i.e., students, personnel, family, and community) have an active voice and are empowered to be proactive agents of the Ubuntu community. Ubuntu implements a holistic approach to not only educating their students, but also educating the community. Ubuntu’s motto is “Unapologetically centered on student success by every means necessary.” The school
prides itself in being student centered first (see Figure 1, document obtained from school’s administrative assistant). Students are at the center of the school’s operations and practices. Asante (2009b) stated, “A centered school involves parents in the process of centering students” (para. 10). Peers, community, family, and the school support and provide resources for the students’ success and access to postsecondary education. The Village Council is the school’s governing board and provides guidance, support, and resources for Ubuntu. Additionally, the COO is the school’s chief operations officer and the CIO is the school’s chief information officer. The CAO is the school’s chief academic officer and the Wazuri board is the school’s parent organization.

*Figure 1. Ubuntu Charter High School Organizational Chart*
Students

The majority of the students enrolled at Ubuntu come from the surrounding community; however, as a charter school, Ubuntu is required to accept students from anywhere in the district through lottery. The average reading level of incoming ninth grade students is Grade 6 and the average math level of incoming ninth grade students is Grade 5. Ubuntu believes that all students have the ability to learn; have unique strengths, abilities, and learning styles; can be creative problem solvers and decision makers; learn best when they see the relevance of the subject matter; and can make positive contributions ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011).

Personnel

Ubuntu is composed of about 80 personnel, including 30 teachers. Ubuntu’s personnel team includes academic coaches (teachers), life coaches (social workers and mentors), career coaches (elective teachers and transition workers), activity coaches (athletics, the arts, and student activities), and family coaches (parent ombudsperson and parent trainers). Transition workers in the context of Ubuntu are personnel who help students’ transition from high school to postsecondary education, similar to college counselors. Ubuntu is working vigorously to ensure that all teachers who teach a core academic subject are well prepared in their content area to comply with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. All new core content teachers will meet this requirement and any current teachers will “work expeditiously” towards meeting the requirement ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011). All new hires at Ubuntu will have valid state certification and high, objective, uniform state standard of evaluation (HOUSSE) ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011). In addition, new hires will have passed
the content area Praxis, or possess a bachelor’s or master’s degree in the content area ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011).

Ubuntu’s teachers are compassionate and loving towards the students. Many of the teachers expressed that they treat the students like they are their own children. Essentially, Ubuntu teachers provide a loving environment that encourages their students to learn.

Ubuntu personnel meet weekly to monitor the school’s goals and do organizational planning. The frequent meetings ensure that Ubuntu continues to meet student needs and redefine their practices and interventions efficiently. The teachers utilize multi-year teaming and curriculum mapping. Multi-year teaming involves teachers with similar content areas meeting weekly to discuss academic or student concerns. Curriculum mapping allows Ubuntu teachers to work together to ensure students are meeting the academic standards for courses in each grade.

Ubuntu personnel adhere to the following state-mandated cultural standards for educators:

- Culturally-responsive educators incorporate traditional and cultural ways of knowing and teaching in their work;
- Culturally-responsive educators use the local environment and community resources on a regular basis to link what they are teaching to the everyday lives of the students;
- Culturally-responsive educators participate in community events and activities in an appropriate and supportive way;
- Culturally-responsive educators work closely with parents to achieve a high level of complementary educational expectations between home and school; and
• Culturally-responsive educators recognize the full educational potential of each student and provide the challenges necessary for them to achieve that potential. ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011, p. 5)

Teacher orientation at Ubuntu is unique because activities infuse cultural training by introducing personnel to new values, practices, and linguistic paradigms. New personnel receive additional reading materials that help their own understanding of African-centered beliefs and practices and develop new approaches to doing things. They participate in additional professional development opportunities headed by seasoned administrators and educators that provide additional insight regarding the school’s context and culture. For example, new staff learn right away the call and response methods of saying the Kiswahili terms, *ago* (I am knocking at the door) and *ame* (the door is open), to get students’ and staffs’ attention. New personnel learn additional terms such as *hotep*, used as a greeting and *ashe*, used to show agreement.

New staff eventually become accustomed to the new vocabulary and school cultures that will allow them to adapt better to an African-centered environment. Essentially, the cultural training allows new personnel to develop a deeper sense of what it means to provide and work in an African-centered environment. Personnel learn how to operate within an African-centered paradigm and how to provide instruction or support that complements the learning styles of Black children. Most teachers had students desks grouped into clusters of four to encourage interactions with each other. Additionally, teachers would purposely facilitate activities that included group interactions and classroom dialogues as opposed to didactic lessons. These practices align with the Nguzo Saba principles, *umoja*—unity and *ujima*—collective work and responsibility.
School personnel tend to have multiple responsibilities that may or may not be direct duties related to teaching and learning. Some of Ubuntu’s personnel serve as Jenga Empowerment Mentor Support (JEMS). JEMS provide feedback for improvement regarding classroom instruction, assist with the design of instructional activities, and integrate best practices into the classrooms. Some of Ubuntu’s personnel serve as teachers and athletic coaches.

**Family**

Ubuntu personnel recognize the importance of family and consciously work to maintain regular and frequent interactions with all parents. Ubuntu personnel continuously strive to communicate with parents about students’ academic performance through student/teacher meetings, emails, or phone calls. Parents are encouraged to check their student’s assignments each evening through dialogue and the school website (Ubuntu school handbook). Ubuntu personnel want parents to be informed not only when students are performing badly in class but also when their students are doing well. Ubuntu has a strong parent organization, Wazuri Parent Association, with a 75-80% participation rate via face-to-face and/or online. Parents are vital educational partners at Ubuntu. Parents are encouraged to equip their children with the necessary tools for success (Ubuntu school handbook). Ubuntu’s Wazuri Parent Association is a dedicated group of parents who volunteer in numerous ways to benefit the school and children (Ubuntu parent association website). Additionally, the Wazuri association meets monthly in the school’s cafeteria and publishes monthly parent newsletters, as well as maintains a Facebook group and website. These efforts link parents to valuable community resources and keep them informed of Ubuntu’s school news and student achievement.
All Ubuntu parents receive an Ubuntu email account that allows them to receive bi-weekly email blasts from school personnel. Parents receive a biweekly report via email of their student’s progress. All parents or guardians get regular phone blast informing them of school events and important dates to assist with keeping the lines of communication open. There are monthly parent meetings and quarterly student conferences where the student, parent, and educational team meet to discuss any needs. Lastly, personnel are available every Wednesday morning for parent meetings.

Wazuri parent meetings occur at least eight times per year in addition to parent workshops. These workshops provide parents with assistance and support regarding student’s postsecondary transition plan, academic support, financial planning support, tax preparation support, and legal family issues support. The school provides parents with resources that help them help their child be successful and invites parents to participate on various school committees, such as the Strategic Planning Committee, and the Fundraising Committee. Ubuntu employs a Parent Ombudsperson to organize and facilitate parent activities and outreach as well as handle parent concerns. The school serves as a resource for not only the student, but the parent and community as well. Ubuntu recognizes that parents made a conscious decision to enroll their child at the school and Ubuntu honors their choice by cultivating a culture of parental involvement at the school.

Community

Community members, businesses, faith-based organizations, and individuals provide numerous services at Ubuntu that have included career awareness via workshops; shadow days; career connections via internships; college/postsecondary preparation via mentoring; and scholarship support. The school has also hosted health fairs for families and students that
focused on health and healing, substance abuse, yoga, holistic health, stress management, and chiropractic medicine. One of Ubuntu’s signature programs is Communiversity, which provides free intergenerational classes for families to work and learn together.

In the past, Ubuntu has partnered with outside organizations to host an annual community cancer awareness event that focused on different health and social issues prevalent specifically in the community of African Americans. The event included workshops, information booths, presentations, and a dance-a-thon. Proceeds from the event went towards a non-profit organization that either furthered awareness or catered to those affected by the health or social focus of the year. Ubuntu also partners with Red Cross to host an annual blood drive. Students and school personnel participate regularly in the event. In 2010, 122 people volunteered to donate, and 84 were qualified resulting in 43 units of blood or a total of 129 lives saved by the efforts of those who participated. Lastly, all students must complete sixty hours of community service prior to graduation.

**Academics**

Ubuntu implements a student-centered approach that places students at the center of schooling. Ubuntu teachers have received extensive training in differentiated instruction, which allows them to be flexible in their approach to teaching. They know how to adapt the curriculum and presentation of information for students rather than expecting students to change themselves for the curriculum. Also, Ubuntu teachers develop teaching materials and assessment measures that allow all students to learn within a classroom, despite differences in ability. Teachers would provide a variety of methods or approaches for students to complete assignments; for example, one assignment allowed participants the option to write a paper, perform a creative piece, or create a website or blog about a particular topic.
Ubuntu supports students in learning who they are as individuals within their culture and understanding their own cultural experiences. Ubuntu infuses Nguzo Saba and Ma’at into the school’s curriculum and ethos. Children are reminded daily of the importance of observing both principles as they strive to develop honorable character and intellect. Ubuntu’s educational philosophy emphasizes holistic development of students, by acknowledging the role of peers, school, community, and family in this process (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. Ubuntu’s Educational Philosophy

Ubuntu’s philosophy is based on the Council for Independent Black Institutes (CIBI) practices created in 1966. The school’s philosophy emphasizes high student academic
achievement as the primary goal of the school and culturally responsive curriculum with connections to numerous community organizations and resources. Ubuntu’s goals and objectives are to:

• Provide an environment where students assume responsibility and consequences for their actions;
• Promote a safe, calm, and disciplined environment in which students can discover and develop their talents;
• Instill an appreciation that the search for knowledge is a lifelong journey;
• Empower the students to recognize his/her needs and use resources effectively to solve problems;
• Provide opportunities through various activities that allow the student to become responsibly reliant and a resourceful member of the world community; and
• Create and foster the spirit of Ma’at (truth, justice, harmony, balance, order, reciprocity, and propriety) and Nguzo Saba (Umoja—unity, Kujichagula—self-determination, Ujima—collective work and responsibility, Ujamaa—cooperative economics, Nia—purpose, Kuumba—creativity, and Imani—faith). (Ubuntu newsletter, 2008)

Ubuntu will develop skills that enable students to:

• Interact with others;
• Resolve conflicts;
• Address mental health issues;
• Acquire vocational skills;
• Be prepared for postsecondary education;
• Contribute to their community;
• Sustain high attendance; and
• Become lifelong learners. (Ubuntu newsletter, 2008)

Ubuntu provides Saturday classes, summer enrichment programs, career based opportunities, and internships. Students can participate in person or online in college preparatory courses, skills development classes, honors courses, language classes, and college-level courses. Ubuntu’s curriculum was created to be culturally-responsive. The curriculum reinforces the integrity of cultural knowledge that students bring with them and recognizes cultural knowledge as a part of a living and constantly changing system that is rooted in the past, but continues to grow through the present and into the future. Additionally the curriculum utilizes the local language and cultural knowledge as a foundation for the rest of the curriculum and situates local knowledge and actions in a global context.

Effective teaching develops and fosters effective learning environments. Effective learning environments provide the resources and support for student academic success. At Ubuntu, the school believes that effective teaching establishes high expectations for behavior and academic achievement, while emphasizing the basic values of honesty, dignity, responsibility, respect, and teamwork ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011, p. 6). Ubuntu encourages active participation and recognizes errors as learning opportunities. Additionally, the school offers each student opportunities to be successful; nurtures a positive self-concept; and provides access to current technology, texts, and materials that support the curriculum ([Northeastern State] Department of Education, 2011, p. 6). Ubuntu requires all students to develop a personalized student success plan.
Ubuntu has made and continues to make significant progress in implementing its mission. Ubuntu’s attendance rate is above 90% and fewer than 10% of students transfer to other high schools. Ubuntu students continue to excel academically, which evident in their state standardized test scores. In 2011, Ubuntu students scored in the 70th percentile for math and almost 80th percentile for reading ([Northeastern] Department of Education, 2011). The school has excelled academically both in terms of graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment. The school’s first graduating class in 2000 reported 92.6% successfully graduated and 77% of the graduates progressed to a postsecondary destination. From 2002 to 2010, Ubuntu had 100% graduation rates and from 2004-2010, 100% of the graduates progressed to a postsecondary destination. In 2009 and 2010, 100% of graduates received postsecondary scholarships. Ubuntu’s 2010-2011 senior class consisted of 117 graduates enrolled at thirty-two different 4-year, 2-year, and trade/technical schools in the fall of 2011. This class received approximately $1.2 million in scholarship funds for their postsecondary studies.

In 2004, Ubuntu’s state test scores were the highest in the region. Additionally, in 2006 and 2009, their state test scores ranked them as the top charter high school in the city. In 2010, Ubuntu received an exemplary school ranking by the city’s school district and in 2011, the school ranked as one of the top high schools in the district. The school credits its high graduation and college acceptance rates to their ability to support the student holistically. Ubuntu has a track record of each graduate being accepted to five to eight different colleges or universities.

In 2010-2011, Ubuntu launched its career cluster model that allowed students to participate in vocationally-based academies as an elective in addition to their college preparatory curriculum. The school created a culinary arts program for students to gain experience working
in a professional kitchen environment, utilizing professional small-ware and equipment. Students learn safety and sanitation techniques, food preparation, and prepare a full range of menu items (i.e., appetizers, soups, salads, entrées, and desserts). Communications Academy, another vocation program, allows students to learn to write, direct, record, edit, and produce documentaries and original video productions. Ubuntu offers vocational tracks for students because some students may desire to go directly into the workforce or others want to improve their credentials and gain additional experience. Ubuntu personnel want to prepare students to be successful in any environment after high school, hopefully some type of postsecondary education.

All seniors must complete a comprehensive senior project as a graduation requirement. Students present their senior project in front of a panel of judges. A component of this project is the internship experience, which places seniors as interns with a business, organization, or government agency with the goal to facilitate development as community leaders and heighten awareness of different career paths while improving their skills.

**Special Programs**

Ubuntu has a variety of special programs to supplement traditional academic coursework. Some of programs focus on academic enrichment while others provide scholarships for participants. Ubuntu has three programs that infuse Afrocentrism: Rites of Passage, Pillars of Peace, and Ma’atic development. Ubuntu offers student organizations and athletics that motivate students to excel outside the classroom.

**Rites of Passage**

African-centered rites of passage are rituals and ceremonies based on such African concepts as spirituality, communalism, expressive individualism, reciprocity, and
intergenerational practice (Goggins, 1996). Rites of passage and ceremonies traditionally represent the transition from one phase of life to another. Essentially, Rites of Passage allow communities to perpetuate their culture (Goggins, 1996). Daily *harambee* assemblies and planned activities are components of the rites of passage, which are integral aspects of the African-centered educational philosophy (Detroit Public Schools, 1992).

The Rites of Passage program enhances the growth and development of the students via social activism. The Rites of Passage program’s goals are to develop a balanced person through constructive socialization. This development encompasses both intellectual and emotional maturity. This program supports the cultural, social, spiritual, and emotional growth and development of students through a series of activities, rituals, and ceremonies as well as academic and service opportunities. Students separate into two groups, men and women; both groups have “elders” or older mentors. Students learn about family and cultural history; develop values, goals, and leadership; and foster their creativity and spirituality. The rites program prepares students to go through life and deal with challenges.

Students bond with their peers, learn from elders, and reeducate themselves about Afrocentricity during the rites of passage. The rites are a series of symbolic steps created to prepare students to face the world beyond graduation and lead lives centered on morals and values, such as advancing the community. One ritual might involve the group creating a human chain that would symbolize unity. Essentially, the idea is that the chain is only as strong as its weakest link. The Rites of Passage program culminates with a naming ceremony, in which students receive their African names.
**Pillars of Peace**

Pillars of Peace program is a holistic, culturally-centered mediation program within the Ubuntu school that allows the school constituents to utilize conflict resolution principles to help resolve conflicts and differences of opinions between students and/or school personnel. The program creates a culture of harmony and values-based peace within the school. Staff and students are trained to become Pillar of Peace mediators or school representatives and they work together to assist others in finding peaceful resolutions in difficult or challenging life situations that may involve fighting, profanity, unresolved conflicts, instigating, teasing, verbal harassment, or forms of intimidation (Ubuntu student handbook). Pillars of Peace’s restorative approach is based on the belief that the people best able to resolve a conflict or problem are the people directly involved, and that imposed solutions are less effective, less educative, and possibly less likely to be honored.

**Ma’atic Development**

Ma’atic Development (MD) provides an alternative to suspension. MD is similar to in-school suspension. At Ubuntu, MD is a place for students to re-center themselves. The Ma’atic development program is similar to the Lee Cantor behavior modification program. MD allows students to complete their assigned class work as prescribed by their teachers while receiving assistance with their academic, social, and/or personal challenges. Ubuntu believes that students who participate in MD will be better prepared to make a smooth transition back to their classes. MD serves as a positive alternative to traditional suspension because students still complete their academic work while reflecting on the seriousness of their actions. Students begin to understand that there are consequences for negative actions and behaviors, and take the necessary steps to rectify the inappropriate behavior.
Extracurricular Activities

Ubuntu believes that extracurricular programming is an essential component of a student’s positive high school experience and that success in these programs generally encourages success in the classroom and improves a student’s self-esteem. Ubuntu empowers students to develop school organizations or programs. Students developed the school’s first student council called *Diongo Wembe*, a Congolese term for Student Council. Students developed the student council organization to bridge the gap between the students and administration. Ubuntu has a performing arts department that facilitates activities in choir, modern dance, African dance, African drumming, drill team, martial arts, and drama. Additionally, the school has programming that supports students’ development of leadership and public speaking through Mock Trial and Student Government—Council of Youth Afrikan Leaders (C.O.Y.A.L).

Ubuntu has a variety of athletic programs at the school, including football, boys and girls basketball, cheerleading, cross-country, track, and volleyball. Ubuntu’s boys’ basketball was All City champion in 2009, 2010, and 2011. In 2009 and 2011, Ubuntu earned the title of All State boys’ basketball champion. Lastly, Ubuntu was the first charter school football team in the country to beat a traditional public school.

Challenges

Ubuntu encounters similar challenges like other inner city schools. The school is located within a community with high unemployment and many single parents, grandparents, family members, or non-family member caregivers as head of household. Ubuntu also faces the challenge of retaining a teacher and leadership workforce that is dedicated to an Afrocentric philosophy and values the importance of culture.
Participants

My research questions required that I study the actions taken by school personnel to develop and support a college-preparatory ethos, including a college-going culture. As such, it is important to identify the participants in this study. I interviewed 13 personnel at the African-centered charter school. I scheduled interviews in a vacant office or the participant’s office. Every participant read and signed a consent form prior to sitting for the interview. I audio recorded interviews and entered participants into a raffle to win one of three $25.00 gift cards. Each interview lasted between 20 and 90 minutes and I completed all of the interviews in January and February 2013. I assigned African pseudonyms to participants based on characteristics I perceived the participant displaying during the interview and interview responses.

All interview participants completed demographic information regarding their gender, race/ethnic background, highest level of education and length of employment. The purpose of asking for this information was to avoid researcher bias and limited awkwardness that may have occurred by soliciting the information verbally during the interview. As a sample, all participants identified as African American/Black. The gender breakdown was seven women and six men. Seven participants identified as administrators and six participants were teachers. The administrators included the school’s CEO, principal, Director of Technology, Dean of Students, a social worker, the college guidance counselor, and the parent ombudsperson. The teachers’ content areas included rites of passage, support staff, social science, and Ma’atic development. Table 2 gives a summary of the number and type of interview participants.
Table 2

*Interview Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>African meaning</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Dept.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinaka</td>
<td>God decides</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamau</td>
<td>Quiet warrior</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaaria</td>
<td>One who speaks softly but with wisdom</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sekou</td>
<td>Learned</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neliah</td>
<td>Strong willed and vigorous spirit with a leveled mind</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lema</td>
<td>Cultivated and developed</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aman</td>
<td>Peace</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safia</td>
<td>Pure and wise</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habiba</td>
<td>Beloved and sweetheart</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iman</td>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obi</td>
<td>Heart</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/ Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sakina</td>
<td>Tranquility and peace</td>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rashidi</td>
<td>Thinker; counselor</td>
<td>Man</td>
<td>African American/Black</td>
<td>Admin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows the participants’ highest levels of education. Unlike many charter schools, most Ubuntu personnel have at least a bachelor’s degree.

**Table 3**

*Participants’ Highest Level of Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education after high school other than 2-year or 4-year college (e.g. trade school)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More study after bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/professional (master’s/doctorate)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 illustrates the length of employment for both the teachers and administrators. Most personnel have worked at Ubuntu for at least two years.

**Table 4**

*Participants’ Length of Employment at Ubuntu*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of employment</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 months to 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+ years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present background information on Ubuntu as well as a general profile of interview participants. Similar to other charter schools, Ubuntu emphasizes in its mission the importance of supporting and fostering environments for student achievement. Ubuntu strives to groom students to become successful lifelong learners and valuable contributors in society. Overall, Ubuntu’s environment highlights the importance of culture on student success and postsecondary aspirations. In the next chapter, I present the findings of the research.
CHAPTER V. FINDINGS—COLLEGE PREPARATORY ETHOS

In Chapter 5, I discuss how personnel at an African-centered charter school described ways that they developed and transmitted a college preparatory ethos. I examined how school personnel encouraged and supported students’ college going behaviors. This chapter describes the findings from participant’s dialogues, observations, and document analyses. I divided the chapter into five sections. The first four sections answer the research questions and the last section addresses the main research question. The five sub-questions supplemented the main research question, “How do the personnel at an African-centered charter school try to influence the student’s college-going aspirations?”

In this chapter, through an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the individual interviews, I reveal an overarching theme, It Takes a Village and three subthemes that emerged from the perceptions shared by school personnel about Ubuntu’s college-going culture (see Table 5). The subthemes included a) College-going; b) When I Shine the Nation Shines and When the Nation Shines, We All Shine; and c) Giving the Students What They Need. The first theme, It Takes a Village, exemplified how the Ubuntu community (personnel, community, and family) supported and fostered the school’s mission of academic success and postsecondary education. College-Going, the second theme emphasized how Ubuntu infused numerous aspects of college-going culture into the school’s curriculum, daily interactions, and overall infrastructure. The third theme, When I Shine the Nation Shines and When the Nation Shines, We All Shine highlighted how students’ personal success contributed to Ubuntu’s overall achievements. The last theme, Giving the Students What They Need, focused on how Ubuntu personnel provided students with social and cultural capital needed to achieve academic success and develop college-going aspirations.
The school personnel provided detailed descriptions regarding their experiences and perceptions of how they supported and transmitted a college preparatory ethos. The study indicated that the majority of personnel interviewed believed that an African-centered environment positively influenced students’ college-going behaviors.

**College-Going**

The theme *College-Going* aligns with the first research sub-question, “How do personnel at an African-centered charter school support a college-going culture?” McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez’s (2002) “Nine Principles of College-going Culture” served as model for understanding how Ubuntu personnel supported college preparatory conditions. The nine principles of college-going culture were college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. Each principle contributed to the overall college-going culture at Ubuntu. The first nine principles of college-going culture evident at Ubuntu align with McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez’s Nine Principles of College-going Culture. The last principle, *Technology* was not present in the McClafferty et al. model but was a part of Ubuntu’s college-going culture.

**College Talk**

College talk refers to how school personnel provide clear and continuing communication with students regarding college preparation. College talk was present in the school’s newsletters, correspondence, newspapers, posters, and school assignments (i.e., college application essays) (McClafferty et al., 2002). Ubuntu personnel conveyed college expectation messages through their daily student interactions. Students and families were engaged in college preparation dialogues at the onset of their academic journey at Ubuntu. Habiba, an administrator, noted,
When they [students] come in, they are immersed with information about what they need to do to get ready. Even as much as getting a bank account ready. Making sure the scholarships are here, making sure students are connected with people who have jobs and professions that they are interested in because not only do we do college fairs, we do workshops, and seminars on resume writing. Preparing your college essay, real world life community-based activity, all of our students have to participate in community service. Making sure they are prepared with languages, what colleges are looking for in a student, a scholar student, we at Ubuntu expose them to that.

Ubuntu prepared students for postsecondary success by offering a rigorous college preparation curriculum. The Ubuntu environment provided them with academic rigor and the expectation that they would attend postsecondary education and be successful. Aman, an administrator, explained,

It boils down to having to be prepared for what the next step is. Academic rigor, I think is a part of it, more so I think it is the expectation. Our students particularly by the time they graduate as seniors, and they are going through that senior internship and senior presentation process, when they go to college they are not shocked. They are not surprised, so they are prepared.

College talk highlights the need for school personnel to be proactive and knowledgeable in sharing college-going information with students and their families. Personnel would have discussions with students about potential challenges or obstacles students may encounter as they pursue postsecondary education. Aman stated,

They [students] are aware of the financial barriers, because we teach them about those things. They know how to circumvent some of those potholes and they are aware that
when they go to school if some of their grades aren't intact, they may have to take remedial courses and what that means. We really try to educate them about how to navigate the whole college scene.

Ubuntu personnel understood the importance of providing students with college-going information during high school. School personnel encouraged students to be actively engaged in the college-going process. They wanted students to utilize Ubuntu’s college preparation resources to inform their college transition process. Additionally, the personnel understood that some students might face challenges at their postsecondary institution, but they continuously reminded students that there were campus resources and support in place to help them be successful. Personnel mentored students by sharing their personal collegiate experiences. These postsecondary experiences included stories about financial aid challenges, campus involvement, and academics. As Sekou, a teacher, explained,

The main thing is I want them to be ready. You know when they go to college, no surprises. So we try to give them every single thing we have been through college, we talk about financial aid, we talk about clubs, we talk about programs, fraternities and sororities, as well as education. We talk about majors and minors. We talk about everything, so that they can be prepared. Because we see that once, sometimes students go to college and are not prepared and they get to freshman class and about 57% of freshman drop out of that university their first year. It's kind of like we don't want our students to be the ones who are the dropouts. We want them to say, “You know what, I have tough skin, I already knew this, I was prepared for this and I can keep going.”

Ubuntu personnel embedded college talk into the daily practices as well as displayed college talk through their interactions with students and families. Ubuntu personnel understood the
importance of providing students with constant and clear communication about college preparation.

**Clear Expectations**

Personnel had clear expectations for students’ college preparation and academic achievement in high school. School personnel expected students to do their best at Ubuntu, and acknowledged that students’ best effort was subjective. School personnel recognized that each student had different learning capacities and measured success differently. Personnel wanted to develop students’ self-esteem and confidence as it related to their academic success. They believed if students developed these key attributes early in their academic careers and carried it with them to postsecondary education, they were destined for academic success. Ubuntu conveys these expectations to students and families as soon as they begin their first year at the high school. Additionally, Ubuntu defined and communicated these expectations in the school’s mission statement, educational philosophy, and school correspondence. Neliah, an administrator, acknowledged, “Our culture is that you are going [to college], pretty much, it's like you have no choice.”

Students are encouraged to participate in college-going behaviors and supported by school personnel. Habiba mentioned, “Ubuntu informs scholars that they are going to achieve; if they want it, they're going to go post-secondary education.” The majority of personnel responses emphasized the expectation that students would work hard and pursue some type of postsecondary education. Obi, an administrator, emphasized, We just have this expectation level of you know, you can go to school, and if you choose not to then you know that's cool. We also make all the children apply to college, so even if you don't want to go to school, you know that you got accepted. So if you ever wanted
to, you change your mind, or if you go to school, you know, we already kind of laid the groundwork and the foundation for you to go to school.

Rashidi, another administrator, articulated,

I think that our young people see so much of the emphasis of college whether it's with college tours, or when they start placing the kids’ acceptance letters in the cafeteria. They just hear it all the time. Whether they are making individual visits on off-site learning experiences, they just know that the expectation is not if they are going, it's just where. I think that once they’re here, year two, year three, its where and it's really in everything.

McClafferty et al. (2002) cited the importance of personnel having frequent communication with students about their college options and providing students with numerous opportunities to discuss college preparation and define their goals. Ubuntu infused college expectations into the school’s culture both through interactions and through visual images. Rashidi mentioned he posted senior postsecondary acceptance letters on cafeteria bulletin boards to encourage students to apply as well as alert them of their peers’ achievements. Ubuntu students applied to a number of postsecondary institutions as a high school graduation requirement. Aman noted, “It's just kind of the mantra here, you got to go to college. College is the only thing, like said from administration to teachers to coaches. That's just what we do.”

Personnel believed that having students apply to postsecondary education positively influenced their self-esteem. Some students would change their mind towards the end of the academic year and realize that they desired to attend postsecondary education. Personnel wanted students to continue to be lifelong learners and advance their knowledge through postsecondary education. Habiba indicated, “What I hope the students get out of going to college-going culture
is the belief that they don't have to be limited by their current circumstances.” Ubuntu personnel wanted students to have upward mobility through formal education. Ubuntu personnel believed mediocrity was not an option. School personnel presumed students rise to the expectations placed upon them by school personnel. Aman reaffirmed,

Children need to know that where they are is not good enough to be where they want to be. You know then trying to motivate them through that. For a long time 100% of our students had graduated and were accepted to postsecondary, so everyone that comes here knows that is the culture. So that's the expectation, so that part is easy. We expect everybody to go to college, college is the only option. So that helps frame everything that we are doing.

Some students expressed that they were uninterested in postsecondary education but school personnel insisted that they were going to be successful in some field after Ubuntu. Aman stated, “We have some children that do not want to go to college; they do not feel like they want to go. They maybe just cannot, but we are going to do something with them.” The mission at Ubuntu is to prepare students to pursue postsecondary education, but it was up to the students to decide which environment would be best suited for them to be the most successful post-Ubuntu. Ubuntu understood the importance of student success post-Ubuntu, whether it was enrolling into postsecondary education or directly into the workforce. Overall, Ubuntu developed and facilitated clear and high expectations for all stakeholders regarding supporting a college-going culture.

**Information and Resources**

McClafferty et al. (2002) defined the third principle, information, and resources, as providing students with access to up-to-date, comprehensive college information and college-
going behaviors infused into the school’s infrastructure. Ubuntu provided the college-related resources for students to pursue postsecondary attendance. The school provides access to comprehensive, up-to-date, and relevant college preparation information (i.e., PSAT/SAT/ACT materials, financial aid materials, college catalogs). Students and families access these resources through the on-site college access center, where the full-time college counselor resides. All of the tables in the college access center contain college-going brochures, fliers, or information about prospective schools, financial aid, or entrance exams. Numerous posters depicting various types of postsecondary education institutions or armed services and college flags adorn the walls of the college access center. The college access center contains numerous bookcases full of PSAT/SAT/ACT preparation material, college catalogs, and self-help books about college preparation.

The college counselor facilitates grade-specific assemblies for students that focus on college topics or college information. Additionally, the college counselor also facilitates the JAAMA program, a before-and-after-school academic support program. The JAAMA program includes college-going topics for students and families that provide resources and information to help ease the access of college knowledge and preparation to all. Students and families can visit the college access center to receive information about test prep and financial planning workshops. College preparation information is also in the school’s newsletters and correspondence. Kamau, an administrator, noted, “Students are very aware of college, they know the road of how to get there, they know the application process, and they do get accepted.”

School personnel exposed Ubuntu students to information and resources about postsecondary education, college application process, financial aid, and potential challenges they may encounter as they transition to postsecondary education. Ubuntu provides students with a
college-bound high school senior planning calendar on its school website. Senior and junior year college planning calendars are also included in the school’s newsletter. These calendars provide students with a month-by-month list of tasks that students need to complete to become college bound. These tasks include narrowing down the list of potential colleges, gathering all of the necessary test scores and high school transcripts, requesting letters of recommendation, and developing college admission essays.

Ubuntu alumni are active participants in the school’s college talk and school personnel invite alumni to come back and chat with students about college. Chinaka mentioned,

I like to have students who are graduated come back to tell them what it [college] is like.

So that they can get a feel and really help them understand that this is where you are going and this is what you need to be able to do.

Alumni are able to relate to current students sometimes because of the close age, but the majority of the time because they share similar Ubuntu academic experiences. Neliah reaffirmed that past alumni “can attest to where they came from, from the four years being at Ubuntu and . . . Who they are in college, they come and give back to students who are here now.”

Personnel acknowledged the importance of students having access to resources that support their academic success as well as hearing past alumni experiences. Personnel wanted to ensure that students were not only academically prepared but also knew how to navigate the college scene. Students would be comfortable with accessing resources and approaching personnel about college preparation issues.

**Comprehensive Counseling Model**

McClafferty et al. (2002) described the comprehensive counseling model as all school counselors being college counselors and all student interactions with counselors being college-
advising opportunities. At Ubuntu, all school personnel actively participated in college-advising opportunities. The personnel understood the importance of all school personnel being active participants in students’ postsecondary preparation. School personnel did not view this responsibility solely belonging to the school’s college counselor. Chinaka, an administrator, said,

The whole school understands that our job is to work with every child here graduating and going on to some place post-secondary. Everybody knows that, they know that is our aim. They, the parents, bring their children here because they know that’s our aim. College preparation was effective at Ubuntu because it was a collaborative endeavor undertaken by all personnel. Chinaka further reflected,

When I was in the district I saw the job of preparing children for college was a job of the counselor, maybe she could pull a child out for a period of time or whatever. That’s not successful cause when I worked with the District and I worked with [Northeastern United States] College, children would say that they want to go to college but there are all kinds of things that have to happen to prepare them. So the teachers need to know what the colleges are looking for. So we did back mapping to say what are the colleges looking for and why aren’t children getting into colleges.

Ubuntu personnel would share information about college preparation with each other and the student. Ubuntu’s college counselor was an additional resource in the school to support the already existing college-going culture. Additionally, the school counselor would distribute college information to all students, families, teachers, and personnel (McClafferty et al., 2002). School personnel, students, and families could visit with the counselor to obtain college-going
resources or learn about college preparation opportunities for students and family. Chinaka advocated,

    I'm a supporter of a college access center and the college counselor. Children can go online and do virtual walkthroughs. The college counselor has all of the materials and handouts. We purchase and have SAT and ACT and all that stuff right here in the building.

    The school counselor was actively involved in all things related to college. The counselor would regularly meet with current students as well as provide additional support for Ubuntu alumni. Habiba noted,

    The guidance counselor is very hands-on, gets a lot of information, she gets those young people in and she knows by the time they are in twelfth grade, she knows practically all the parents. Because they have relationship from calling her, texting her, emailing, coming to the workshops.

Ubuntu’s comprehensive counseling model highlighted the need for college counseling to become everyone’s responsibility and role. College counseling at Ubuntu was a shared responsibility of all school personnel.

**Testing and Curriculum**

    School personnel must inform students about required tests, given opportunities to prepare for these tests, and provided financial opportunities to offset testing fees (McClafferty et al., 2002). Ubuntu purchased online SAT, ACT preparation programs for students, and provided opportunities for students to receive fee waivers. Additionally, Ubuntu implements a college preparation curriculum and students must meet the entire curriculum requirements for graduation (please see chapter 4 for the course list). All students take the postsecondary focus curriculum
regardless of their post high school plans. School personnel infuse the postsecondary focus into course assignments and senior graduation requirements. The premise is that all students have access to college-preparatory curriculum that will allow students to meet most if not all requirements for postsecondary education in the future.

School personnel should be actively engaged in the school’s college-going culture by providing students and families with information and resources that support and transmit a college preparatory ethos. As Kaaria, an administrator, explained,

Last year we had college day, and college awareness. During college awareness week, we [school personnel] were able to wear college t-shirts one day where everybody just even including the students, so everybody participated and represented some type of college or university.

Nelah confirmed,

Our college-going culture is that every person here, every personnel down to our maintenance people, they encourage the students about going to college. Like I said down to our janitors, our maintenance people, and the lunchroom people. No matter what all the way to the top. It's our culture; our environment is you are going to college. What are you going to do? What do you want to do? What school do you want to go to? What do you want to do with your life? The question, I ask when I come through, what do you want to do with your life?

The intentional efforts of school personnel and the initiatives of the students have resulted in higher standardized test scores, as well as immediate postsecondary acceptances and scholarships.
Faculty Involvement

McClafferty et al. (2002) recommend faculty being active and informed partners with counselors, students, and families. Some classrooms at Ubuntu would have college themed decorations that included school flags or college success quotations. Additionally, the personnel would allocate class time to discuss college talk with students. Personnel understood their role in college preparation and supported the school’s college preparatory ethos. One of the teachers in this study mentioned that he had dual responsibilities as the testing administrator and the twelfth grade head teacher.

Safia mentioned mirroring her assignments to college assignments with respect to formatting and deadlines. She said, “I try to encourage time management, you know even with putting, setting times on assignments in class. I assign assignments in manners that colleges would. Post it, you know. Give it a deadline and it locks off at a certain time.” Personnel were heavily involved with developing students’ college readiness and facilitated different college preparation techniques. They wanted students to become comfortable with these assignment requirements, so that when they were in college courses it would not be foreign to them. Aman reinforced Safia’s classroom practices by expressing,

We also put a lot of the college prep work into the curriculum. So our seniors are writing college essays. It's not just we are writing about Macbeth or anything else. They are writing college essays. We require them to apply to ten schools at least, and we require them to apply for like fifty scholarships as a part of their senior package. We require our juniors to take the SAT, so it's part of just the regular curriculum. And I like I said part of that is just exposure some kids have never done it and they don't know what to do. Personnel understood the importance of being active involved in students’ college preparation.
Ubuntu personnel wanted students to be prepared for standardized testing and coursework to ensure that they met the college entrance requirements. Personnel made conscious efforts to purposely infuse college readiness activities in classroom lessons. Sekou, a teacher, stated, “I prepare the students for ACT and SAT tests and saying this is what you need to do. This is the test that you need to take to get into college.” Ubuntu provided students with access to online test preparation programs or additional test preparation handouts. Habiba noted that

Students had to do essays, they had to apply to colleges, and they had to make sure everything was in order that their SATs were taken. That way when Ubuntu hosted the college fair and people were coming, college admission representatives were able to give them that information, and they were accepted on the spot. Their SAT scores were strong enough and they actually got scholarships right on the spot. That's what we're [Ubuntu] talking about. And that's what we want them to hope to see, that everything you doing here is preparing you for your life's purpose and to have a purpose driven life.

The school’s college counselor kept Ubuntu teachers up-to-date on college related information. Some teachers mentioned visiting the college access center to obtain additional college preparatory materials. Overall, Ubuntu faculty was active and engaged participants in the school’s college-going culture.

**Family Involvement**

Family involvement was as a major theme in the conversations with school administrators and personnel. Family members must have opportunities to develop college knowledge and understand their role in a students’ development of college-going behaviors (McClafferty et al., 2002). Family involvement encompassed participation in school activities
that included mandated parent/teacher conferences, a parent association, and school workshops or meetings focused on students’ college preparation and financial planning. School personnel expect parents to encourage their students’ success in high school by helping them prepare for standardized tests and other exams (school newsletter). Aman noted that Ubuntu is “getting more, a lot more hands-on, a lot more presence from our parents in the education process.” Student families were active participants in the school’s college-going culture.

Ubuntu personnel viewed family members as active partners in students’ education. Partnering with parents reaffirmed the school’s holistic approach to student development. School personnel emphasized the importance of catering to the whole child both inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, personnel believed that the majority of parents supported Ubuntu’s unique educational approach and preferred to enroll their students at Ubuntu because of the post-secondary focus. Most parents supported students’ current academics and postsecondary education aspirations by being actively engaged in their child’s college preparation. Parents had access to view their students’ biweekly class grades. Additionally, parents could email teachers about their students’ academic progress or arrange a time to meet with their student’s teacher for a face-to-face discussion. Kaaria noted that

Being a community based school, we partner with our parents to help the child. Again, it’s that holistic approach and when that happens, it's awesome. But our parents at the very least are supportive; they believe in what we do, they support what we do. And like the majority of the students I can say when their parents apply them for this school, they come from families who interested in them getting post-secondary education. Even if their parents never went to college, they said, “I send them here because I want them to go to college.”
Ubuntu parents not only have to support Ubuntu’s mission, but also must invest into the school’s educational philosophy that emphasizes postsecondary education. Parents have to understand that their student’s academic success will require commitment, patience, and support from not only the school personnel but the family as well. Parents can attend workshops that assist them with financial aid applications. School personnel want parents to invest in their student’s success during this partnership. Chinaka describes the parent personnel relationship below.

When the parents come, I tell the parents I work for you. But we are not going to molly coddle your child so if your child can tell you what they going to do or not going to do, this isn't the place. If you want your child to be where they need to be in four years, we can make that happen. But that is going to be with before school, after school, Saturdays and summers. It's going to be rigorous. And umm, I get their buy in and I try not to treat them like parents that can come in for the cookie sales. I never liked that as a parent.

Ubuntu personnel collaborated with families to support students’ academic success and postsecondary enrollment. Habiba explained the parent-personnel relationship as a transparent and collaborative approach centered on student success,

Ubuntu tell the parents that on the onset that you must buy into education and higher learning for your children. So at the beginning, there are no secrets about what we do here at Ubuntu, for any family member. We work with the families extensively to make sure that if there is some problem, it can be resolved because we can sit and come into an agreement. Whatever it is that basically, these young people are successful and that's the goal at Ubuntu.
Ubuntu’s partnerships with parents was successful both because of the positive impact on student’s academic success and the potential for parents to provide additional resources to support the school. Some of these additional resources included developing school fundraisers, providing sites for senior interns, and volunteering to supervise school activities.

Our parents also are involved in helping to identify the needs of the school, helping us to get resources for the school, and being spokespersons for the school. And you know they try to come out and support in all kinds of ways. (Chinaka)

Ubuntu personnel stressed the importance of constantly communicating with students’ families and keeping them informed regarding their student’s academic progress or school updates. Ubuntu has an onsite ombudsperson whose primary responsibility is to communicate with parents and ensure that they are informed. The ombudsperson also coordinates the Wazuri Board or the parent association and facilitates parental workshops. Ubuntu Wazuri Board encouraged all parents to participate in the monthly parent meetings and to consult the school’s website for additional information.

So the parents, we get them involved and we have a parent liaison. Our parent liaison or ombudsperson, here on staff that makes sure that she contacts parents and lets them know this is what we are doing. We are offering it to you. Now, we may like I said, we may get 50/50 that come out, but we are offering it to you. (Neliah)

The Wazuri board allows parents to get involved with Ubuntu, develops communication channel for parents to know about school functions, and encourages parents to support each other.

**College Partnerships**

College partnerships emphasize the importance of developing and fostering postsecondary linkages between the high school and colleges. These linkages could include field
trips, college fairs, and academic enrichment programs (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). The goal of these partnerships is to raise awareness and aspirations towards postsecondary education. McClafferty et al.’s (2002) college partnership principle encompasses linkages between K-12 schools and local postsecondary institutions, but my study only includes the partnerships specific to high schools. Ubuntu has numerous opportunities for students to gain exposure to postsecondary institutions. As Kaaria explained,

We take the children on college tours, so once they get the actual feel of the universities and the institutions then they get a little excited and motivated about I am going to this [institution]. At least they know they get the actual visual of what a college campus looks like.

Ubuntu personnel expose students to various types of postsecondary institutions that included historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), two-year community colleges, public and private four-year institutions, and vocational schools. In addition, students can attend the school district’s annual college fair, which includes other district high schools. Personnel cultivated students’ sense of belonging and reinforced institutional fit by having students participate in college tours and informational sessions. Students begin to visualize their place on campus and potentially begin their overall college transition. Sakina reaffirmed,

So I think that when students are exposed to, you know like “Wow, I was on a college campus. I got to see, and I got to talk to people. I just got to experience that.” It does something to you.

Students were encouraged to participate on college tours and attend college fairs. School personnel would personally take students to visit nearby college campuses. Personnel would
connect students to college staff who were familiar with Ubuntu’s practices or knew one of
Ubuntu’s school personnel. Neliah mentioned that

    I and even everyone here have a relationship with schools [colleges]. These schools
    make sure that our students are kind of paired up with someone there or a faculty person
    that they know or that students could go and talk to.

Ubuntu personnel were committed to providing and supporting college partnerships for students.
The college partnerships included public and private four-year institutions, and two-year
community colleges. Some of the partnerships were formalized agreement, while the majority of
these informal partnerships consisted of primarily college visits.

**Articulations**

Articulation describes how schools convey a college message throughout the students’
secondary education experience. McClafferty et al. (2002) articulation element describes a
seamless experience form kindergarten through high school that expresses consistent and clear
communication. Ubuntu is a member of an Afrocentric school association that includes
elementary, middle, and high schools. Currently, there is no reported articulation with any
middle or high schools. Most students do not transfer from one school to the next within the
association.

    My study focuses on the college-going messages articulated in Ubuntu high school.
Ubuntu informs students and families of their goal of having every student attend some type of
postsecondary education early on in the process. Neliah noted, “It's like you come in the door, at
the parent meeting, it's like there is not if, ands or buts. Your child is going to some type of
postsecondary institutions.” Ubuntu personnel informed families in ninth grade of the school’s
objective of having all students pursue postsecondary education. Chinaka indicated that
The parents always hear me say in 9th grade when they come in, if you do all the things we ask you to do between now and the next 4 years, your child in August of that year is going to be moving out of your house. We know that we can guarantee that, we done that. So that everybody is a part of the focus of transition from high school to college. That's not normal in a high school.

Exposing students to college-going behaviors early in their career encourages the students to develop college-going habits. Chinaka mentioned, “Just like it was a process for you to go from 8th grade to 9th grade, there's a process to transition from high school to postsecondary.” Personnel are trying to help students understand the importance of being actively engaged in a college-going culture, while simultaneously preparing them for postsecondary enrollment and matriculation. Habiba explained how the school developed and facilitated the intentional college preparation curriculum and structured it throughout the students’ tenure at Ubuntu.

Our young people are always in engaged in college activity from the ninth graders on. We're immersed in college preparedness; we started off with a college workshop or a college fair. The homework and projects are relevant to them going to college. You have to get in eleventh grade; we start with you developing your scholarships, your essay writing, and your applications. So when you come in twelfth grade year, after you prepare all these resumes and community service and different things like that. By the time you enter, you have done everything required; you are really ready to be in accepted into postsecondary education.
Ubuntu’s postsecondary focus is infused into the school’s curriculum at the onset of the students’ academic journey. McClafferty et al. (2002) highlighted the importance of schools conveying a consistent and clear message of students’ postsecondary education enrollment.

**Technology**

Technology is not a principle in the McClafferty et al.’s (2002) model but was a key part of Ubuntu’s college-going culture. Students, families, and personnel all actively utilized technology to communicate with each other or access resources. The school’s newsletter reminded students that they were required to create a Gmail email account to correspond with school personnel. Ubuntu purchased numerous electronic college preparation resources for students. Aman noted that

> We do a lot of technology things. We’ve purchased specifically things like Peterson’s Guide, a website dedicated to college search, SAT prep, and ACT prep. And it’s always been some element of that engrained into curriculum. Right now, we have two computer based programs, one is Study Island, where they have SAT/ACT prep course that is required for seniors and we have another program Education 20/20, which is another distance learning type program, where students can enroll in prep course. It’s more like a teacher who records her lecture and the lesson and things.

Ubuntu uses technology to help provide additional college preparation resources for students. Aman reaffirmed the importance of “having the resources for students to do everything from apply to you know type their essays and all those kind of things.”

The school’s curriculum infuses various technological components. Most personnel have online homework assignments. Obi stated,
We [Ubuntu] have different things, like Schoology and Turnitin that is now available to high school students. So you are able to have children submit work on Turnitin and then let them see, “Ohh, okay, so 35% of your paper was either cited or plagiarized or wasn’t original information . . . They [students] upload it [their assignments] and I grade their homework right there. Send their grade back and see you in class the next day.”

Students become familiar with computer programs, like Turnitin, as well as uploading electronic time-sensitive assignments. Many of the personnel understood the importance of incorporating technology into their curriculum because of the wide usage at the postsecondary level.

Parents utilize Ubuntu’s technology to complete financial aid applications online and can correspond with school personnel to obtain information in a timely manner. Additionally, Ubuntu parents use social networks such as Facebook to communicate with each other. Habiba mentioned, “They [parents] get on Facebook, and they develop a Facebook page, where all the parents are talking to each other and no students can be involved.” Parents are encouraged to communicate with each other and staff to stay abreast of Ubuntu policies and practices.

Ubuntu’s college-going culture encompassed all school personnel, regardless of their position at the school. The school enacted all of McClafferty et al.’s (2002), 9 principles of a college-going culture (college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation) through its daily interactions, curriculum requirements, and organizational infrastructure. Personnel supported a college-going culture by encouraging all school constituents to share the collective responsibility of fostering a college preparatory ethos and supporting students’ college-going aspirations. School personnel perceived their interactions as supportive of developing and fostering a college-going culture.
Giving the Students What They Need

The next theme, Giving Students What They Need, parallels research sub-question 2, “How do personnel at an African-centered charter school perceive the impact of their interactions on students’ college-going process?” and research sub-question 4, “How do personnel at an African-centered charter school utilize social and cultural capital to develop students’ college-going aspirations?” The personnel believed that their interactions with students encouraged students’ college-going aspirations. School personnel felt responsible to provide the resources and support to nurture student success. Ubuntu personnel credited their positive reinforcement and holistic development as key components that fostered student success.

Personnel Meeting Students’ Needs

Holistic development simultaneously addresses an individual’s physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects. Aman expressed,

We support our children, we praise them, we praise our students, and again because they know that we are interested because we are dealing with the whole of them, I think it just that whole piece just fosters success. You know it deals with whole child and you can't, get a kid or student to think about college when the only thing they can think about is can they get home safely. But when you deal with that, when you start to give them resources and you show them that you care and things start to happen because of your effort. Then they start to buy in, they start to believe in what the school is, they start to believe in you, believe in themselves, and then the sky is the limit.

Aman’s statement relates to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a motivational theory that emphasizes the need for people to satisfy basic needs prior to meeting successively higher needs (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Additionally, personnel wanted students to feel comfortable approaching
them regarding any concerns or issues and they wanted students to have a voice. Ubuntu personnel understand that students may face numerous challenges or barriers (i.e., lack of food, safety issues, or peer pressure) that could negatively influence their academics. School personnel believe they made a difference with their students because they provided support to them both inside and outside of the classroom. School personnel understood that safety is a prerequisite for self-esteem. Kaaria reaffirmed, “Once you know where you come from it gives you the motivation and confidence to anything you want to do.” Aman supported Kaaria’s statement regarding the importance of students developing confidence to desire success

I hope that they just gain confidence. I want them to feel confident that what they’re getting from here is going to prepare them for the future. I hope they take away, or just assess some value into the cultural aspect of what it is. I really think that means a lot particularly in certain types of environment that you may encounter when you go to school. I think it says something when someone can be confident in who they are, when they get out there and have to face other types of adversities. At least that's one thing they don't have to question. Who they are? And so I hope that they take that kind of confidence out of this. I think that's the key thing, academically they are going to be prepared, they come through, they graduate, they are going to be prepared academically but outside of that is just confidence.

Personnel contributed to students’ holistic development by supporting students’ spiritual needs. Safia described how personnel supported students’ development of confidence as reaching down into their spirit. Safia mentioned,
When you open up students’ minds to themselves and you reach that spirit. It is you know beyond the sky is the limit. You know that it is like raising the dead. You know it is an awakening that is so [laughs] real that it is unreal. You know.

Safia described how personnel developed student’s positive self-concept that further developed a student’s confidence. Lema reinforced Safia by noting, “When students are able to break the monopoly of self-hatred. When they can break that they are on their way.” Students began to develop a positive self-worth that made them believe that they were valued and special.

Personnel showed students that they genuinely cared about their development. The personnel viewed their students in most cases as their own children. Neliah mentioned that personnel at Ubuntu treat “The kids we have here are like our own children. We treat them just as if they were our own children.” Students benefited from having dedicated and compassionate school personnel.

**Personnel Developing Relationships**

Ubuntu personnel served as role models for the students. Personnel believed that students were able to relate to them due to their similar characteristics (i.e., ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or residential neighborhoods). Aman noted, “[Personnel] build relationships, and that is how they foster learning here.” Additionally, personnel reemphasized with students that it was acceptable to be an educated and successful person of color. Obi noted that

I like to consider myself an example of something different. You don't always have to look like the boys in your neighborhood, you can be different and still be proud of who you are as far as being a Black male. Unfortunately, we constantly have to buck up against this notion that you went to school and you did what you supposed to do. You
have a wife and all that, you must be soft or you must be punk. And I can say it, you know as far as the staff here, the teachers none of us, none of us are soft, none of us are punks. And our kids know that, you know, I can talk to you about some things that will let you know that I am no punk. You know so I think that also builds their cultural integrity and knowing that is okay to be an educated Black man and to make your money legally.

A few personnel believed Ubuntu’s success was due to its relational approach. School personnel believed that students benefited from being able to relate to personnel through shared cultural experiences, determination, and resiliency.

I think one of the main things is that we have with the demographics that we serve being we are like 99.8% African American. When you have that many African American students, then you fill your school with African American personnel who all have degrees and post-graduate degrees and doctorates. I think it that alone speaks volumes to what kids see and what they can achieve. I think it's one of the main things that we do here we just show them hey it's possible because I did it and we're from the same neighborhoods that you are from. We rode the same subway that you did and we all have the degree, so you know there is no reason you can't do it as well. (Obi)

Rashidi supported Obi’s statement by indicating, “It’s very odd for a young person to be here for a year and if you just brought all the staff members in one place, name this kid and someone not have a very special relationship with that child, super odd . . . I think it is way more relationship than it is a book, the college access center, the library. I really don’t think it’s those things.”
Personnel Emphasizing the Value of Education

Many personnel expressed having daily conversations with students about the importance of attending postsecondary education. Personnel believed that once they were able to get students to become active participants in their education and understand the value of education, they were more likely to be successful. Safia recalled a class discussion.

I asked them “What kind of lifestyle do you want for yourself?” You know they want the big cars, and they want big houses. In addition, I am asking them, “How are you going to obtain that?” We talk about the street thug life and the limitations, the timespan of living that kind of life. Yes, it's fast, and yes, it's quick. But it’s over that fast. What happens afterwards? If you are not college bound, because everybody is not, what other types of things do you want to do? Cause you still have to make a plan. So we talked to them, we give them classes to help them to get set up along the way. It’s not you are in the twelfth grade you go to do this, this, this, and that. You know it's a building block process.

Personnel desired students understand the value of education. Additionally, they wanted students to understand how education could open doors for them to obtain desired lifestyles. Similarly, Safia recalled another classroom discussion that focused on the value of education.

We talk about parents, “How many of your parents went to college? Who lives in the house with a single parent?” A lot of them raise their hand. “Okay, that single parent takes care of you. Does anybody else help them take care of you? Nope. Who takes care of the bills?” [Students responded,] “My mom.” “What happens if something happen to her? How hard does mom work?” [Some students responded] “My mom got two jobs.” “Why? Why does she have to work two jobs? Because she did not go to college, so she got to have them two jobs to meet that one.” Talk about salaries. Talk
about expenses. And when they start seeing it, they are like what! You know, we can't hide stuff. So when you make the reality to them, you give them a second thought. But if you go to college and you become good at what you do, you can land a good job. That one job can take care of that and some. So these are ways we include it in class and constantly encourage college-going.

School personnel were realists because they wanted students to understand how education could improve their and their families’ life circumstances. Personnel talked with students so much about attending college that it contributed to the college-going culture’s infusion into Ubuntu’s African-centered environment. School personnel understood the importance of meeting student needs, developing meaningful relationships, and emphasizing the value of education. Personnel engaged in these crucial activities due to the positive impact it had on fostering students’ college-going aspirations. School personnel’s perceptions of Ubuntu’s college-going culture influenced their attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding student’s college aspirations.

**Personnel’s Own Social and Cultural Capital**

Ubuntu personnel utilized their own social and cultural capital to develop and support students’ college-going aspirations. Some of the staff expressed that they were presently pursuing postsecondary studies, and they wanted to be an example for their students of lifelong learning. Neliah noted,

So when they [students] see staff going to school or pursuing higher education as well, then it kind of gives them a sense of okay well I can go you know do my four years and also go back if I have to work a little bit . . . So that kind of gives them you know we
have [support college-going] not only for our students, but for ourselves. Our administration pushes us to go further to get more education.

Personnel encouraged each other to pursue postsecondary education because they understood the impact of education on individuals, the school, and the community. Additionally, some personnel informed students that they were modeling college-going behaviors by currently enrolling in postsecondary education. Habiba noted, “When they [students] hear and see that, a lot of us are going back to college and still in college. They are like ‘You in college?’ Yeah girl, education is ongoing, it’s a life learning process, you know.” One staff member described her personal journey to develop cultural capital. Sakina remembered,

I went to business school because I didn’t believe I could go to college. And there was only one college that I ever wanted to go to and that was . . . College, which was rich, private, and very White. I never believed that I could go there, circumstances happened. The only college that I ended up applying to was . . . college and they accepted me and I went. But even going to . . . college, I thought all those As those teachers were just being nice to me, I never believed in my ability. After I graduated, I got my masters. I always push my students . . .

Personnel shared with students their hesitancies or challenges that they had to overcome to obtain the cultural capital necessary to pursue postsecondary education. Obi shared his personal collegiate experience:

I didn’t do well my first time in undergrad and I ended up leaving and going back. And these people, I don’t know if you heard of them, their names are AES they just kept calling me and they kept asking for money. I said well I am going to give you this money, I might as well have a degree to show for it. So I ended up going back to
school. . . . The number one thing is that students must want an education. I just know that you have to be determined to finish. When I went back to school and I would talk to new students. I told them that ‘I could still say it to this day I never met anybody who failed out of school or couldn't finish college because they just physically, didn't have the skill sets. It was always because they were too lazy, got distracted or was out partying or got somebody pregnant or got pregnant. But I never met somebody who left school or failed out of school because they just couldn't cut it.

Ubuntu personnel desired to be role models and serve as support for students who did not have access to college preparation information. They cultivated students’ development of cultural capital by sharing their personal past and current postsecondary experiences. Personnel wanted students to understand the challenges or obstacles they had to overcome to become an educated person of color. They believed that if students could understand these experiences, their students would be more likely to desire to continue to develop their cultural capital.

School personnel wanted students to know that developing college-going aspirations was a process that it did not occur spontaneously. Sakina mentioned,

So I use examples with them that you may not feel comfortable, but do it now. Don’t wait to your fifty years old. You know do it now and if you need help get it. The thing that I realized was when I was eighteen, college wasn't for me, but I might have been a little further ahead if I would of went to some post-secondary, got some kind of post-secondary education. So even, you know like realizing that you know what, college is not for everybody, but some kind of education is.

School personnel believed that they served as visual reminders of college-going expectations. Obi mentioned,
In this school, you have a large amount of African American males with degrees, so that visual alone I think that is one of the first things that we do is that, we have a large number of African American teachers who are qualified. [We] did well in school; we have papers for a lack of a better term.

The personnel believed that all students could enroll and be successful in postsecondary education regardless of their past challenges or their social or cultural backgrounds. Personnel shared their stories of how they developed the necessary cultural capital to pursue postsecondary education. Obi noted,

In my position . . . I give students a space to talk about what it means to be a Black person, to hear from somebody who is kind of close to their age about you knowing being a young Black man and the process that I’ve gone through. I think it helps build their cultural integrity because I like to consider myself an example of something different you don’t always have to look like the boys in your neighborhood.

Personnel believed that the most important resource that helped them develop students’ cultural and social capital was their own collegiate experience. Personnel shared the lived experiences of pursuing postsecondary education and many of the school personnel came from similar backgrounds as students.

**Students’ Development of Social and Cultural Capital**

Cultural capital emphasizes the need to provide students with the resources to support college-going aspirations. Chinaka noted, "We [personnel] realized we had to work on education that would meet the child's need . . . There is no excuse not to try our best do whatever we need to do for a child.” Personnel provided resources for students to develop the cultural capital to become college-ready. Ubuntu personnel understood the importance of providing an education
that would meet the needs of students and providing them the resources to develop college-going aspirations. Personnel informed students during high school that some postsecondary education would provide additional resources to aid their college success. Habiba mentioned,

We know our young people are equipped, are prepared and addition we don't shame, we don't bring shame to student support programs. If you need additional support, we prepared you, but you gotten accepted into with your SAT scores and your transcripts. So now you may need additional support to some classes. So even though you may feel little intrepid you know about taking a science course or something like that, but because you know about additional resources that are available to you, you're going to be successful in college.

Personnel believed that students should work cooperatively together to foster success. They wanted students to become accountable for their development and utilize Ubuntu resources to be successful. Lema described the student development as

We push cooperative learning, individual responsibilities, associated with cooperative learning because see no matter what happens and no matter what collective group that you around and you how you learning and nine times out of ten, you still have to be your own man and your woman. So you still have to be responsible for learning and retaining and processing information that's going to advance your life experience.

Social capital focuses on developing the networks or relationships to support college transition. Personnel described how students benefited from social networks with school personnel, community alliances, and their peers that helped them develop a college-preparatory ethos. Kemau mentioned,
It is not so much having the knowledge, but rather am I going to endure? And so you have to endure through all those pieces [college preparation] for accomplishments. Socialization to be able to socialize appropriately with peers umm in a global market, so we stressed that 90% of the college classes is now going to stress some type of group work or cooperative group work. So we try to integrate that a lot within our climate as well the ability to access resources. Meaning it’s not so much, what you know, but can you find the person who can tell you. So that is one of the things we stress.

Ubuntu personnel wanted students to use their social and cultural capital to attain their goal of postsecondary education. Habiba stated,

A college-going culture is where you connect the relevancy of always being a world learner, a lifelong learner, you never stop learning. And that's what we try to challenge young people to believe that they can do great things and no matter whether it is a post-secondary, whether it's umm electrician, or if you are going to college, that learning never stops. And I think that when you create that and you show what can happen when you continue the connections you are able to make. I think that really helps with our young people. What I hope the students get out of going to college-going culture, is the belief that they don't have to be limited by their current circumstances.

Personnel aided and supported students in developing skills to activate the social and cultural capital necessary to negotiate the college-going process. Personnel fostered positive relationships with students that helped students develop confidence and determination that they could be successful in college. Personnel understood that most of Ubuntu students began high school lacking the specific types of “college knowledge,” or were unaware of how to prepare for postsecondary education in terms of financing a college education, applying to institutions, or
understanding what it means to be college ready. Personnel knew that students’ under-preparedness could negatively influence their postsecondary enrollment, persistence, and college success. School personnel wanted to give students the necessary resources to support college-going aspirations, which meant providing students with the social and cultural capital in the form of college knowledge, college readiness, mentoring, and networking.

When I Shine the Nation Shines and When the Nation Shines, We All Shine

The third theme, When I Shine the Nation Shines and When the Nation Shines, We All Shine, relates to the third research sub-question, “How does an African-centered charter school’s culture influence personnel’s attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding student’s college aspirations?” When I Shine the Nation Shines and When the Nation Shines, We All Shine describes how Ubuntu develops and fosters academic success within their African-centered environment. Ubuntu’s African-centered education is deeply rooted in Nguzo Saba and Ma’at. Chinaka noted, “Because Afrocentricity requires that you do what's best for the child, if we are preparing that child for college, it's our responsibility to give them any and everything they need, so that they are truly prepared.” One of Ubuntu’s school newsletters included the phrase, Pamoja Tutashinda, which means, “Together we will win.” This message reinforces Ubuntu’s strong commitment of developing and fostering academic success within its school environment.

The Nguzo Saba and Ma’at principles served as the foundation for students’ academic, social, and moral development. Ubuntu infused Nguzo Saba and Ma’at into the school’s curriculum, ethos, and daily interactions. The participants in this study often referenced these principles when they shared their reflections and perspectives about Ubuntu’s college-going culture. Many participants would use the exact terms of the principles, while others would provide information-rich descriptions that exemplified these principles. In this section, I discuss
how Ubuntu’s African-centered charter school culture influenced personnel’s attitudes, values, and behaviors regarding student’s college aspirations.

**Attitudes**

Ubuntu personnel believed that every student was capable of enrolling in some type of postsecondary education after high school, regardless of their educational background or socioeconomic status. An administrator mentioned that the attitude and beliefs of school personnel enacted greatly influenced the school’s college-going culture.

It's a can do attitude. It is just believing so strongly in our children, in our community and basing its values and beliefs on the seven principles of the Nguzo Saba, which is talking about having a purpose, being unified, and collective work and responsibility. All those things that we know take to make a strong community. If we have strong communities, we have strong families. And if we have strong families, we have strong young people. But we know that there are families in our communities [that] need work. But what Ubuntu does, is put that aside. They come in here and they tell these scholars that they're going to achieve, if they want it, they're going to go postsecondary education.

(Habiba)

Personnel understood the importance of supporting student success because of the positive impact it would have on families in the community. Personnel encouraged students’ higher learning, by reaffirming to students that they had the potential to pursue postsecondary education. Personnel supported students’ postsecondary pursuit by doing whatever it takes to foster student success, whether it was providing additional educational resources, allocating additional one on one time with students, or discovering how to motivate students to achieve academic excellence. Chinaka described it as a “by any means necessary” attitude.
Another statement that Ubuntu uses is “I am unapologetically centered on meeting the needs of my children by any, every means necessary.” One by one, I kind of call it, the Malcolm X-Tubman process. That there is no excuse to not try your best to do whatever you need to do for a child and so it has to become an up close and person, one by one. They do not quite understand, you sit and work with them you try to find that hot button; by every means possible.

“By any means necessary” attitude describes how personnel were willing to go the distance, overcoming challenges or obstacles that hinder student success. Personnel operated with a “no excuses allowed” mantra that emphasized that students would encounter challenges or obstacles, but it was up to them to fulfill their destiny. Aman mentioned,

The staff I think by and large is committed to the success of our students and our school and mostly committed to the mission and vision of the school. Our staff goes above and beyond and outside of the box cause that is really the only way you can deal with the whole child.

Personnel’s “by any means necessary” approach was espoused through their interactions with students. Sekou stated, “We believe in educating our children and always being there.” School personnel were willing to devote extra time before or after school to help students. Lema expressed,

Personnel did not mind working hard or going beyond the call of duty. You know if it is a parent teacher conference, you know, if the conference is on a Saturday, then the staff will come on a Saturday. If it is on a Friday and Saturday or a Thursday and a Friday, from one to nine or one to eight, then the staff is here. If it is from one to six, the staff is here.
Ubuntu personnel were committed to going the extra mile to advance student success. A few personnel mentioned going with students to visit local colleges and universities. One staff member mentioned providing food to a student who confided that his or her family was enduring financial struggles and could not afford to purchase groceries. The personnel expressed the importance of helping with a student’s home life because of its direct correlation to student academic performance. Aman believed that students were lucky to attend Ubuntu because personnel were truly concerned and committed to helping students. Aman expressed

I think they [students] are just extremely fortunate to have a place like Ubuntu, where the staff is taught that if students fail, it is not because they failed; it is because we failed them. So there is a lot of extra effort and a lot of concern that our students benefit from when they are here.

Additionally, personnel are invested in student success and they are expected to take ownership if a student does do well on an assignment or in a course. It is common for personnel to devote additional support or resources to help students be successful both while they are at Ubuntu and after they graduate. Chinaka defined success as “children being accepted and being able to go on with their life and be in control of their life.” Ubuntu personnel’s attitudes positively correlated to student success. Personnel were committed and invested in Ubuntu’s educational philosophy which helped foster student success at the school.

Values

Students’ family and the community are valued at Ubuntu. The school encourages the different constituents to share their opinions and provide feedback about Ubuntu practices and policies. Habiba described the process
Before this school, even opened parents were brought to the table and asked to participate in what they wanted for our children's education. Ubuntu never stepped away from that. Every month we have meetings, we get feedback and praises. We are talking to the parents constantly. Our CEO is always at every meeting. We always have staff that stay and try to get feedback about how they are gauging learning here at Ubuntu. That's really different when you are talking about being inclusive and making sure that this building is open to serve the community. Open to serve families and students. So I think that really sets us apart at Ubuntu.

When families, schools, and the community collectively agree upon the objectives to foster student success, everyone can benefit. Habiba’s previous quote highlighted that successful students can lead to stronger families which can lead to stronger communities. Stanton-Salazar (1997) identified two types of social networks that influenced minority students’ access to social capital for student success—institutional agents (school personnel) and protective agents (family or community members). Ubuntu encourages protective agents to be active participants in their students’ academics. Personnel believed that families were more likely to support a school’s effort when they were included in the discussion. Families are the foundation of communities, thus when communities were actively engaged with schools they benefited from the potential development of an educated workforce. Ubuntu understood the importance of collective work and the need to support students and families because of the positive impact on community advancement.

Additionally, Ubuntu’s community provides an environment that reinforces the school’s mission and values, as well as provides additional support, resources, and opportunities necessary to foster success. Kaaria noted
We have people in the community, of course, [we] want the community to be different but they bought into making sure that everything is safe. So they know our students, they know when they see their dashikis, the dashikis is one of our students. If something is happening, illegally transactions, drugs, they call us and let us know. So that we can make sure our students are safe.

Many participants emphasized the need for the curriculum, regardless of content (i.e., science, mathematics, reading, language, or history) to be relevant and meaningful to students’ daily-lived experiences. Aman explained the need for the curriculum to reflect students’ cultural backgrounds. He explained,

You know there is the term Sankofa, which means to go back and reclaim, you know it's a big part of what we do here. So we try to make sure they understand their history, they are proud of it. Once they do that we believe they can have a firm footing to go out in the world and be functional, positive, and productive.

Personnel wanted students to value Afrocentricity and understand how it correlated to individual success. Additionally, personnel believed when students developed a stronger sense of their culture, they were more likely to become active participants in their community.

Ubuntu’s college-going culture highlights the importance of all school constituents being lifelong learners, never stopping the learning process. Personnel have a commitment of being lifelong learners; some of them are in school themselves and are constantly encouraging their students to pursue postsecondary education. Chinaka expressed,

We want children to become lifelong learners and so our staff we push them to become lifelong learners. So once they become very good at anything, we start pushing them to go to school. Almost all our younger staff is in school because you can't sit on your
laurels here. So if you are doing this, and you got an associate’s degree, when are you going back to get your bachelors? When are you going back to get your masters? Until you get a terminal degree, we have no expectations that you will stop. Because that is what we want them to model for the children, that's what we need to model as adults.

Neliah reaffirmed this espoused value by indicating, “Teachers can go back to school and get a higher education, we are trying to teach them that it does not stop, nowadays a bachelors not all you are going to need.” Education at Ubuntu appears to be an on-going process and personnel are constantly pushing students to think about postsecondary education.

**Behaviors**

Ubuntu’s infuses the college preparatory ethos into school’s policies and practices. Rashidi mentioned “The college-going culture really starts from our founder and I think it's like everything is about what we are doing to place our kids in college.” Ubuntu personnel understood the importance of encouraging students to develop college-going aspirations. Personnel would often mention college-going activities to students in daily conversations. Safia recalls a time in the classroom

When I see leaders and different things, even my students that have low self-esteem, you know, I say stuff like go ahead “Professor so and so . . . and girl I can't wait to I come to your college tour, to see you, you going to give me you know, you going to tour me around your dorm.”

Personnel wanted students to begin to visualize their collegiate journey. Personnel wanted students to know that they were committed to seeing them advance academically both at Ubuntu and beyond.
Personnel worked collaboratively with each other to develop and foster environments that supported a college-preparatory ethos. Chinaka noted, “So the work at Ubuntu it's everyone's responsibility when you are in African-centered education, centered on around meaning the nature of the child. Everybody's job is to give the child what they need to get to their goals and objectives.” Ubuntu personnel understand the importance of student accountability and personnel developed strategies or approaches that helped improve students’ academics. The collaboration involved personnel communicating and supporting each other. The personnel would meet weekly to discuss student and school needs as they relate to planning, advising, and academic achievement. Sekou described the collaborative personnel interactions

We plan for the children first. The children are in the center in the circle and everything reaches out. So that is how we plan, we plan for the children first and then everything around it. This is what we need to do for the children and this is how we teach the rest of the staff. This is what you need to do for the children. It's not I come in at eight or I leave at four. It's if I know I need to stay here longer or I need to be here earlier, this is what we are doing for the children. And that's how the difference is it's just that we implement what needs to be done for the children.

Ubuntu’s college-going culture resembled Oakes et al., (2002) description of a college-going culture because school constituents perceived college-going as an attainable goal due to the school’s values, beliefs, and expectations. School personnel’s attitudes, values, and behaviors positively influence the support and transmission of a college preparatory ethos. Additionally, school personnel believed that students being successful led to the school being successful, which led to the community being successful, which most importantly led to the African race being successful. Success began at the individual level but had the potential impact
of improving the community and nation as a whole. Personnel believed it was their responsibility to provide students with the necessary social and cultural capital to develop college-going aspirations.

**It Takes a Village**

The first theme, It Takes a Village, corresponded with the main research question, “How do personnel at an African-centered charter school try to influence the students’ college-going aspirations?” School personnel influenced students’ college-going aspirations by having a shared vision that emphasized student success at Ubuntu. The school’s CEO/founder led school personnel collaboratively to build the school’s vision around student success. School personnel nurtured this shared vision of the school by integrating it into all school practices and policies. When the CEO met with school personnel to make and implement school decisions, the CEO would begin every meeting by reminding school personnel to concentrate on what will most help students achieve academic success and develop college-going aspirations. Ubuntu personnel sustained this shared vision by reminding each other and students of the vision and communicating the vision to students, parents, and the community through school newsletter, school website, and any other available outlet.

College-going was part of the school’s mission statement and philosophy. All Ubuntu constituents bought into the school’s mission of providing an environment for urban learners that supported high expectations and focused on giving students what they needed to be successful. School personnel invested in their students’ success and it showed in the school’s practices and policies that fostered an environment of postsecondary expectations and academic success. Ubuntu’s emphasis on postsecondary education helped personnel develop and implement strategies that fostered student success. Sakina noted,
They [students] are so full of potential. We definitely have scholars here; we have multi-
geniiuses here. We have students here that will change the world, if they could just get to
believe in that.

School personnel discussed postsecondary education with students and families in an
affirmative and empowering manner when students began enrollment at Ubuntu. Personnel did
not say “if you go to college” rather it was “when or where you went to college.” Aman
emphasized,

Like you got to go to college, you know. Or I should say you got to go somewhere. It's
just doesn't stop at high school, whether it's the military, or whether it's a trade school.
We are doing something and that's what I mean by really getting at the whole child. We
have some children that don't want to go to college; they don't feel like they want to go.
They maybe just can't. But we are going to do something with them, we are going to find
something to motivate, something that is going to give them a step and the resource to be
successful.

School personnel would often share their own collegiate experiences with students to
provide wisdom or insight regarding the value of education. Sekou recalls his college-going
conversations with students

I am always about college. The children love my college stories and they are like
“remember that time.” Students remember the stories more than I do. We talk about it a
lot sometimes we have our alma maters’ fans or billboards up in our classrooms. We talk
about college-going all the time. We say, “Hey, you are going to college.” We are
always reinforcing college.
The first theme, *It Takes a Village*, described Ubuntu’s overall approach to supporting and transmitting a college preparatory ethos. Ubuntu implemented policies and practices designed to develop and support a college-going culture that required students to fully participate in college preparatory activities. School personnel believed that all students were capable of becoming college ready and attending college despite their academic or marginalized backgrounds. Ubuntu personnel embraced students’ social and cultural backgrounds in developing and supporting the school’s college preparatory ethos.

*It Takes a Village* proverb highlights the variety and extent of involvement of the entire Ubuntu community in the development and support of the school’s college-going culture. The school facilitated focused collaboration between the students’ families, school personnel, community, and peers to develop students’ college readiness. Ubuntu offered precollege workshops to both students and families, to encourage both parties to develop cultural capital. Students developed college-going aspirations because all school constituents supported students’ academic journey at Ubuntu.

**Challenges**

As the village worked to educate children, many school personnel acknowledged that Ubuntu encountered numerous challenges as they developed and transmitted a college preparatory ethos within their African-centered environment. The most prominent barrier or challenge to fostering a college-going culture was finances. Ubuntu’s financial challenges have resulted in the school restructuring its organization. The last challenge was the assumptions of “outsiders” about Afrocentric infused education.
Finances

Ubuntu continues to face challenges similar to other charter schools when it comes to finances. The local school district decreased the amount of funding provided to schools. As explained by Aman,

In charter schools across the board, the funding is very different than in the public schools. We get a portion of the funds for each student. A small portion of that still goes back to the public school, even though the child is not there. So already, we have to do the same job with fewer resources and fewer resources often times means less human resources. Many of us here do a whole lot.

Ubuntu continues to have to do to more with less. Chinaka described the financial deficit that Ubuntu experiences as “running on a wing and prayer. Funding and money are the biggest things because trips to those college campuses are very important. . . . We need to have money to help those activities, more college tours, more college fairs, just more traveling around.”

Habiba reaffirmed Chinaka’s feelings by noting

The cuts to the funding to Ubuntu and other schools is devastating because that really impacts all of the additional support personnel that work with young people. Also, being able to bring in different people and have activities, sending student different places. That is really important, when you are developing a college-going culture in your school.

Ubuntu has offset these obstacles by fostering more community partnerships and fundraising. Unfortunately, these approaches have not provided enough additional finances, so Ubuntu had to reduce the number of employees, letting some personnel go. Chinaka described the school restructuring:
Right now that is not as strong because the school district is in crisis. Because of that crisis they have stopped paying all of the money that they are supposed to Ubuntu. And so in doing that right now, everybody all the charter schools in the city are like frozen in time to see what the new superintendent going to do. What is happening? In doing that I had cut a lot of people so just sat up the last couple days and we redid our organizational chart for now until June because we don't have all the people we need to have.

Citywide all schools are struggling because of money. Ubuntu does suffer from personnel turnover because personnel receive competitive packages at other schools. Chinaka expressed, “If Ubuntu loses good people it is because they cannot pay them what the district does and the district takes them right out from under Ubuntu.” The majority of personnel continue to remain dedicated to the school’s philosophy and have taken on additional responsibilities, despite not receiving additional compensation.

**Afrocentric Infusion**

A few personnel expressed the challenge of infusing Afrocentricity into the precollege curriculum while meeting the state academic standard requirements and preparing students for high stakes testing. One person mentioned the challenge of changing individuals’ assumptions or beliefs about Ubuntu. Lema mentioned,

The Negro minded people would say, “Why ya’ll teaching that Black stuff? Ya'll teaching that hate stuff and that.” But we not, we doing the same thing any ethnic group would do. It’s to teach the truth about yourself, your history, your heritage, so you can make a contribution to the [following] generations. But when we do it, we get all kinds of you know, we get talked about. So our struggle is to balance everything out.

Sekou reaffirmed Lema’s view by mentioning that
Some of the challenges that we have sometimes are people’s ideas or assumptions about Ubuntu . . . Sometimes if outsiders are not HBCUs, sometimes they write us off because they are like, “they are too militant and things like that.”

Ubuntu attempts to let their academic achievements speak for themselves, which should change individuals’ perceptions.

**Alternative Educational Routes**

One participant mentioned that there were a few cases where students said they did not desire to pursue postsecondary education and would rather enter the workforce. Some school personnel expressed the understanding that postsecondary education may not be the best option for every student. Kaaria explained, “some children they say ‘I do not want to go to college,’ we try to find alternatives or trade school.” Personnel acknowledged that some students may desire to enter directly into the workforce or would rather obtain vocational training in high school. In addition, personnel worked to develop alternative plans for some students that did not include postsecondary education because they understood that postsecondary education might not be for everyone and understood the importance of providing students with alternative options to foster their individual success. Sekou stated, “If you don’t want to go to college, there are other options that you can do. But you are going on to do something when you leave Ubuntu.” Most of the school personnel expressed the desire for every student to go to college, but acknowledged that college was not the only path to success. One person expressed that he wanted students to at least try postsecondary education and then decide if it was for them.

Ubuntu continues to face a reduction in finances, reorganization of school personnel, challenge of infusing Afrocentrism into a packed curriculum, and alternative educational routes. School personnel continue to be dedicated to the school’s mission despite the reductions in
finances and employees. Ubuntu personnel continue to strive to overcome these barriers because they are committed to developing and supporting students’ college-going aspirations.

Summary

This chapter highlighted personnel’s perspectives and aspects of the African-centered education program that enhanced Ubuntu’s college-going culture. The findings for this African-centered school studied in this research suggested that college-going culture was successful when all school constituents were involved, included key college-going aspects, and centered on meeting student’s needs. In the next and final chapter, I summarize the research and provide conclusions based on findings. Implications for practices and recommendations for future study are also included in this section.
CHAPTER VI. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of my study was to understand how African-centered charter high school personnel developed students’ college-going aspirations. I described the role of African-centered school personnel in the transmission and support of a college-preparatory ethos. Their perspectives emphasized the strategies and approaches they believed worked best for their students that included the integration of the college-going and African-centered cultures. Additionally, I examined how the school’s mission, physical setting, governance, values, and strategies utilized by African-centered personnel transmitted and supported a college-preparatory ethos. The research findings presented in Chapter 5 described a variety of college-going strategies co-existing with the school’s African centered environment that simultaneously resulted in successful college-preparatory conditions.

This last chapter of the study has four sections. In the first section, I provide an overview of the study. Next, I discuss the study’s findings and conclusions. I provide recommendations for practice in the third section. Finally, in the last section I address some recommendations for future research.

In this qualitative case study, I explored how African-centered charter school personnel supported and transmitted a college-preparatory ethos. The site selected for this study was Ubuntu Charter High School. Ubuntu’s primary goal was to provide students with an African-centered education as well as simultaneously prepare them for postsecondary education curriculum. I sought to understand how school personnel developed and supported students’ college-going aspirations as well as what impact the school’s culture, physical setting, mission, governance, and values influenced the college-preparatory ethos. The study relied on active inquiry which encompassed 13 semi-structured interviews with school personnel, document
analysis and observations of professional development workshops and African-centered practices (i.e., affirmation), while the presentation of findings were guided by McClafferty’s et al. (2002) Nine Principles of a College-going Culture Model. This study also accounted for how social and cultural capital influenced the relationship between the African-centered and college-going cultures at Ubuntu.

Through the dialogues, the participants revealed that a college-preparatory ethos was as a result of all the school constituents investing in Ubuntu’s educational philosophy. Ubuntu exemplified the African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” in its academic environment. The students’ families and personnel’s understand their role of providing students with the resources and support to be successful. Ubuntu’s personnel discussed how an African-centered environment developed and supported a college-going culture. School personnel shared their perspectives on how they developed and supported students’ college-going behaviors, which include encouraging students’ self-discovery and practicing the principles of Ma’at and Nguzo Saba. I explained postsecondary ethos with McClafferty et al.’s (2002) college-going culture framework to understand how Ubuntu’s culture influenced college access and success. Technology was a crucial aspect of Ubuntu’s college-going culture and infused into the majority of corresponding elements.

The findings and conclusions of this study are profound and offer valuable insights in how we understand and perceive college-going cultures within an African centered environment. Previous college-choice research (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Schmit, 1991) indicated that students develop college-going aspirations in high school. The majority of school personnel interviewed in this study expressed the need to develop and support students’ college-going aspirations through daily interactions and a post-secondary focused
curriculum. Academic preparation, social support, and access to information are strong predictors of college attendance and completion for racial/ethnic minority and low-income students (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). The school in this study provided examples of best practices and strategies that supported and transmitted a college-preparatory ethos.

In chapter 5, I identified some key elements of a college-preparatory ethos. Those elements included an orthogonal subculture, a collaborative and supportive college-going culture, and student-centered environment. I utilized the McClafferty et al.’s (2002) Nine Principles of a College-going Culture model to identify key elements present in Ubuntu’s college-going culture, but the explorative quality of qualitative research permitted room for both new and expected themes as well as the development of an additional research question. As such, this study provides new insight about the role of technology in the support and transmission of a college-preparatory ethos that may prove a useful addition to the literature on college-going cultures, college-choice, and pre-college experiences. Lastly, it is important to note that McClafferty et al.’s (2002) model only highlighted faculty or teachers’ involvement with the development and sustainment of a college-going culture. My study included teachers and administrators. Ubuntu believed that all school personnel played an active role in developing and fostering students’ college-going aspirations. Both types of participants equally talked about their roles in developing and supporting Ubuntu’s college preparatory ethos.

**College-going Culture**

Ubuntu’s college-going culture aligned with Corwin and Tierney’s (2007) five elements regarding college readiness: 1) academic momentum, 2) an understanding of how college plans develop, 3) a clear mission statement, 4) comprehensive college services, and 5) coordinated
systemic college report. Ubuntu’s academic momentum was present in the offering of challenging college preparatory courses. The second element highlighted how school personnel articulated to students their postsecondary education attendance expectation. Ubuntu personnel shared and developed this expectation with students as soon as they began the ninth grade. School personnel expected students to participate in pre-college activities that helped students develop or strengthen their college readiness though appropriate coursework, required admission exams, and college choice activities (i.e., college visits, college fairs).

Ubuntu’s clear mission statement articulated the school’s postsecondary expectation and overall student academic success. The school’s mission statement served as the foundation of its college-going culture by developing and reflecting what the Ubuntu hoped to accomplish for its students (Deal & Peterson, 2009). Most Ubuntu personnel provided comprehensive college services for students to guide, prepare, and provide students with college related information and resources. The school college counselor facilitated the majority of comprehensive college services and encouraged school personnel to support these endeavors. Ubuntu fulfilled the last element by effectively engaging all stakeholders in developing and achieving college goals.

**College Choice**

Ubuntu’s college-going culture encompassed Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage model of college choice that included predisposition, search, and choice. Ubuntu college-going culture predisposed students to develop behaviors and attitudes for postsecondary education. School personnel would incorporate college preparation activities into course assignments, and have informal conversations about college. Hossler and Gallagher’s second stage, search, entailed students acquiring college-related information. School personnel would share information about choosing courses to take for college admission, preparing and taking college
entrance exams, and understanding college financial aid. Students were required to apply to a minimum number of schools and scholarships as part of the school graduation requirement. Ubuntu enacted the last stage, choice, by congratulating and acknowledging students’ postsecondary institution selection within the commencement program.

Ubuntu’s JAAMA program facilitated all three stages of Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) college choice model. The JAAMA program motivated students and encouraged them to think about the possibility of postsecondary education attendance. Many of Ubuntu students participated in the JAAMA program because of the opportunity to receive additional academic support and college-related information (i.e., participates in college tours, attend admission fairs).

Subcultures

Ubuntu operated under two types of cultures: 1) the college-going culture that the personnel transmitted and supported and 2) an African-centered culture that exposed students to the rich history, culture, and traditions of the motherland Africa. In describing a college-going culture within an African-centered environment, participants expressed the need for personnel to support students’ college-going aspirations due to the potential impact of advancing not only the individual but also the African American community as a whole. Education was not for the sole purpose of attaining good grades and later a good job, but rather it included the ability to develop skills to contribute to the African American community.
Ubuntu’s college-going and African-centered cultures supported and enhanced each other (see Figure 3 above). Ubuntu’s two subcultures overlapped because their corresponding values reinforced each other and operated symbiotically. The African-centered culture was an “orthogonal subculture” because school personnel “simultaneously accepted the core values of the dominant culture and a separate, unconflicting set of values” particular to the Ubuntu environment (Martin & Siehl, 1983, p. 54). Ubuntu’s orthogonal subculture had distinct characteristics and values that did not conflict with the school’s college-going culture. Ubuntu’s African-centered culture shared some of the same values of the college-going culture, but also simultaneously adhered to others that were unique. Ubuntu’s African-centered culture did not
jeopardize the cohesiveness of the overarching college-going culture. For example, Ubuntu personnel infused Nguzo Saba and Ma’at principles into the school’s postsecondary focused curriculum, ethos, and daily interactions. The infusion of these two sub-cultures at Ubuntu supported students’ overall academic success without jeopardizing either of the culture’s distinctive values.

Additionally, the African-centered culture was an “enhancing subculture” that was consistent with and supportive of the dominant college-going culture. Ubuntu’s African-centered culture was very much in harmony with the college-going culture because both cultures emphasized the need to educate students to become successful. The findings from the study revealed a synergy between the college-going culture and African-centered subculture. Many participants mentioned utilizing Nguzo Saba and Ma’at principles to develop and support the school’s college-going culture. Ubuntu’s two sub-cultures embraced students’ social and cultural backgrounds while assisting students’ development of college-going behaviors. Personnel and family involvement, two college-going culture principles in McClafferty et al.’s model (2002), overlapped with Ubuntu’s African-centered emphasis on “It takes a village to educate a child.” Ubuntu wanted all school constituents to be active agents developing and supporting students’ college-going behaviors. African-centered education emphasizes the importance of instilling students with knowledge, which aligns with McClafferty’s et al.’s (2002) principles of information and resources and testing and curriculum. Ubuntu’s academic accomplishments were significant because they were embedded within the African value system while simultaneously infused into the school’s college-going culture.

Although participants talked very little about the challenges of simultaneously implementing a postsecondary focus and African-centered curriculum, it seemed the personnel
were committed to incorporating both unique aspects. Ubuntu’s African-centered college-going culture enabled students “to affirm their culture en route to acquiring the cultural capital necessary to succeed in college” (Tierney & Jun, 2001, p. 210). It was common for personnel to assign schoolwork that encompassed both elements. Personnel emphasized the importance of providing students with a culturally relevant education while simultaneously preparing them for postsecondary education.

**Culturally Relevant Education**

Ubuntu personnel supported cultural integrity by facilitating programs and teaching strategies that incorporated a “students’ racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities” (Tierney & Jun, 2001, p. 210). Personnel did not want students to view their racial/ethnic background as a deficit or disadvantage, but as a catalyst for academic success. School personnel understood that students’ perception of race shaped their success in education and would purposely facilitate classroom dynamics and schooling methods designed to view racial/ethnic minorities as positive contributors to humankind. School personnel would emphasize to students that many of the first scientists and mathematicians were African. They wanted students to understand that it was in their DNA to be successful. Ubuntu personnel wanted to validate and center the experiences of Africans/African Americans in education. They wanted students’ cultures to nurture and empower them to desire to be academically successful.

School personnel utilized the African-centered curriculum as a channel to educate students on the importance of race in education, as well as to help students to understand how the African/African American race influenced their behavior and overall school functions. Ubuntu’s cultural integrity framework recognized the cultural groundwork of the personal, social, and
institutional factors that interact to develop and support students’ college access and success (Rueda, 2005).

Ubuntu personnel emphasized the importance of establishing a multicultural, college-going identity that fostered “confidence and skills to negotiate college without sacrificing one’s own identity and connections with one’s home community” (Oakes et al., 2002, p. 108). Ubuntu personnel developed students’ multicultural, college-going identity by integrating students’ multiple worlds while fostering their supporting their identity development and college-going behaviors. A multicultural, college-going identity integrates students’ multiple worlds while supporting their identity development and college-going behaviors. School personnel developed programs and practices that incorporated students’ diverse backgrounds into academic and social activities (Tierney, Colyar, & Corwin, 2003). The findings of this study implied that participants believed that the African-centered education and college preparation worked together to support student success and academic achievement.

**Teamwork Makes the Dream Work**

The research in my literature review supported the notion that successful college-going cultures exist when school constituents invest in a college preparatory mission and have adequate resources to implement a college-going culture. Ubuntu enacted the Deal and Peterson’s (2009) six cultural elements of school success: 1) a shared sense of purpose, 2) teacher involvement in decision-making, 3) collaborative work around instruction, 4) norms of improvement, 5) professional learning by staff, and 6) a sense of joint responsibility for student learning. Deal and Peterson’s six elements describe the key components of school success.

The majority of school constituents, family, community, personnel, and alumni had a common sense of purpose, preparing Ubuntu students for postsecondary education. Everyone
had the same mindset about the importance of developing and encouraging students’ college-going aspirations. One participant in my study described the personnel’s shared sense of purpose as “teamwork makes the dream work.” School personnel worked together to develop and implement college-going strategies to achieve the dream of postsecondary success for all Ubuntu graduates.

This shared purpose included having school personnel, administrators, and teachers involved throughout the decision-making process at the school. The school’s collaborative college-going approach entailed the following: the school’s mission and vision was enacted in all school literature, school personnel were active agents in the school’s college-going culture, and students had access to the school’s college preparation resources. The school leadership was committed to building and sustaining a college-going culture (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Ubuntu’s teamwork approach helped school personnel develop approaches and strategies to support students’ college-going aspirations.

School personnel were encouraged to develop or strengthen existing strategies or practices to foster students’ academic success. Ubuntu personnel welcomed innovative ideas to improve Ubuntu’s academic environment. Ubuntu understood the importance of providing professional development opportunities throughout the year for their staff. The school wanted staff to be aware of new state academic standards and teaching approaches (i.e., technology, learning styles).

Ubuntu personnel believed they shared a joint responsibility for student learning. They understood their role of giving students what they needed to be successful at Ubuntu as well as providing students with the resources to become college-ready (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Participants consistently described the school’s collaborative communication and
culture that supported the community’s investment in postsecondary education. Ubuntu’s community supported the college readiness efforts of the school, and provided additional resources for the students (i.e., scholarships and internship sites). The campus-wide commitment to supporting and transmitting a college-preparatory ethos was essential for the development and sustainability of a college-going culture.

School personnel and parents became partners in preparing students for postsecondary education (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Interpersonal relationships between students, personnel, and family members provided a collaborative network invested in the students’ overall academic success and college-going aspirations. Ubuntu understood the importance of engaging parents in the students’ college preparation because of the potential positive impact on students’ college attendance and completion (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Everyone was encouraged to become active participants in the school’s college-going culture by being positive role models and mentors for students. Personnel served as models for what it was like to be an educated person; they wanted students to believe that one day they would become educated people who could make positive contributes to their community and larger society. Personnel’s relationships with students greatly influenced students’ transition into postsecondary education.

The school utilized in this study developed and supported a student-centered environment that sought to meet the needs of the students by creating a culture in which school personnel, parents, and communities formed partnerships for the benefit of students (Drake, 2000). School personnel believed that all students were capable of attending some form of postsecondary education regardless of their academic ability. School personnel had high postsecondary
expectations of their students and provided the students with the necessary social and cultural capital.

**Cultural and Social Capital**

Personnel in this study mentioned the importance of giving students what they needed to become college-ready and develop college-going aspirations. Ubuntu personnel valued students’ college-going aspirations but also understood the importance of giving the students the resources to foster academic success. School personnel recognized that the majority of their students began their academic career at Ubuntu with a deficit of cultural and social capital. They believed it was their responsibility to equip their students with the social and cultural capital needed to attend and succeed in postsecondary education. Ubuntu personnel supported students’ development and attainment of the cultural capital or credentials needed for postsecondary admission. Additionally, school personnel assisted students and families in the development of students’ postsecondary goals, values, and efforts.

Ubuntu personnel provided students with the social and academic support networks or social capital needed to help underrepresented students with the college transition. School personnel supported students’ social capital development by providing students with the access to college preparatory resources within the students’ social network. Ubuntu personnel equipped students with social capital to allow them to make informed decisions about postsecondary attendance (Hossler et al., 1999). Social capital at Ubuntu included personnel facilitating and support students’ pre-college preparation and postsecondary enrollment expectation. Ubuntu personnel had consistent and high expectations of all students pursuing some form of postsecondary education after high school graduation through reinforcing the norms of academic excellence and college preparation (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009).
As reported by those I interviewed, Ubuntu students acquired social capital through their interactions with school personnel and the formation of networks. School personnel served as institutional agents, who provided students with the academic and social support by encouraging students’ academic achievement and college-going behaviors. Personnel provided academic support by engaging students in formal and informal strategies that built, strengthened, and promoted students’ college preparation knowledge through deliberate activities, structures, policies, and expectations (Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, & Coles, 2009). School personnel consciously provided social support that fostered and strengthened “social networks, school connectedness, self-confidence, and academic motivation” through intentional activities, graduation requirements, school behaviors, and expectations (Savitz-Romer, Jager-Hyman, & Coles, 2009, p.6).

Personnel’s transmission of social capital to students positively correlated with the school’s high graduation and college enrollment rates, further supporting Perna and Titus’s (2005) finding that the likelihood of enrolling postsecondary education after high school related to the quantity of resources accessed by students through social networks at the school. School personnel developed meaningful and positive relationships with students to assist them in developing and attaining goals for postsecondary education that increased the likelihood of students’ college attendance and academic success. Ubuntu personnel helped promote college-going as a viable postsecondary option and shared college preparation and college choice information through their relationships with students (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). The personnel relationships with students encouraged student academic development that positively correlated to students’ college-going aspirations and pursuit of postsecondary education (Coleman 1988; Hossler et al., 1989). Personnel believed that their interactions encouraged...
student to achieve academically, consider postsecondary education and benefit from the consistent emotional support throughout the college preparation process.

Ubuntu personnel desired for students to be successful after graduating from Ubuntu, whether it was enrolling directly into postsecondary education or going directly into the workforce. Additionally, Ubuntu’s cultural postsecondary environment created and perpetuated prestige (Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan, & Shaun, 1990) because of the school’s high graduation rates and postsecondary enrollment. This positive reputation was primarily due to the school’s rigorous college preparation and high academic achievement expectations for all students. School personnel provided students with the academic resources, supports, and networks to be successful at Ubuntu and in the future.

Technology

The original intent of the study was to understand how personnel at an African-centered charter school develop and support a college-preparatory ethos. I later determined that technology was an essential component of the college-going culture. Ubuntu integrated technology aspects into the various college-going principles identified by the McClafferty et al. (2002), Nine Principles of a College-Going Culture Model. The integration of technology into the school’s postsecondary-focused curriculum provided opportunities for students develop the essential skills to become college ready. Personnel would develop assignments that entailed students conducting research via the internet, submitting assignments online, participating in online standardized test preparation, and utilizing various computer programs (Word, Publisher, PowerPoint, or FrontPage) to complete assignments. Personnel understood the value of helping students refine the technological skills they needed to be successful in postsecondary education.
**Recommendations for Practice**

This investigation has provided insight into interventions that African-centered charter school personnel utilize to support and transmit a college-preparatory ethos. The findings provide insight into ways school personnel can adapt or revise the school’s policies and practices to ensure that the school develops and supports students’ college-going aspirations. I offer the following recommendations for schools with a postsecondary focus as ways to foster and support a college-preparatory ethos.

Schools should infuse a college-preparatory ethos into the school’s administration, governance, curriculum, practice, and policies. The school’s mission and vision should articulate the postsecondary education focus. School personnel have the responsibility to provide students with the coursework that gives them college preparatory skills. Providing students with the courses to enhance their access to and success in postsecondary education is crucial.

College-going cultures exist in schools where all school constituents are committed to supporting and facilitating a college preparatory ethos. An active partnership model between all constituents (i.e., school administration, teachers, students, and family) supports students’ college preparation. Frequent communication between all constituents is essential to fostering and supporting students’ college-going aspirations. Participants in this study said that many parents lacked “college knowledge” about the application and financial aid process. Students’ families must be encouraged to become active participants in their students’ college-going aspirations. Frequent communication with the family of the students can develop and support the home/school connection that further supports students’ overall college-going aspirations. This additional support for families is crucial especially if parents or caregivers did not attend postsecondary education. Choy (2001) emphasized that when parents or caregivers of first-
generation students become involved with the secondary school, their students are more likely to pursue postsecondary education.

Personnel should expect students to achieve academically and pursue postsecondary education after high school. Schools should have high expectations for their students’ postsecondary enrollment; it is not sufficient just to have students visualize or desire to pursue postsecondary studies. Rather, is crucial that schools provide the resources and networks that will assist them in developing college-going aspirations and becoming college ready.

Personnel believed that students benefited from having meaningful and positive relationships that supported students’ college-going behaviors. They wanted students to develop the confidence, determination, resilience, and knowledge of college needed to access postsecondary education. These relationships helped students gain access to the social and cultural capital necessary to develop and maintain their college-going aspirations. School personnel should encourage students to become college-ready and pursue postsecondary education.

School environment should articulate a clear and consistent college-going message. The placement of college signs, banners, or brochures support this effort. Personnel should share collegiate stories and experiences with students to provide additional support. Schools should host an annual college fair and invite a variety of postsecondary institutions to present information about their colleges to students. Lastly, schools could facilitate a college awareness week that includes a variety of postsecondary focused events (i.e., college fair, college tour, future school/alumni pride day, or SAT/ACT preparation). School best articulate clear and consistent college-going messages when they allocate adequate resources to support the college-
preparatory ethos. These resources include professional development for school personnel and pre-college workshops focusing on financial planning, admissions, and student success.

College-going cultures work best when school’s academic environment integrates a comprehensive counseling approach. The school counselor serves as an important connection in providing students and personnel with information about postsecondary education, the college application process, scholarship information, and financial aid information. It is crucial that the school counselor have a system in place to disseminate the information to all interested parties including students, personnel, families, and the community. Typically, school counselors accomplished this through grade assemblies, presentations at parent meetings, newsletters, bulletin boards, school correspondence, and personnel professional development sessions.

Schools that desire to develop a college-going culture generally provide students with a postsecondary-focused curriculum. Personnel can integrate various postsecondary admission requirements into coursework. For example, a math teacher may have students research college costs and/or the financial aid process, whereas an English teacher may have students write their college admission essays. Additionally, personnel can develop assignments that prepare students for college-level courses.

Schools should integrate technology into its college-going culture. Personnel may provide opportunities for students to conduct postsecondary institution research via the internet, submit assignments online, and communicate with students via email. These efforts will allow students to develop the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education.

College-going cultures are most successful when all school constituents support the school’s college preparatory mission and vision, as well as when the school has sufficient and adequate resources to facilitate and support college-going cultures. School personnel should
understand and facilitate the school’s postsecondary mission and vision. Schools must provide students with the resources and information to develop college-going aspirations. Additionally, school personnel should develop and foster meaningful relationships with students and families to support students’ college-going aspirations. These relationships can empower families to be an active participant in their student’s college-going process. Schools must educate families about the importance of postsecondary education as well as provide additional information to inform families about college preparation and transition.

What this research shows is that a college-preparatory ethos works best when all school constituents understand, support, and are committed to its purpose. School personnel, students, family, and the community participated in the school’s college-going culture, which positively influenced its overall success.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

I completed research on one ethnically centered charter’s schools approach to developing and supporting students’ college-going aspirations. African-centered education encompasses many different aspects; my study focused on how personnel at the school developed and supported a college preparatory ethos. This study forces us to reconsider the role of ethno-centered education and college-going cultures. There are many opportunities to further research in African-centered or even ethno-centered education. This study has provided additional insight to understand how one African-centered charter school developed and supported a college-preparatory ethos.

This research study’s context was an urban public charter high school. The findings from this study may be transferable to other ethnocentric or college preparatory focused schools. Further research might include the perspectives of participants in other types of institutions (i.e.,
African-centered traditional public high school, African-centered middle school). This would provide a broader view of the participants in other secondary schools. Additional research might also include the perspectives of participants in other ethno-centered schools, including Latino-centered, Hawaiian-centered, or other ethnic-specific cultures.

The voices missing in this study were those of the students who participated in a college-going culture at an African-centered charter high school. A future study could explore student perspectives of school personnel’s intervention efforts to develop and support a college preparatory ethos. A possible question is, “How do students understand or perceive their school’s development and transmission of a college preparatory ethos?” A similar study could address students’ holistic development from both the personnel and student perspective.

Another voice missing in this study was that of the parents. The school utilized in this study employed a parent ombudsperson to serve as a school liaison with parents about school updates, information, and polices. A few participants expressed the need to help parents develop the college knowledge needed to help and support their students college-going behaviors. A future study could explore how parents or caregivers prepare and support their students’ college-going aspirations. Future research questions could include, “What are the effects of parental involvement and support as they relate to students’ college-going aspirations?” “Why do parents choose to enroll their students at a charter school that focuses on postsecondary education preparation?” and “What value do they see in their students’ attendance at the school?”

Another study could examine how the school’s governance and administration model influenced the school’s college-going culture and students’ academic success. The governance and administration model at this school was unique and may not be generalizable to other academic environments. An extension of this future study may consider how school
characteristics (i.e., mission, organizational structure, environment, etc.) develop college-going cultures. The school in this study implemented an African-centered postsecondary-focused curriculum. Additionally, a similar study could examine how school resources support or hinder a college preparatory ethos. Many schools throughout the nation continue to experience a decrease in funding and employee turnover. Schools continued to face the challenge of doing more with less financial support. A possible research question is, “How do charter schools leverage their resources to provide and support a college-preparatory ethos?”

A few participants in this study expressed the challenge of developing alternative educational routes for students who may be uninterested in pursuing postsecondary studies. One participant in this study said that a student directly informed school personnel that he was uninterested in attending postsecondary education and would rather enter the workforce after high school. The personnel described how this student became successful and eventually moved up the ranks in his company. A future study could explore how school personnel implement approaches that support students being successful without attending postsecondary education. A potential research question is, “How does a postsecondary education-focused school provide resources or support for students who may choose not to attend postsecondary education?”

Another study could explore how students describe the process of developing other-than-college-going aspirations.

Additional research can examine the long-term and short-term effects of attending an African-centered postsecondary-focused school on students’ matriculation and persistence in college. During the interviews for this study, a few participants expressed interest in investigating if Ubuntu graduates persisted in and graduated from postsecondary education. They also mentioned the desire to track alumni. A future study could investigate if Ubuntu
students successfully matriculated to college and explore how the graduates perceived their academic college preparation and its impact on their college transition and success. Lastly, a future study could examine the role of technology in developing and supporting a college-going culture. Many participants mentioned that students and families utilized technology to communicate with school personnel, receive additional academic support, and prepare for college.

Most studies on charter schools have been quantitative and have concentrated on issues of student performance and achievement. My main objective was to understand how personnel at an African-centered charter school developed and transmitted a college preparatory ethos. The results highlighted how Ubuntu developed and supported students’ college-going aspirations, while also providing insight about challenges or barriers to implementing a college-going culture within an African-centered environment.

**Giving Back to Ubuntu**

Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) highlighted the importance of the qualitative researcher “giving back” to the community in which the research is conducted (p. 124). Ubuntu means, “I am because we are.” Ubuntu supported and embraced me conducting research with the school. Ubuntu personnel enacted the African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” by becoming invested in my education just as they are with their own students. School personnel understood the importance of helping individuals be successful. As soon as I entered the school’s environment, I became a member of the Ubuntu community. The school provided the connections, resources, and office space needed to conduct this case study. The office space provided a safe space to conduct and transcribe interviews. School personnel volunteered to be participants in this study at their own free will.
Qualitative research by its very nature is intrusive with the interviewing and observing of the participants. Thus, it is important that I share the knowledge and findings gained from my study with the Ubuntu community. I will present the school with a written summary detailing findings, discussion, and recommendations. In addition, I will offer to present my findings to the school personnel in person. I hope that the information and insights gained from this study can assist school personnel as they continue to support and transmit a college-preparatory ethos.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation aptly began with the African proverb, “It takes an entire village to educate a child” to describe how African-centered charter high school personnel supported and transmitted a college-preparatory ethos. This study revealed how the Ubuntu community facilitated a college-going culture within their African-centered environment that gave students what they needed to become academically successful and develop college-going aspirations. This study revealed how both cultures supported and transmitted a college-preparatory ethos through a collaborative investment in students’ academic success.

Students’ academic achievement and high educational aspirations were encouraged by personnel, family, and the community. Personnel believed students benefited at Ubuntu because of their access to a college preparatory curriculum and graduation requirements that aimed to make students college-ready. College-going behaviors were a key component of the school’s culture and became illustrated through Ubuntu’s practices and interactions. Ubuntu’s college preparatory ethos was successful because the school prioritized and integrated it into the school’s infrastructure. All activities at the school led back to the college-going. Ubuntu’s academic success is due to the constituents’ investment in the school’s mission, vision, and educational
philosophy focusing on students’ academic success. Personnel provided the necessary academic resources and support to foster student success.
REFERENCES


Available http://epa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n8/.


*Technos: Quarterly for Education & Technology, 8*(3), 2-27.


doi:10.1177/0021934704273149


APPENDIX A. THE BASIC COMPONENTS OF THE AFRICAN-CENTERED PEDAGOGY

(Murrell, 2003, p. 17)
APPENDIX B. LETTER TO CHARTER SCHOOL CEO

Dear CEO,

My name is Christina Wright Fields and I am currently a third-year doctoral student in the Higher Education Administration doctoral program at Bowling Green State University. My specialization within my program is on marginalized populations and academic success with my overall research interest involving academic preparation and college transition of marginalized populations. Currently, I am beginning the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies and am interested in understanding how African-centered charter schools prepare students for postsecondary education.

I decided that I wanted to explore a Northeastern United States charter schools because I am a native of this region. I knew I wanted to look at urban schools because I grew up in an urban environment and I always knew I wanted to be able to give back to communities that encouraged and supported college preparation and transition. My past research has allowed me to understand how primary and secondary education greatly influences access to higher education that then facilitates an individual’s upward mobility. As I began to conduct my literature review, I realized that there is limited research on how African-centered school personnel facilitate the development of students’ college-going aspirations.

I am writing to request your permission to use you (the CEO) and some of your personnel in my qualitative research. The purpose of my study is to examine how African-centered charter high school personnel develop students’ college-going aspirations. This study also will examine how the school’s mission, physical setting, governance, values, and strategies utilized by African-centered personnel transmit and support a college-preparatory ethos.
I selected your school for my study because I initially learned of your institution, Ubuntu Charter High School, through a professor at [Northeastern State] University. Additionally, I explored the Office of Charter, Partnership, and New Schools’ website and the state’s Department of Education Charter school website. After reviewing the information (i.e., annual report summary) available on these two websites, I reviewed your school’s website to learn more about its history, college preparation, and parental involvement. I was impressed to learn that 100% of your students graduate on time and are accepted into college.

Because my doctoral program is Higher Education Administration, I would be interested in understanding how your school personnel develop students’ college going aspirations through their dialogues and interactions with students. Ubuntu provides a great curriculum that involves all the key constituents: students, personnel, family, and community and is a great example of an African-centered charter school.

I chose case study as my methodology because of the contextual nature of my study. I plan to collect data a variety of ways, which include interviews, document analysis, and observations. I would like to conduct interview with school personnel (i.e., CEO, principal, teachers, custodians, etc.) to understand how they develop and support students’ college going aspirations. Students will not be participants in my study because of my study’s focus on personnel perspectives. Also, I desire to do document analysis on both internal and external documents. The internal documents may include memos or other communications that are circulated inside the organization, brochures, meeting minutes, annual report, strategic plan, mission statement, educational philosophy, and pedagogical approaches. These documents will provide potential insight about governance structure guiding principles, and organizational values. The external communications will consist of materials produced for public consumption.
(i.e., letters to parents, curriculum materials, etc.). Lastly, I would also like to conduct observation that could include classrooms, college preparation workshops, or school meetings, etc.

The data collected will be held in the strictest confidence and will only be available to my dissertation chair and myself. All information will remain confidential. The names of the school and participants will not be included in the dissertation. Participation is completely voluntary and is not expected to affect your school in any way. You may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice even after you agree to participate in this study.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my current dissertation research interests and your school. I can be reached via email [contact information] or by phone [contact information].

Lastly, please let me know if you would desire a copy of my resume to review.

Thanks for your time and I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Christina Wright Fields
APPENDIX C. LETTER TO SCHOOL PERSONNEL

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University and in the dissertation research phase of my studies. My research project involves examining how African-centered charter high school personnel develop and support students’ college-going aspirations. My intention is to interview members of the school personnel. A few observations are also planned (i.e., cultural activities, college career center, and college workshops).

The data collected from the interview and observations will be held in the strictest confidence and will only be available to my dissertation chair and myself. The name of the school will not be included in the dissertation. Participation is completely voluntary and will not affect your school in any way. You may withdraw from this study at any time without prejudice after you consent to participate in this study. Should you choose to participate in this study, please respond back to me confirming your participation. If there are any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at the number or email listed below:

Sincerely,

Christina Wright Fields
APPENDIX D. INFORMED CONSENT

Participant Consent Form

Title of Project: A Case Study Exploring an Urban African-centered Charter School Personnel’s Transmission and Support of College-preparatory Ethos

Principal Investigator(s): Christina Wright Fields, Higher Education Administration doctoral student at Bowling Green State University and Dr. Ellen Bronko, advisor.

You are invited to participate in a research study on African-centered charter school personnel’s development of college-going aspirations. For the completion of my doctorate in the Higher Education Administration program at Bowling Green State University, I am conducting a research study examining how African-centered charter high school personnel develop students’ college-going aspirations.

Purpose
The study will explore the following question: How do the personnel at an African-centered charter school try to influence the students’ college-going aspirations? By conducting this research, I desire to gain a better understanding of how personnel at an African-centered charter school develop and support students’ college-going aspirations.

Nature and Procedure
This is a qualitative study that will include interviewing and observing participants. I hope to identify and interview about ten participants from various departments at the school. I estimate that your participation will take approximately two to three hours. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. I would also like to observe meetings or workshops in which you are discussing college-going activities. Additionally, any documents you could provide that would give insight into the schools’ college-going environment would be helpful. As follow-up, I will provide you with any written records of our conversation to verify what I have described is an accurate representation of our conversation. You will have the opportunity to read and revise your responses. Additionally, as I analyze the interview for themes, I will request your feedback.

Benefits/Risks to Participant
This study involves minimal risk; that is, no risk beyond those encountered in the normal course of everyday life. If you are concerned about any questions you may choose to not answer them; refusing to answer any questions will not result in negative consequences. You also will have the chance to review the transcript of your interview and remove or change information you do not wish me to use.

The benefits of participation in this study are greater understanding and reflection of your experiences. The results may help to better inform the educational field as to the best practices that develop college-going cultures and the benefits of African-centered academic environments on the development and support of postsecondary opportunities for students.

In addition, you will be entered in a drawing for one of three $25.00 Target gift cards (I anticipate that ten school personnel will participate in the study). The odds of winning are about 3 in 10. After I have finished data collection, I will conduct the drawing. Winners will receive the gift card via postal mail.
Voluntary Nature of the Study/Confidentiality
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can refrain from answering any questions without penalty or explanation. You are free to withdraw consent and to discontinue participation in the project at any time. You may also stop at any time and ask me any questions you may have. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with BGSU or your employer.

I will make every effort to ensure your participation in this research is confidential, although I cannot absolutely guarantee that. Your name will never be connected to your responses; instead, a pseudonym will be utilized for identification purposes. Additionally, I will use a pseudonym for the school's name and not mention the specific location of the school.

When I compile the results of the study, I will change the name of any personally identifying information (including the names of people you mention). I am the only person who will be able to match the pseudonym to your real name. The data will be stored on a password protected computer and I will only have access to it. All tapes will remain securely in my possession. All tapes will be erased at the completion of the study.

Contacts and Questions
At this time you may ask any questions you may have regarding this study. If you have questions later, you may contact me at Christina Wright Fields, at [redacted] or Dr. Ellen Broido, my dissertation advisor, at [redacted]. Questions or concerns about institutional approval or your rights as a researcher participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or [redacted].

You will be will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent
This section is to indicate that you give your informed consent to participate in the research:

- I agree to participate in a research involving African-centered charter high school personnel development and support of students' college-going aspirations.
- The information on this form has been explained to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedure. I agree to the conditions of this study as described.
- It has been explained to me that I will receive no compensation for participating. However, I may request a copy of the study's results.
- I voluntarily consent to participate in this research investigation. I may refuse to participate in this study or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in this study without penalty.
- I am 18 years of age or older.

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

________________________________________
Name (Please Print)

________________________________________
Signature

________________________________________
Date
APPENDIX E. APPROVAL LETTER

BGSU
Bowling Green State University
Office of Research Compliance

DATE: January 2, 2013
TO: Christina Fields
FROM: Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: December 31, 2012
EXPIRATION DATE: December 12, 2013
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 15 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on December 12, 2013. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
APPENDIX F. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Pseudonym:

2. Sex/Gender:
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Prefer not to respond

3. Race/Ethnicity
   - African American/Black
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Native American/American Indian
   - White
   - Not listed
     - please specify:
     - Multiracial
   - Prefer not to respond

4. Highest level of education obtained
   - Less than high school
   - High school graduate (or G.E.D)
   - Education after high school other than 2-year or 4 year college (e.g. trade school)
   - Some college (community/junior college or some 4-year college study)
College graduate (bachelor’s degree)

More study after college bachelor’s degree

Graduate/professional degree (master’s/doctorate/law/medicine)

Don’t know

5. How long have you been employed at the charter school?

6 months to 1 year

2-5 years

6-10 years

11+ years
APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CEO (PRINCIPAL/DIRECTOR)

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer

Interviewee:

I. Greeting

a. Thank you for participating in my study about African-centered education and college-preparatory ethos.

b. The purpose of this interview is to get an understanding, from your point of view, of how African-centered school personnel develop and support students’ college-going aspirations. There are no right or wrong answers, just share your thoughts with me about the questions I ask you. I’ll ask numerous open-ended questions, as indicated in my initial invitation letter. I will use your words to develop themes and may quote you in my final report. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain confidential. I will not utilize your name in association with your quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that could link you to your words in the final report. The recordings, transcriptions, forms, and other documents will be coded and altered to protect the participants and school’s identities.

c. If I ask you any questions that you do not want to answer you do not have to, just say we can skip to another question.
d. I would like to record these interviews, which will allow me to more accurately represent our conversation. However, if you desire to say something and prefer that it is not recorded, please let me know and I will turn off the digital recorder. I would also be making memos during the course of the interview. Do I have your permission? Do you have any questions before we begin? Ok, let’s get started.

e. Review and sign two consent forms. Give one form to the participant and retain the other copy for records.

f. Start digital record and begin interview.

II. Interview Questions

a. How long have you been the CEO in this school?
   i. Why did you become a school’s CEO?
   ii. Tell me about your day—walk me through your typical day.

b. Tell me a little about the school’s mission.
   i. How do you interpret the charter school mission in your practice and student interactions?
   ii. Why was the school organized? Who were the founders?
   iii. How would you describe your vision for this school?
   iv. How is your charter school different from other public schools?
   v. Describe the students here.
   vi. Describe the personnel here.
   vii. How would you describe the school’s educational philosophy and program?

c. How do you describe college-going culture?
i. How does the personnel implement strategies of college going as expected and attainable norms?

ii. How effective is your African-centered school at meeting its goals of increasing college-going rates?

iii. What does participating in a college-going culture mean to you?

iv. What happens to graduates of your school after they matriculate in college?

v. What challenges exist to building and sustaining a college-going culture?

vi. Are students equipped to succeed in a college environment?

d. How do you support students’ “cultural integrity”?

i. Cultural integrity emphasizes programs and teaching strategies that support cultural validation by engaging students' racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities.

e. What outside networks does the school have?

i. What is the role of the local community in the school?

f. Summary Question

i. Is there anything that I have not asked you that I should have?

ii. Are there any documents you have used to support students’ college going aspirations? Would you be willing to share those with me?

g. Closing Statement

Thank you for spending time with me and sharing your perspectives. I plan to send you a copy of the interview transcript and my initial impressions of this
interview as soon as possible. You will have the opportunity to read, review, and revise your responses as you see fit.
APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PERSONNEL

Time of Interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

I. Greeting

a. Thank you for participating in my study about African-centered education and college-going aspirations.

b. Purpose: I am interested in learning about how African-centered school personnel’s development and support of students’ college-going aspirations.

c. Procedures: I’ll ask numerous open-ended questions, as indicated in my initial invitation letter. I will use your words to develop themes and may quote you in my final report. However, I assure you that your participation in this study will remain confidential. I will not utilize your name in association with your quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that could link you to your words in the final report. The recordings, transcriptions, forms, and other documents will be coded and altered to protect the participants and school’s identities.

d. I would like to record these interviews, which will allow me to more accurately represent our conversation. However, if you desire to say something and prefer that it is not recorded, please let me know and I will turn off the digital recorder. I would also be making memos during the course of the interview. Do I have your permission? Do you have any questions before we begin? Ok, let’s get started.
e. Review and sign two consent forms. Give one form to the participant and retain the other copy for records.

f. Start digital record and begin interview.

II. Interview Questions

a. Why did you become a personnel member at this school?

b. What is this school about?
   i. How do you interpret the charter school mission in your practice and student interactions?
   ii. What do I need to know to understand this school well?
   iii. How would you describe the school’s educational philosophy and program?
   iv. How would you describe the culture of the school—its history, values, traditions, assumptions, and ways?
   v. In your opinion, what makes a charter school (like this one) different from a regular public school?
      1. How is the teaching different here from teaching at other public schools?
      vi. Describe the students here.
   vii. Describe the personnel here.

c. What role does Afrocentric education play in the development of a college-going culture?
   i. How do you describe college-going culture?
ii. What do you hope your students get out of being engaged in the school’s college-going culture?

iii. How do you support students’ “cultural integrity”?

1. *Cultural integrity* emphasizes programs and teaching strategies that support cultural validation by engaging students' racial and ethnic backgrounds in a positive manner in the development of their pedagogies and learning activities.

iv. How do you create a college-going culture in the school? Examples.

v. What resources have most helped and supported you as you attempted to develop a college-going culture?

vi. What challenges or barriers exist to building and sustaining a college-going culture?

vii. In what ways do you collaborate with school colleagues to promote and support a college-going culture?

viii. Are students equipped to succeed in a college environment?

d. How do college aspirations of personnel support students’ college-going behaviors?

1. Probe—can you give some examples?

e. What outside networks does the school have?

i. What is the role of the local community in the school?

f. Summary Question

i. Is there anything that I have not asked you that I should have?
ii. Are there any documents you have used to support students’ college going aspirations? Would you be willing to share those with me?

III. Closing Statement

Thank you for spending time with me and sharing your perspectives. I plan to send you a copy of the interview transcript and my initial impressions of this interview as soon as possible. You will have the opportunity to read, review, and revise your responses as you see fit.
APPENDIX I. DOCUMENT REVIEW FORM

Date received: _______________

Document: _________________________

Name or description of document:

Event or contact, if any, with which document is associated:

Date: ________________________

Importance of document to study:

Brief summary of contents
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</table>
Items to pay attention to:

- What types of workshops were available for students (i.e., career, financial aid, SAT preparation)?
- What mentoring occurs (i.e., ongoing one-on-one, group, professional relationships)?
- What types of tutoring or academic support (i.e., Math, English, other subjects, college entrance exams)?
- What social or cultural events (i.e., cultural events, holiday celebrations, and social events)?
- What types of counseling services for students (i.e., academic advising or college student shadowing)?
- What campus visits/tours?
- What kinds of summer academic day or overnight camps?
- What types of workshops for parents or guardians (i.e., financial aid, college prep, career choices, SAT/ACT information, study skills)?
- What types of ongoing parent support (i.e., conferences, support groups, and financial aid guidance)?
APPENDIX J. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Date: ________________________________

Event/Activity of observation: ____________

Place of observation: ____________________

Time of observation: ____________________  Start_______  End_________

Number of participants: __________________

Types of participants: ___________________

Role of observer: _______________________

I. The Participants and Activity

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<tr>
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Table 5

*Themes with Corresponding Codes (n=115)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>I. It takes a village to raise a child (aggregated)</strong></td>
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<td>603</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Personnel (aggregated)</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>203</td>
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<tr>
<td>i. Personnel support students</td>
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<td>ii. Personnel as role models</td>
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<td>iii. Personnel show love and care</td>
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<td>v. Personnel reflected on own education</td>
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<td>vi. Teachers as innovators (<em>kuumba</em>)</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>vii. Personnel are committed</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>viii. CEO as a servant leader</td>
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<td>ix. Personnel as realists</td>
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<td>x. Personnel with multiple responsibilities</td>
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<td>xii. Professional development</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>xiii. Personnel reaching to students’ spirits</td>
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xiv. Staff as a resource

xv. Personnel aspirations not supporting students’ college-going

xvi. Personnel are friendly

xvii. Personnel are crazy

xviii. Personnel are certified and qualified

xix. Respect of elders

xx. Personnel concerned about students

xxi. Being consistent with students

xxii. Personnel support each other

xxiii. Staff have strong value system

b. Community (aggregated)

   i. Community

   ii. Community support

   iii. Collaboration

   iv. Advancing the local community

   v. Collective work (ujima)

   vi. Students from local community

   vii. Community is Ubuntu’s extended
family

viii. Community members as watchers 6 11

ix. Availability of additional resources outside of the school 1 1

x. Having a voice 7 17

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xii. Afrocentric Unity (umoja) — Afrocentric School Association 9 12

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iv. Parents support Ubuntu mission 6 13

v. Educating parents about college life 5 10

vi. Partnering with parents 4 10

vii. Parent mandatory events 3 3

viii. Ubuntu as welcoming 1 1

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d. Ubuntu Alum 8 17
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p. Core courses | 3 | 3 |
q. Technology’s role in Ubuntu | 6 | 15 |

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a. Foster success

b. Students below average academically

c. Special education

d. Preparing students for the future

e. Expectation for success

f. Personnel believing in the philosophy

g. Ubuntu’s mission and vision

h. Peaceful Atmosphere

i. Ubuntu built on great morals and values

j. Alternative options for students after high school

k. Promote students’ higher learning

l. Students fulfilling destinies

m. Students create educational plans

n. Value of education

o. Student centered

p. When I shine the nation shines

q. Having purpose (*nia)*

r. Lifelong learners

s. School trips

t. Schools should develop multicultural focus
u. Each one teach one 3 3
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   ii. Students accessing resources 6 10
   iii. Students becoming responsible 11 24
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<td>Student characteristics (aggregated)</td>
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<td>i. Students as awesome</td>
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<td>ii. Students are loving</td>
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<td>m.</td>
<td>iii. Students are receptive</td>
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