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## Academic Performance of Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students: A Case Study of Teachers' Perceptions

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## **Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**

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Abilene Christian University  
School of Educational Leadership

Academic Performance of Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students:  
A Case Study of Teachers' Perceptions

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Shelly Lynn Anderson

March 2023

## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation case study to my two daughters. A special thank you to both of my daughters, Margaret Lynn and Macie Shae, who have been my best cheerleaders and the green blinking light from *The Great Gatsby*. You both have always encouraged me to do my best and work hard for growth and achievement. To Dayna Cardenas, not only my teaching soulmate but the person who always reminds me that I can, thank you. I would also like to thank my students, throughout the years, who have shaped me into the educator leader I am destined to become. Finally, I must dedicate this experience to my two American Staffordshire Pit Bull Terriers, Dylan Grace and Jagger Luna. For the past four years they have been by my side through this entire journey, and I am a better person because of them. To all of the strong women in my life: thank you.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to acknowledge the wonderful faculty and staff at Abilene Christian University. I would not be where I am at today without the direction of Dr. Dianne Reed, Katrina Kelly, and Dr. Dana McMichael. A very special thank you goes to Dr. KK (Dr. Kristin O'Byrne). I entered the positive leadership concentration under her direction, and it was the best, most difficult experience that truly cultivated my own positive leadership in education. At times, I really did not know if I could make it, but with Dr. KK's compassionate guidance with high expectations, I learned to be vulnerable and to persevere at the same time. I will always pay those valuable life lessons forward, which is the only way I know how to thank her adequately. Dr. Dianne Reed, a final thought...our connection will never be final because we are family now, after this journey. All of my love, respect, and gratitude.

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## Abstract

This study determined the perspective of the teacher when researching low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic performance. Research highlights reasons and evidence for the low academic performance and the struggles the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students face. Research also recommends educational interventions that are not effective in bridging the achievement gap of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in comparison to their White counterparts. Previous research denotes that school districts desire to implement educational interventions for struggling learners; however, theories, strategies, and interventions do not translate to application within the classroom. The qualitative case study demonstrated the perspective of 20 case study participants who are current educators of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas, with data to support and connect the research. This qualitative case study provided data from a questionnaire, interviews, and data from the teacher perspective from a selected urban high school (grades 9–12) in south central Texas. Key findings from the study included students' and teachers' basic needs must be met first before learning can occur. Key findings also include the student/teacher relationship is critical to student growth and achievement. The 20 teachers perceive themselves as competent, confident, and capable educators and what they need from their district to support them in student growth and achievement is more time to plan and prepare lessons for a diverse population of students and more parental/guardian support because the academic gap is widening for the most vulnerable students of the nation. The 20 case study participants contributed their perceptions on COVID-19 and how that has compounded the challenges and barriers for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement.

*Keywords:* academic performance, educational intervention

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the U.S. National Center for Children in Poverty, one in five children or 38% of children under the age of 18 are poor (Koball et al., 2021). Latinx children comprise the largest group of poor children at 36%, with Black children three times as likely to endure deep poverty (Koball et al., 2021). Minority students, Black and Latinx, from disproportionately low-socioeconomic homes predict disadvantages and barriers for academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). Educational interventions which focus on high-leverage instruction, or the explicit precision or clarity of teaching best practices and expectations for teachers, alone failed to bridge the achievement gap for poor, minority students (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019; Weissberg, 2019). Low socioeconomic status (SES) Black and Latinx students experience educational gaps due to limited opportunities for an equitable education (Scarry, 2020). The achievement gap is the differentiation in academic performance between subgroups, as one group is outperforming the others, an achievement gap sets in for subgroups (Kotok, 2017).

The relationship between students' ethnicity and students' growth and achievement shows that poor minority students face many disadvantages throughout their K–12 years (García & Weiss, 2017; Glock et al., 2019). Poor minority students experience negative factors, such as low birth weight and exposure to environmental toxins, compared to their White counterparts (Farkas et al., 2020). Social, environmental, and psychological factors influence the widening achievement gap (Kotok, 2017). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are more likely placed in lower-track courses even if they have the potential to be high-achievers (Bromberg & Theokas, 2014; Kotok, 2017). Students develop thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors through peer influences, teacher/student relationships, the relationship the student has towards

the school, and their family influences (Kotok, 2017). While data calculates student growth and achievement through test scores, students' success incorporates many more factors (Buehler et al., 2015).

According to Vaillant and Gonzalez-Vaillant (2017), good teaching practices positively effect student achievement. Low SES Black and Latinx students do not grow and achieve in reading programs and these students continue to produce disappointing results (Abadzi, 2016). Research, however, does not identify good teaching characteristics that correlate with positive student growth and achievement outcomes (Vaillant & Gonzalez-Vaillant, 2017). For low SES Black and Latinx students to bridge the achievement gap, it remains critical for educators to understand the interventions to this point have historically failed the social reality of the needs of minority students compared to their privileged counterparts (Berry et al., 2014). If educators lack the understanding of socio-economic differences of their minority students, the socialization and communication within the classroom will provide challenges due to the interconnectedness of sociocultural dynamics, language differences, and racialized perspectives (Bottia et al., 2016). Through focused, intentional instructional practices and the development of relationships through collaboration and shared leadership, underperforming schools can transform students and demonstrate student growth and achievement (Meddaugh, 2014).

## **Background**

Educators must study the variation of student achievement among low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and the impact the intervention practices have on student growth and achievement in the context of a selected urban school district in south central Texas. The selected urban district serviced 10,138 students during the 2019–2020 school year (Murphy et al., 2022). Within the selected urban school district in south central Texas, the high school reported 57.8%

of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are in jeopardy of dropping out of school prior to graduation (Murphy et al., 2022). The district, as of 2021–2022 school year, has an accountability rating of C (Murphy et al., 2022). Annual achievement data from the selected urban district demonstrated a large achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. Of the over the 3100 students at selected urban district in south central Texas, the student demographic makeup is: 72% Latinx, 9% Black, 17% White with reading test scores of 55% compared to the state of Texas average of 70% (U.S. News, 2020). Murphy et al. (2022) noted in 2020–2021, the selected urban high school has a demographics of teachers: 57% White, 33% Latinx, and 10% Black.

According to a national educational consulting firm, McKinsey and Company, the COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the achievement gap for low SES students of color, not only deepening the long-standing social and educational inequities they faced prior to a global pandemic (Dorn et al., 2021a). Low SES Black and Latinx students did not have access to solid and substantial educational instruction since March 2020 (Dorn et al., 2021b). Low SES Black and Latinx students are six months behind in reading and math compared to their White counterparts who lag four months behind (Dorn et al., 2021b).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study describes the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The teacher is the closest person to the student throughout the day and the teaching environment is the student learning environment. Teacher perceptions can provide much insight into the academic performance and low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. According to the 2018–2019 Texas Academic Performance Report (TAPR), is the most

recent recorded assessment report due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The selected urban school district ranked in the lower 50% of all public schools and charter schools in Texas (Murphy et al., 2022).

The United States Commission on Civil Rights (2018) held a briefing in Washington, DC to address the student achievement gap between well-funded public schools compared to poor school districts that have the most disadvantaged students, primarily poor minority students. All students have the right to equal and equitable education according to however, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students continue to demonstrate an achievement gap compared to their White counterparts (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2018). The failure to closely evaluate the relationship between socioeconomic status and race hinder insight into the skill gaps between White, Black, and Latinx students (Henry et al., 2020; McGrady & Reynolds, 2013). The disparity between minority students and nonminority students appears in the achievement, opportunity, and educational outcomes enhancing the racial equity gaps (Elliott, 2020; Williams et al., 2020). As low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are moving through secondary education, research showed a decline in the emotional and psychological supports from educators as students feel (Borman et al., 2021). The students that feel that they do not belong in the classroom having a large impact on their academic growth and achievement (Borman et al., 2021). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students transitioning to secondary education enter an education system that erodes their positive emotions and social emotional learning directly impacting their academic growth and achievement (Borman et al., 2021; Williams, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south



central Texas. In addition, this study includes the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question that guided the focus of the case study was: What are the perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' teachers at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance? The research questions that guided the study were:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

## **Definition of Key Terms**

**Achievement gap.** The achievement gap refers to the inequities and disparities in the academic growth and achievement of low-income, minority students compared to their White counterparts (Porter, 2022).

**At-risk student.** This term defines any student that fits the state of Texas criteria that faces the potential for dropping out; 13 factors classify a student as at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

**COVID-19.** A virus that created a global pandemic which is known as SARS-CoV-2, which is an RNA virus that mutates which spreads into large populations of people (Rueda Altez & Hamdy, 2021). When the mutation process occurs, errors in the viral replication create more opportunities for the virus to replicate, creating more chances for mutation (Rueda Altez & Hamdy, 2021).

**Differentiated instruction (DI).** Differentiated instruction provides diversity in instruction through educational planning and delivery of strategies related to the diversity of students and academic levels within the classroom (Smith & Chestnutt, 2021). Differentiated instruction requires that educators understand the diversity of needs of all special populations of students to support the learning in a diverse context (Smith & Chestnutt, 2021).

**Educational/academic interventions.** Educational/academic interventions are a series of steps an educator takes to assist the struggling student in a specific area of need (Lynch, 2019). Educational/academic interventions focus on four tenets: proactive, intentional, formal, and flexible (Lynch, 2019).

**Gifted and talented students.** According to the Texas Education Agency, a gifted and talented student is who performs above grade level and shows continued potential performing at

an exemplar level (Texas Education Agency, 2021). According to the Texas Education Code, a gifted and talented student demonstrates a high level of performance in an academic, creative, or artistic content area (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The gifted and talented student also demonstrates leadership qualities and may excel in one or more academic areas (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

**Individualized education plan (IEP).** An IEP contains a differentiated educational plan for any student receiving special education services (Farkas et al., 2020). An IEP is an annual written document for every student between the ages of three and 21 that are receiving special education support services and recommendations by Admission, Review, and Dismissal committee, composed of district officials, special education department, teacher representatives, and the student with parent/guardian representation (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

**Scaffolded instruction.** Scaffolding instruction in education is the learning process, where the instructor supports the learner in developing skills and strategies for the activities the learner cannot accomplish independently (Van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). Scaffolding education are the symbols, signs, psychology, and tools through which skills and knowledge develops through instruction and guidance (Maksic & Josic, 2021).

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy is a person's belief about themselves and their abilities and capacities in specific situations and performances (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1999). Self-efficacy is about a person's internal confidence and awareness of their own ability to control their actions, behaviors, and motivations within their environment (Bandura, 2002; Bandura et al., 1999).

**Socioeconomics.** Socioeconomics are the study of a population based on economics, education, and social status (American Psychological Association, 2022). Analysis of economic,

education, and social status often bring to light the inequities in the access to resources, flaws in the societal systems, and the power of privilege in society (American Psychological Association, 2022).

**Special education in Texas schools.** Curriculum designed to meet any student with a mental, emotional, or physical disability (Texas Education Agency, 2021). The Texas Education Agency provides students and their families, along with the school district, a high-quality support system for the student to grow and achieve (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

**Student engagement.** Student engagement is the positive feelings and emotions connected to the attention, interest, curiosity in the learning process (Sousa, 2016). Engaged and motivated students participate in class lessons and activities, pursue learning opportunities and goals, more willing to face and overcome challenges in the learning process, and gain intrinsic motivation rather than relying on extrinsic rewards (Sousa, 2016).

**Student/teacher Perceptions.** Student/teacher perceptions are the thoughts and mental images students/teachers have about one another and the perceived reality they are experiencing (Whittle et al., 2018).

**Teacher bias.** Teacher bias is a subconscious association or stereotypes that teachers place on students, possibly even contradicting their own explicit values and beliefs (Suttie, 2016). Psychological biases influence teacher bias, which is placing associations on students because of their race, ethnicity, gender, fixed traits, and environmental circumstances (Suttie, 2016).

**Texas education agency.** The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the governing agency that oversees public education in the state of Texas, to include primary and secondary education. The commissioner of education leads the TEA (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

**Title I.** Title I represents a federal grant program designed to issue monies to schools with a make-up of 40% or more of low-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Local educational agencies, to include primary and secondary education, receive federal funding for additional educational resources (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

### **Summary**

The academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, with the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, support this study in describing the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at an urban school district located in south central Texas regarding how those perceptions can shape, positively or negatively, the outcomes of students' growth and achievement. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

Chapter 1 provided introduction of the study, the background of the study, statement of problem, purpose of the study, research questions, definitions of terms, and the summary. Chapter 2 reviewed the current literature related to the topic of this case study, discussed the theoretical framework that guided the case study, and a summary. Chapter 3 included the population, study sample, materials/instruments, data collection and analysis procedures, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and summary. Chapter 4 provided the results of the data collection. Chapter 5 discussed the findings, limitations, recommendations for practical application and future research, and summary.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas. In addition, this study includes the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

The review of literature provides supporting information on factors that contribute to the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and the role of the teacher in the learning process. Prior researchers provided a great deal of information regarding the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students; however, within the review of literature there is a gap in how teachers perceive the educational academic performance, the influence of relationships on academic performance, and how that directly influences behaviors of low SES at risk Black and Latinx students (Arbelo Marrero, 2016).

The overarching research question that guided the focus of the case study is: What are the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance? The research questions that guided this study are:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

### **Literature Search Methods**

The literature review focuses on public education barriers that low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students experience through the lens and perceptions of their academic teachers. From the review of literature, the case study focuses on the teachers' perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and their immediate needs to include safety and security, shelter, and food and how that can relate to their academic performance. The teachers provided insight through their perceptions in relation to students' self-efficacy, motivation, and growth and achievement. The research focused on academic achievement in context, federal initiatives over the past three decades, background/culture and how it influences the learning environment. Within the review of literature, I addressed the influence of socioeconomics, the effects of COVID-19, and food insecurities on student learning. The review of literature also includes discussions on ineffective teaching/lack of representation, teacher bias and teacher burnout, management and discipline, and the engagement gap. I reviewed the overrepresentation in special education, parental engagement, scaffolded/differentiated instruction for the equity of every student and the role of language and the influence on the growth and achievement of the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

The literature review provides a foundation of information of existing research. Research conducted systematically with research presented transparently, educators provided clarity in the systematic studies as relevant evidence in the case study (Cooper et al., 2018). The review of literature began to form from the online database at Margaret and Herman Brown Library at Abilene Christian University beginning spring of 2021 and spread out as the research began to unfold. Relevant peer-reviewed journals were searched for the basis of the literature review. The initial intent was to only include literature from the past 5 years; however, due to COVID-19 pandemic halting and altering educational delivery, it was essential to include relevant studies older than 5 years.

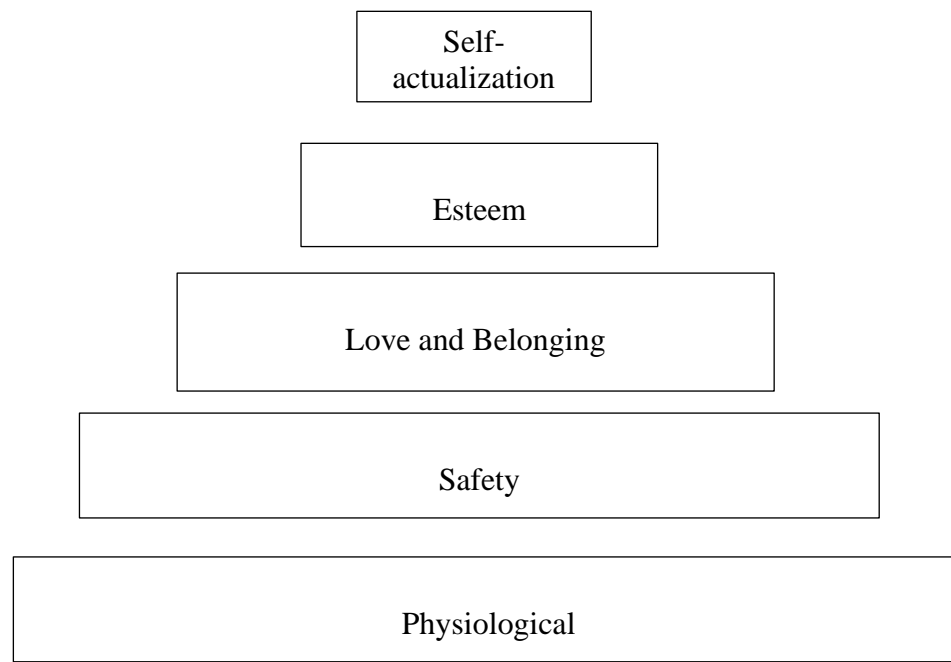
### **Theoretical Framework Discussion**

The six levels on the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow (1943) include: physiological needs such as food and shelter, safety needs such as a safe environment to learn, love and belongingness such as feeling a connection to others, identification to a group, good self-esteem through recognition or praise as confidence develops, fulfilling personal learning styles through self-actualization, and motivation through self-transcendence (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

*Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs Illustrating the Human Needs Levels*



Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs directly connects to learning through student motivations (McLeod, 2007). When students' needs are met, it is optimal time for learning to take place (McLeod, 2007). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, lower-level needs such as psychological and safety occur first before the student can address the higher level of needs (McLeod, 2007).

Physiological needs, according to Maslow (1943), means that students must have the basic level of physiological needs met, to include food, shelter, and clothes. The physiological needs of a student play an important role in academic performance (Aming'a, 2016). The most fundamental needs of a student, according to Maslow (1943), are physiological needs and until the basic level of needs are satisfied, students cannot address their more advanced needs. Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students face more challenges having basic needs met, impeding

their educational growth (Manola, 2019). Food insecurity, compounded by COVID-19 pandemic, affects the health of students, to include mental health and nutrition, creating adverse individual and community health outcomes (Niles et al., 2020). If a student is hungry, the student cannot focus on any other needs or desires until the hunger urges have been satisfied (Burlleson & Thoron, 2017). A student may be unable to focus or display disruptive behaviors because they are hungry, creating a barrier to learning (Burlleson & Thoron, 2017).

Safety needs means a safe environment is critical for students' well-being and growth (Hopper, 2020). Safety is a need that every person needs to feel and needs to be always present, to include social safety (Bowen, 2020). When students feel safe, students can cope and mitigate stressful events or contribute to the students' less painful reaction to stress (Zheng et al., 2016). However, according to Maslow (1943), if students' feel unsafe, they will not be able to think of anything else and their emotions will consume their behaviors. According to Burlleson and Thoron (2017), "learners view safety through a predictable and orderly world-they have an undisrupted routine or rhythm" (p. 2). Maslow (1943) viewed safety and security as emotional safety as well as safety within the environment, home, and school.

Love and belonging needs means that students are social beings and have a desire to belong to a group, friends, partnerships, and teams (Maslow, 1943). Love is a strong emotional connection students feel towards others and belonging is the need to feel acceptance by others (Pinkus, 2020). If the student does not feel a sense of belonging and acceptance with their own family and if students live in low SES environments, the economic stress can tax their emotional well-being (Crandall et al., 2020). When students have a positive relationship and bonds with their family, students are more confident and have a stronger sense of overcoming their challenges (Crandall et al., 2020).

Esteem needs means that when students' esteem needs are met, they feel a sense of self-respect and respect for other students and teachers (Gawel, 1996). When students display esteem needs, they demonstrate confidence, a value in themselves, and a respect for others (Burlison & Thoron, 2017). Students satisfy their esteem needs when they have a high positive value of themselves (Maslow, 1943). Maslow (1943) described high esteem as also a high value of others, with an inner respect for self. Within this category of needs, students also reach a desire for accomplishment and achievement (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow (1943) described self-actualization as the highest level of motivation for students. Once students have all the basic needs met, Maslow (1943) described self-actualization as obtaining meaning of one's own life and pursuing their ultimate goals and dreams in pursuit of happiness. Self-actualization is a process of taking the individual from self-centeredness to altruism and service (D'Souza & Gurin, 2016). Maslow (1943) contended that once students' needs become fulfilled, they then can evolve in the final stage of self-actualization or transcendence. Students in the self-actualization stage have a desire to fulfill their goals and dreams (Vinney, 2018). Maslow (1943) believed that humans have a strong desire to reach the higher needs, and everyone has the unique potential to thrive and be the best version of themselves (Vinney, 2018).

## **Literature Review**

The academic achievement gap continues to plague the United States' education system primarily affecting minority students, as academic achievement is a marker for future career and economic success (Diaz, 2021; Moller & Stearns, 2012). When evaluating grades, growth within standardized assessments, collegiate acceptance and achievement, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students continue to fall below their nonminority counterparts (Couch et al., 2021;

Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Too many low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are not gaining the skills they need for college and beyond and many are not at grade-level in reading by the end of third grade (Williams, 2021). It is critical to understand the achievement gap among low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students compared to their nonminority counterparts, according to Paschall et al. (2017), a simultaneous analysis must be conducted on both race and socioeconomic status. Academic interventions and educational policy are ineffective in promoting educational equity (O'Day & Smith, 2016; OECD, 2012; Paschall et al., 2017).

In March 2020, the world faced a global pandemic with COVID-19 virus, as school closures occurred all over the nation (Anderson, 2020; Daftary et al., 2021). The school systems faced various challenges and barriers in closing the achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students; however, the COVID-19 pandemic, school closures, and the transition to remote learning only exacerbated the existing and widening achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Anderson, 2020). Educators must consider critical consciousness and how it influences low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic development (Uriostegui et al., 2021). The future of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, their perceptions of their own future, their academic and future career abilities are directly correlated to their engagement in their educational journey (Blustein et al., 2005; Uriostegui et al., 2021).

### **Contextual Influence in Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement is critical for a student to move from one academic level to the next (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015). Traditional methods of instruction are ineffective, poor teacher/student relationships, and lack of mutual respect within the classroom are all contributing factors for low student growth and achievement (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015). Academic achievement must be a methodical sequential process, with the focus on developing the whole

student, physical, mental, and emotional well-being, while providing a safe and comfortable learning environment by educators that utilize modern activities and lessons to keep student engagement (Al-Zoubi & Younes, 2015). Educational equity and improvements in delivery of education in the direct learning environment mutually support all student academic growth and achievement (Tian & Sun, 2019; Travers, 2018). Assessment of students' growth and achievement is determined by policy-based knowledge and skills which require reliable outcomes based on institutionalized compliance (Tian & Sun, 2019). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students who lack knowledge and skills influences the level of income they will later earn in the workforce (Rothstein, 2015; Torres et al., 2019).

### ***Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students' Academic Performance***

One case study focused on low SES at-risk Black students and revealed that even if the low SES at-risk minority students were high achievers coming into ninth grade, they fall behind in math by the 12th grade (Kotok, 2017). It is critical to capture low SES at-risk Black students early to close the achievement gap (Ren-Etta Sullivan, 2017); however, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are showing regression in the secondary years (Kotok, 2017). It is in the contextual influences, according to Ren-Etta Sullivan (2017), such as learning styles, personality traits, multiple intelligences, and their cultural connections to their environment, in which low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students grow and achieve. It is incumbent on the educators to provide a culturally responsive learning environment as well as teacher efficacy to impact students, bridging the achievement gap (Krasnoff, 2020; Ren-Etta Sullivan, 2017).

Another case study focused on low SES at-risk Latinx students, demonstrated the correlation between academic underperformance connected to the risk of dropping out of school (Arbelo Marrero, 2016). School districts and communities need to develop partnerships to foster

growth and achievement for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; Martinez et al., 2004). The increasing amount of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students falling behind in the achievement gap is due to increases in the Black and Latinx population which directly impacts the United States economically and socially (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; Gandara, 2017). Schools must think in alternative ways other than the traditional top-down approach when it comes to the participation of parents and communities in the growth of low SES at-risk Latinx students (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; García & Weiss, 2017). Relationships, student perceptions, family perceptions, language differences, and values and customs are critical considerations in the engagement of Black and Latinx students (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; Romero & O'Malley, 2020). Teacher/student relationships are important for students' success and influences students' growth and achievement, and it also ignites students' engagement (Agyekum, 2019; Arbelo Marrero, 2016). When fair and equitable best practices occur, students can grow and achieve (Ainscow, 2020; Arbelo Marrero, 2016; OECD, 2012).

Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students influence intergroup connections and experiences to develop intergroup ideologies directly impacting achievement (Ghavami et al., 2020; Leath et al., 2019; Phalet & Baysu, 2020). By improving intergroup relations at schools and within classrooms, students feel secure and comfortable to learn and demonstrate growth (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Phalet & Baysu, 2020). All children, especially low SES at-risk Black and Latinx children, born into poverty, have barriers and challenges regardless of their innate ability to academically achieve and enter kindergarten at a disadvantage (Borland & Wright, 2000).

### **Federal Initiatives Over the Past Three Decades**

While each state in the United States regulates public education within their state, the federal government plays a critical role with federal funding and federal educational initiatives (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Over \$1.15 trillion is necessary to fund all levels of education throughout the United States as of the 2012–2013 school year (USDE, 2021). Federal agencies and the U.S. Department of Education (2021) funded elementary and secondary schools at 8%, leaving 92% of school funding left to the state, the communities, individual taxpayers, and private organizations to produce the monies. The U.S. Department of Education (2021) operates elementary and secondary programs serving over 18,000 school districts, approximately 98,000 public schools and 32,000 private schools, and serving over 50 million students of all ages (ages 3-21 years of age).

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush encouraged “national goals” for education, beginning the federal step into influencing policy, rather than just providing finances (Edwards, 2019). By 1994 and a change of presidency brought President Bill Clinton to enact the Goals 2000: Educate America which again set “national goals” for American schools, as well as the Improving America’s Schools Act, which require American schools to develop federally approved goals and a plan for yearly academic progress, with the threat of losing federal monies if the schools do not make yearly progress (Edwards, 2019). In 1998, the Reading Excellence Act began to fund elementary reading classes and funded smaller class sizes in elementary schools (Edwards, 2019).

### ***No Child Left Behind***

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law in 2002. It became an action plan for all American schools in areas of student testing, master

teacher qualifications, Spanish-language assessments, after school tutoring, and policies on annual yearly growth (Edwards, 2019). With the federal government micromanaging American schools, continued discourse with states that did not want to implement federal educational regulations would not receive federal funding (Uzzell, 2005). The NCLB law was an update of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Klein, 2020; Paul, 2016). The NCLB law was a direct-action response to the achievement gap for poor minority students, who all along did not perform academically as well as their White counterparts (Klein, 2020; Rowley & Wright, 2011). Due to internationally competitive concerns, the federal government stepped in to enhance the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and put the federal government front and center in holding all schools accountable for yearly annual progress and thus the NCLB became law (Klein, 2020). The goal of the NCLB was to boost the growth and achievement of subpopulations of students, for example, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, including special education students (Klein, 2020). States would lose Title I funds if they did not comply with federal educational changes (Gordon, 2022).

Student testing in reading and math begin in third grade through eighth grade with scores reported to the states for the entire school of students to include all subpopulations, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, special education students, all minority students, and low-income students (Brey et al., 2019). Schools must meet a proficient level and remain on track with their goals and objectives, and when a school cannot make annual yearly progress in two years or more, the school faces federal sanctions (Klein, 2020; Wiley et al., 2005). The school sanctions include allowing any of their students to transfer to a high performing school and the sanctioned school must provide tutoring services to all students (Ahn & Vigdor, 2014). The schools that continue to miss their goals and continue to show regression or a lack of growth could face state



interventions and labeled an improvement required campus, which requires immediate and significant turnaround strategies or the school faces closure (Weiss, 2013).

The NCLB law requires all teachers meet a “highly qualified” status which is determined by federal requirements: the teacher must have a bachelor’s degree in the content area they are teaching, and they must maintain state certifications (Birman et al., 2007). All paraprofessionals must obtain an associate degree, pass professional assessments, and have knowledge and skills in the teaching profession (Klein, 2020; Mauro, 2021). It also became a federal requirement that “highly qualified” teachers are in all schools, not just the better-performing schools (Hunt et al., 2010). The main criticisms of NCLB law are the reliance on state mandated standardized testing to show growth and achievement of students (Holmes, 2010; Klein, 2020). Low-performing schools have not improved growth and achievement as the same widening achievement gap persists with low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Carnoy & Garcia, 2017).

Every Student Succeeds Act passed by Congress in 2015, which replaces the No Child Left Behind of 2002 (Korte, 2015). President Barak Obama signed into law Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 and committed to an equal educational opportunity for all students (USDE, 2016). President Obama focused the new law on working through some of the controversial regulations of NCLB and focused on the goal of preparing all students to be college-ready by the time they graduate from high school (USDE, 2016). The benefits of ESSA include provisions to make all students successful by advancing equity to disadvantaged students, opportunities for college-preparation, clarity in assessment data for all educators, students, families, and communities, enact local initiatives for innovation, invest in a rigorous prekindergarten program, and accountability action to promote positive change in the nation’s most in-need schools (USDE, 2016).

## **Culture/Background and How It Influences the Learning Environment**

The social and cultural background and environment the student grows up in influences what and how the student thinks (Hurst et al., 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1978), human thought and language are inherently different processes and only merge around age 3 years old. Inner speech emerges as cognitive development occurs through the internalization of language (Ehrich, 2006; Vygotsky, 1978). For a student to learn, according to Vygotsky (1978), social transmissions from adults to students play an important role in cognitive development and it is through skilled peers that promote social perspective discussion. According to Vygotsky (1978), all children are born with the ability to learn through attention, sensation, perception, and memory.

As children adapt to their social and cultural environment, they begin to acquire decision-making skills and processes for metacognition through internalizing their social and environmental interactions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Students' cognitive development and functions depend on their beliefs, values, and social adaptations within the culture in which that student has developed in and therefore is socio-culturally determined through the social constructs of their environment (Bandura, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978).

Students are naturally curious and become active participants in their own learning (Singh & Manjaly, 2022; Vygotsky, 1978). However, social contributions are attributed to student adaptation and cognitive development (Cantor et al., 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). Students needs interactions with highly skilled peers or tutors/educators for students to model behaviors in collaborative dialogue as the student begins to comprehend the instructions, behaviors, and actions of the guide or facilitator (Garrett, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). The student internalizes the knowledge and information as the student becomes more self-aware to regulate actions and

behaviors through mimicking and modeling (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). If another person (educator or student) has higher knowledge or experience in a skill, the student can absorb and process the information as they begin developing the skill through interaction, discussion, and application (Vygotsky, 1978).

### **Socioeconomics**

Title I is a federally mandated program that provides financial assistance to schools for 40% or higher population of socioeconomically disadvantaged students to improve academic growth and achievement (USDE, 2006). While the focus over the past three decades was to bridge the achievement gap for students, schools are having very little impact in achieving annual growth and achievement by their lowest performing students, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Anderson, 2020; Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). The poverty rate for all children, apart from Asian children, increased from the years 2000–2014 with Black students increasing from 31% to 37%, Latinx students increasing from 28% to 31% and White students increasing from 9% to 12% (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). Where at-risk minority students reside can indicate poor academic performance based on the structural disadvantages of the area and characteristics, which may display higher levels of violence, criminal activity, and various negative stressors (McGaha-Garnett, 2013; Smart et al., 2021). The physical attributes of a low socioeconomic area can negatively impact students' growth through lack of students' attendance and academic achievement in mathematics (Gobena, 2018; Smart et al., 2021). From early childhood to early adolescence, household income and race significantly shape academic achievement for poor, minority students and the developmental gaps shape the trajectory of academic skill development (Henry et al., 2020; White et al., 2016). In 2009, a study on Indiana's high school graduation showed comparison of non-at-risk White students' graduation

rate 84.4% compared to the graduation rates of 61-66% for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Vesely, 2010). Schools are finding it increasingly difficult to improve the achievement gap for the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and current interventions are not working (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020).

Research demonstrates the achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in middle school mathematics to be prevalent in Colorado, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). The transition low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students make into middle school challenges the adjustment phase due to discrimination from the school setting (Marraccini et al., 2022). Not one school in the study was able to bridge the achievement gap in middle school mathematics for low SES Black and Latinx students during the duration of the 3 years (sixth through eighth grade) the students were in attendance (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). One hundred forty-four schools participated in the 3-year study and the lowest performing students were low SES at-risk Black and Latinx and with state mandated testing as the measurement tool for assessment, closing the achievement gap will require individualized and differentiated support for the most struggling students (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). The school culture and climate are key indicators of student belonging which directly impacts academic achievement (Konold et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2017; Montoro et al., 2021).

With lower test scores and higher dropout rates, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are continuing to fall behind, considerably lacking in comparison to low SES White students, who are demonstrating higher academic achievement despite their lower socioeconomic status (Paschall et al., 2017; White et al., 2016). When factoring the trajectory of educational policy reform, according to Paschall et al. (2017), educators must consider race and

socioeconomic levels together when implementing educational interventions and allocating resources. Specific and intentional intervention targets are critical when focusing on bridging the achievement gap of disadvantaged minority students (Xiao et al., 2021). Xiao et al. (2021) posited that culturally relative policy and interventions are necessary when addressing disadvantaged students within the student community culture, parental supports, and future orientation when bridging the achievement gap. The role of socioeconomics and background knowledge and skills are the most critical influences in the lack of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement (Seuring et al., 2020).

Chronic absenteeism of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students can be directly linked to poverty (D'Agostino et al., 2019; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students have lower physical activity and fitness and higher absenteeism at school (D'Agostino et al., 2019; Van Dyke et al., 2018). Physical fitness opportunities provide low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students with a healthy sense of well-being and promote consistent attendance, which promote positive academic outcomes (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; D'Agostino et al., 2019). Black Americans live in higher poverty than their White counterparts (Creamer, 2020; Mode et al., 2016) and receive inadequate healthcare, inequities in education, inadequate housing, and impoverished and unsafe neighborhoods compared to White Americans (American Psychological Association, 2009).

### **COVID-19 Pandemic**

COVID-19 is a virus that created a global pandemic which is known as SARS-CoV-2, which is an RNA virus that mutates which spreads into large populations of people (Rueda Altez & Hamdy, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic had a dramatic impact with the closing of American schools from March to June 2020 (Anderson, 2020; Daftary et al., 2021). With all normal

activities halted, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in poverty struggled with their adaptive behaviors and systems due to their development and their access to resources within their community (Herbers et al., 2021). The economic and social-emotional learning, due to the COVID-19 virus, has burdened low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, affecting mental health symptoms (Villatoro et al., 2022). COVID-19 has disrupted the lives of students and continues to worsen the achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Crow, 2022). When COVID-19 evolved into a global pandemic in March of 2020, with school closures, the most disproportionate groups, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, faced school closures and the transition to online education, exacerbating the inequalities in America's education system (Cruz, 2021). The education delivered when school closures took place, even with the best intentions by school districts, teachers, and parents, was not the quality of that in person within the classroom (Dorn et al., 2021a). The disparities within education were glaring pre-pandemic, yet COVID-19 has only compounded the existing achievement gap creating an increase in low SES Black and Latinx student dropouts (Dorn et al., 2021a; Easop, 2022).

The long-term economic disparities this creates ripple in the American economy for years to come and affects low SES Black and Latinx families currently experiencing poverty (Dorn et al., 2021a; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are two years academically behind their White counterparts prior to COVID-19 and the long-term effects continues to echo in American education (Dorn et al., 2021b; Goudeau et al., 2021). During the school closures, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students faced the effects through limited access to remote learning and the learning loss is significant (Dorn et al., 2021b; Goudeau et al., 2021). While widespread school closures occurred March through June 2020, resurgences of COVID-19 impacted the 2020–21 school year as well, leaving many students with remote

learning for the entirety of the school year (Dorn et al., 2021a; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). The greatest impact of COVID-19 is that it has widened an already existing achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Anderson, 2020; Dorn et al., 2021b; Rothstein, 2020). During the school closures, school districts were scrambling to address the disparities in education related to remote learning access, ensuring academic support, and providing nutritional health for the students (Anderson, 2020; Hoffman & Miller, 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students faced the most barriers and difficulties when making the remote learning transition (Anderson, 2020). It became increasingly challenging for struggling low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students within the existing achievement gap to make academic progress during the school closures (Anderson, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The deep impacts of COVID-19 on teachers, parents, and students and the disparities in education only became exacerbated as teachers became burnt out and overwhelmed trying to manage their classes from home (Jones et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has had dramatic effects on all families, yet the hardships, losses, and racial disparities faced by low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students will be long-term and lasting (Anderson, 2020; Jones et al., 2021). School districts must address the existing racial disparities within education, with the addition of COVID-19 pandemic, adding more demands on the school system (Jones et al., 2021). The teaching profession continues to battle inequities within the classroom; however, with the added international crisis of COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges and barriers have only exacerbated these issues (Alves et al., 2021; Hoffman & Miller, 2020).

### ***COVID-19 Pandemic Highlights Inequities in Technology Access***

Children living in large urban inner-cities face higher rates of severe poverty (Miller et al., 2019; Simoni et al., 2016). Within severe areas of poverty, students have less access to

equitable education and technology (Oakes et al., 2021; Simoni et al., 2016). With the digital divide, it only creates a gap for children of poverty to access technological resources and impact students' technological trajectory of computer usage (Simoni et al., 2016).

Distance education impacted all K-12 educational organizations with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 (Anderson, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). With school districts improvising a new education delivery system, distant learning became known as Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) and educators had to change the face-to-face educational delivery to a full online, remote setting (Anderson, 2021; Hodges et al., 2020). Quick solutions included technology-based education in less than desirable conditions and created stress not only for the educators, but for the students as well (Anderson, 2021; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). For students that lacked technology, such as laptops and Wi-Fi connections, K-12 education became inequitable and the least effective method for education delivery for the select students, namely low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Anderson, 2021; Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021). Higher SES students rated on-line education as effective or fairly effective, as resources and support were easier to obtain (Anderson, 2021; Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021).

The inequities with remote delivery of education had dramatic effects on the education system with only 40% of Black students and 30% of Latinx students receiving no online education due to the lack of resources (Dorn et al., 2021a). With students out of school for close to 18 months, students, and peer collaborators physically separated and interrupted education for many low SES at-risk vulnerable students (Bozkurt et al., 2020). While lower academic performance has persisted for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, COVID-19 brought to light the continued inequities in education for this vulnerable student population (Allen et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). The student population that thrived during COVID-19 remote learning were



in the highest-income areas and those that suffered from inadequate educational opportunities are those located in high-poverty (Allen et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). Remote education is never a recommended delivery source of education for low SES at-risk minority students, the most vulnerable and marginalized students in the educational system (Allen et al., 2020; OECD, 2021). E-learning has only magnified the inequities within the education system especially for students with at-risk or immigrant status (Allen et al., 2020; OECD, 2021).

### **Food Insecurity and the Effects on Learning**

According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, basic needs include food, shelter, and clothing, with also the feeling of safety and security with the environment (Crandall et al., 2020). If students do not have their lower levels of needs met, they spend their energy and resources in creating urgency focusing on those basic needs (Alio, 2017; Crandall et al., 2020). One in five children in the United States, pre COVID-19 pandemic, were facing food insecurity, which is the lack of consistency in the opportunity to access a healthy diet (Waxman et al., 2016). The global COVID-19 pandemic has had a dramatic economic and health impact on the most vulnerable population, low socioeconomic minority families, and by April 2020, over 43% of Americans reported job loss or income loss due to the pandemic (Bertoldo et al., 2022). With food insecurity hitting over 18% of low SES at-risk minority Americans, not only is access to healthy foods limited but it poses the added risk that these Americans will forgo medical health care creating short-term and long-term negative health consequences (Bertoldo et al., 2022). English Language Learners (ELL) families, most of whom are Latinx, and most are immigrant families, face three times the experience of food insecurity and due to concerns regarding immigration status, these families were least likely to receive governmental benefits, CARES Act government stimulus checks, or food vouchers, such as SNAP benefits (Partika et al., 2022).

Students facing food insecurities score lower on assessments and face lower growth and achievement compared to their food-secure counterparts (Winicki & Jemison, 2003). Poverty and food insecurity have detrimental long-term effects on children's development and health (Chilton et al., 2016). Food insecurity is associated with lower cognitive growth and achievement in children, affecting emotional development as well (Chilton & Rose, 2009). Food insecurity, exacerbated with the COVID-19 pandemic, created anxiety, fear, social vulnerability, and increased levels of depression in students (Fitzpatrick et al., 2021). Food insecurity directly impacts student grade point average (GPA), cognitive growth, and overall mental health leading to lower academic performance and outcomes (Martinez et al., 2018). Over 11 million students under the age of 18, prior to COVID-19, faced food insecurity daily, as those numbers only grew during the pandemic (Olson, 2021). Low SES students facing food insecurity experience higher levels of behavioral issues and they will face interpersonal relationship difficulties (Kotchick et al., 2021). Hopper (2020) stated, "if someone is extremely hungry, it's hard to focus on anything else besides food" (p. 2). Food insecurity affects the most vulnerable students, who are at the greatest risk of poor academic growth and outcomes, but it is a mitigating circumstance to higher levels of dropouts (Woerden et al., 2019). Students experiencing food insecurity not only face lower academic progress, but there is a strong association to developing sleep disorders, anxiety, and depression (Arenas et al., 2019).

### **Ineffective Teaching/Lack of Representation**

Ineffective teaching contributes to low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' gaps in growth and achievement (Hanselman, 2019; Porter-Magee, 2010). The achievement gap in mathematics has continued to expand in K-12 education in the United States, even with intervention focused on education quality and ranks 35th within industrialized nations on student

math performance (Scammacca et al., 2020). The tenets within a cognitive framework for how students learn, and teachers should consider student mental and emotional mindset, self-regulation and self-control and student work effort and ethic to enhance working memory to enhance inclusion and improve diversity (Allgood & McGoldrick, 2021; Chew & Cerbin, 2021). Educators must consider that not all learning strategies and interventions are going to work on every student; what is effective for one may not be effective in others (Chew & Cerbin, 2021). An effective teacher/student relationship cannot be effective without self-awareness and reflection mirrored in shared experiences within the classroom (Camp & Davis, 2011; Whitehead, 2001). Two considerations that add the most value to student growth, according to Schmoker (2006), are what the teacher is teaching and how well the teacher is teaching it.

### **Underrepresentation of Black and Latinx Students in GT Programs**

Low SES at-risk minority students underrepresent the overall student population in gifted and talented academic programs (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Morgan, 2019). In addition, the lack of master teachers of color only enhances the lack of exemplary low SES at-risk minority representation in these honors courses (Card & Giuliano, 2015; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Morgan, 2019). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students that demonstrate high intelligence may be missing the opportunity to experience a more rigorous curriculum to match their needs due to lack of exemplary teachers and poor working conditions within low-income communities (Morgan, 2019; Sparks, 2021). Grissom and Redding (2016) reported that even with strong standardized assessment scores, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students do not receive gifted and talented services (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Only 3% of Latinx students and 2% of Black students are in gifted and talented programs, with over 4% of their White counterparts taking GT classes (Barshay, 2016). Gifted and talented low SES at-risk minority

students that are underrecognized can begin to underperform (Olszewski-Kubilius & Thomson, 2010).

Gifted and talented low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students enrolled in regular academic classes may distract their peers from learning (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Morgan, 2019). Low SES at-risk minority students of color are referred to gifted and talented programs less because the prerequisite for these advanced courses is teacher referral (Elhoweris et al., 2005; Morgan, 2019). Student and teacher relationships, especially within lower income communities, are critical to student growth and achievement (McKenzie, 2019; Olsen & Huang, 2021).

Another area of concern is the underrepresentation of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes (Owens & Ramsay-Jordan, 2021; Saw et al., 2018). The long-term impact of underrepresentation of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in STEM classes is the lack of representation in STEM career fields as they leave high school (Owens & Ramsay-Jordan, 2021; Saw et al., 2018). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to join STEM classes or pursue STEM careers (Rozek et al., 2019; Saw et al., 2018).

Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students underrepresented and underidentified for gifted and talented programs may act out and appear defiant, therefore the failure to place them appropriately can have life-lasting effects (Diaz-Cardenas, 2020; Morgan, 2020a). Often low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students not identified and placed correctly can seem apathetic or uninterested in their academics (Arbelo Marrero, 2016; Morgan, 2020a). Gifted and talented programs provide students with acceleration and stimulation within the curriculum and separate the higher-functioning students based on their intellectual abilities (Garcia-Martinez et al., 2021;

Morgan, 2020b). Some of the causes of underrepresentation of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in gifted and talented programs are inequalities in wealth, lack of minority teachers, undesirable living conditions, and poor methods of identifying gifted students (Morgan, 2020b; Peters, 2022). Students referred to gifted and talented programs require parent and teacher recommendation; however, many low SES Black and Latinx parents do not pursue recommendations as they rely on the schools for identification with teacher bias limiting referrals (Morgan, 2020a; Payne, 2010).

### **Teacher Bias**

Teacher bias, when working with low SES Black and Latinx students, is an area of concern due to the personal and lasting effects it can have on a student (Chin et al., 2020; Warikoo et al., 2016). A contributing factor to teacher bias within the classroom, according to Plata et al. (2017), is the preexisting bias prospective teachers not only bring into the classroom but develop as teachers within their undergraduate education programs with preconceptions on diversity. Prospective educators bring their own perspectives on race and diversity from their past experiences, namely their own educational experiences and influence from peers, family, and community which shapes their own stereotypes on cultural diversity (Abacioglu et al., 2020; Plata et al., 2017). Even when collegiate teaching programs address multicultural classrooms, according to Plata et al. (2017), prospective educators' preexisting views on race and culture do not change over the course of their higher education. Educational inequality remains pervasive when negative implicit associations towards low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are prevalent because it is often hard to control within a classroom (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021; Warikoo et al., 2016).

Teacher assumptions, predispositions, and judgments drive the inequalities within the academic and classroom management setting of the classroom (Glock et al., 2019; Lorenz, 2021). If the classroom teacher displays negative stereotypes of their culturally diverse students, it affects the students' academic performance and those targeted students perform lower in academic achievement (Borgna & Contini, 2014; Glock et al., 2019). Teachers are contributing to the achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, and it is not in the blatant processes of bias, such as discriminatory grading policies (Lloyd, 2021; Lorenz, 2021). It is in the subtle processes of teachers' treatment of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students by having less expectations in reading and mathematics achievement (Leath et al., 2019; Lorenz, 2021).

Educators that have the same racial and ethnic background as the student are not enough to promote growth and achievement in the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student (Brey et al., 2019; Glock & Schuchart, 2020). However, the educator of color can reduce racial and ethnic disparities within the classroom (Glock & Schuchart, 2020; Morgan, 2020a). Teacher bias occurs when the teacher has student knowledge that influences their expectations and assumptions of future academic performance by students which reflect in the student/teacher relationship (Blazar & Kraft, 2017; Sneyers et al., 2020). Teacher bias attributed to the overestimation and underestimation of students' abilities based on students' cognitive attributes and parental involvement in the students' educational journey (Kuh et al., 2006; Sneyers et al., 2020). Teacher expectations directly affect the academic performance and future trajectory of their students (Dabach et al., 2018; Johnston et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Dabach et al. (2018), 14 primary and secondary educators of Latinx students expected their students' postsecondary careers as nonacademic and predicted their career would be retail, specifically in the service

sector of society. Teachers' interactions and relationships with the students in the classroom impact students' perceptions of their own expectations for their future (Dabach et al., 2018).

### **Teacher Burnout**

Teacher burnout directly affects student growth and achievement (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Students should gain valuable skills and knowledge within the learning environment that will promote their growth and achievement (Gamage et al., 2021; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teacher burnout is a concern for school districts because of the serious impacts it has not only on the teacher but also on the students (Iancu et al., 2018; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Educator burnout is the exacerbated stressors over a length of time and include lack of resources to deal with emotional distress, pessimistic and cynical attitude towards the teaching profession, and intense feelings of ineffectiveness within the learning environment (Iancu et al., 2018; Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Teacher burnout is also a top priority within the educational system considering the COVID-19 crisis and how educational organizations affect policy, decision making, and support systems that impact educators directly, which in turn impact student growth and achievement (Carroll et al., 2022; Trinidad, 2021). Over 30% of teachers do not feel that they receive adequate support and guidance for students with learning disabilities and how to address the widening achievement gap of their students (Hamilton et al., 2020). Due to ineffective support systems, teacher burnout, and the added challenges of COVID-19 pandemic, over half of teachers' experience burnout and approximately a fifth of teachers intend to leave the profession all together (Trinidad, 2021).

When teachers become burned out, districts and students feel the effects due to increased teacher absenteeism, teachers arrive late to work and meetings, lack of enthusiasm, lower

performance assessments, complaining and lack of focus, lack of communication, and unwillingness to be open to new ideas (Lupi, 2014; Yariv, 2011).

### **Underrepresentation of Teachers of Color**

Research has shown that students matched with teachers of the same race/ethnicity benefit in not only academic progress but also in socioemotional development (Rasheed et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2017). The population of the United States does not represent the racial/ethnic diversity within the teaching population and teachers of color have only minimally increased over the past 20 years (Ferguson, 2016; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Rasheed et al., 2020).

School districts are aware of the research that has shown that a diverse workforce is beneficial to a diverse population of students (Camp & Davis, 2011; Raza & Roberts, 2020). Targeted recruitment of a diverse workforce, campus internal support, and incentive in living wage are important factors when recruiting teachers of color (Camp & Davis, 2011; Carver-Thomas, 2018). The state of Texas considers 13 factors to determine if a student is at-risk, as Ladson-Billings (2022) referred to the term “at-risk” as student being synonymous with a student of color. Students are measured on the Texas At-Risk Indicator, according to the Texas Education Agency (2019), based on 13 criteria.

At-risk defines any student under the age of 21 categorized as the high potential of dropping out and less likely to transition to adulthood successfully (Texas Education Agency, 2019). The 13 criteria markers for at-risk include: Pre-K-3rd grade, if a student does not perform adequately on readiness assessments, grades 7-12, any student that does not maintain a grade of 70 out of 100 in two or more subjects, a student who was retained a grade, a student who does not perform adequately on state mandated assessments, a student who is pregnant or a parent, a



student in alternative education programs, a student who has been expelled from a school, a student who is currently on probation, deferred probation, or any conditional release, a student who has previously dropped out of school, a student with limited English proficiency, a student who is in the custody of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services, a student who is homeless, and any student who resides in a residential placement facility (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

With federal educational initiatives over the past two decades, low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students faced inappropriate labels, placed in special education classes, failed a grade level, or even dropped out of school (Brey et al., 2019; Gasman et al., 2017). The quality of education for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students is inadequate, providing those students with overcrowded classrooms, fewer opportunities, limited access to resources and fewer access after-school to provide additional support, such as, technology at home, tutoring access, and extracurricular activities (Barrett et al., 2019; Gasman et al., 2017). However, Cherry-McDaniel (2019) challenged that filling diverse classrooms with teachers of color does not equate to cultural responsiveness or instructional preparedness. While low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students do benefit from exposure to teachers of color, training and education are critical for growth and development of students (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Leath et al., 2019).

### **Classroom Management and Discipline**

Classroom management is a system of policies and procedures to create a positive learning environment for students (Kratochwill et al., 2015; Long et al., 2019). Research indicated that minority students are facing long term and even life changing consequences for student behaviors (Kitchens & Brodnax, 2021; Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Differential

treatment and punishments affect poor minority students, only to perpetuate early criminalization (Berlowitz et al., 2017; Owens & McLanahan, 2020; Potter et al., 2017). Owens and McLanahan (2020) stated, “Prior research identified three mechanisms that help account for racial disparities in suspension and expulsion: between-school sorting, differences in student behaviors, and differences in the treatment and support of students with similar behaviors” (p. 1548). With the diversification of schools within the United States, classroom management strategies implemented at the whole class level make it difficult to identify and summarize behavioral management in the educational setting (Long et al., 2019; Parsonson, 2012).

Effective classroom management must embody procedures for learning to occur (Long et al., 2019). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students may have less access and less exposure to a support system, social and emotional learning, and accelerated, high-leverage instruction which can increase behavior problems (McDaniel et al., 2017; Owens & McLanahan, 2020). In the past, the school system practiced “zero tolerance” in all areas of discipline, exasperating the racial disparities (Henry et al., 2021; Heriot & Somin, 2018). During the Obama administration, schools lightened up on the harsh punishments and overcorrection in attempts to lessen the high percentages of minority students in trouble (Heriot & Somin, 2018; OECD, 2012). The focus is to reduce minority students’ suspensions and expulsions down in numbers, teachers face pressure to underreport classroom disruptions and students’ behavioral issues (Belsha, 2021; Heriot & Somin, 2018). For learning to occur in the classroom, students must be orderly and maintained (Heriot & Somin, 2018; Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). When administrators actively “kick back” behavior referrals, classrooms become unruly and out of control (Heriot & Somin, 2018). Teachers do not feel safe in classrooms where the students’ behavior is unruly and goes ignored (Heriot & Somin, 2018; Obaki, 2017). Discipline for schools must be fact driven and

bureaucratic policy as blanket policy has proven to be ineffective (Heriot & Somin, 2018; McAllister, 2018). To have an effective management system in the classroom, simple and individualized strategies are effective, such as response cards and praise, giving educators more options in creating the desired behavior results in a diverse classroom (Long et al., 2019; Parsonson, 2012). To provide equitable educational opportunities for all students, an effective classroom management system must be rooted in ethnically diverse policies and procedures (Long et al., 2019; Welborn, 2019).

With low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students composing the most diverse student populations, research has shown that low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students face disproportionately negative discipline than their White counterparts (Brey et al., 2019; Gage et al., 2021). Disproportionate negative discipline is systematic within the U.S. public school system and affect academic achievement by discriminating against low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students by denying them equal access to advanced and honor courses to contribute to the imbalance in educational inequities (Ball, 2020; Walker-Berry, 2019). Not only does denying low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students into rigorous educational classes hinder their growth and achievement, but the inadequate educational opportunities undermine the most vulnerable of students to regress and underachieve, as well as facing injustices and disciplinary actions (Ball, 2020; Camp & Davis, 2011).

Students that have low self-confidence and low self-esteem “act out” in delinquency as a means of enhancement of themselves, which ultimately leads to a perpetuation of the destruction of their self-worth (Tomek et al., 2020; Turanovic & Siennick, 2022). If students have negative attitudes towards self, Kaplan (1972, 1976, 1978) explained the intense negativity leads to consequential behaviors because the students view themselves as having negative attributes.

When low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students curb their delinquent behaviors, through social and emotional learning, they have positive long-term effects (Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Tomek et al., 2020).

It is the perspectives of the schools and teachers that perpetuate disparities within the schools when it comes to discipline and low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (OECD, 2012; Welsh & Little, 2018). Deviant behaviors or low SES status are not solely what leads to increased discipline issues in classrooms, consequently leading to increased suspensions and expulsions (Jacobsen et al., 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students begin to face disparities within discipline practices as early as prekindergarten (Skiba, 2015; Welsh & Little, 2018). A classroom teacher's value and beliefs influence their classroom discipline and negatively affects low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). Teachers may anticipate discipline issues with low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and a continuous cycle between teacher and student occurs, based on fears and stereotypes (Lloyd, 2021; Welsh & Little, 2018). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students carry the label as "bad" pertaining to discipline and behaviors (Fadus et al., 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). Disciplinary actions are subjective and low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students receive more severe punishments irrespective of their behaviors (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019; Welsh & Little, 2018). Race and culture are two key components that schools need to consider when balancing the disparities within discipline practices (Weir, 2016; Welsh & Little, 2018).

### **Engagement Gap for Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students**

The achievement gap in student education shows the disparity between various groups of students and can determine the effectiveness of the academic programs within the school

(Dumont & Ready, 2020; Soland, 2018). Students' intrinsic motivation and students' engagement are predictors of growth and achievement in reading (Saeed & Zyngier, 2012; Whitney & Bergin, 2018). Whitney and Bergin (2018) reported that motivating students through incentives provided little growth and achievement sans the skills and preparedness. Lower-income students have less motivation and engagement compared to their wealthier counterparts (García & Weiss, 2017; Whitney & Bergin, 2018). Whitney and Bergin (2018) found that low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students with higher motivation for success did not perform better than lower-motivated low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. Socioeconomic status and race play a role in student motivation and engagement, as social class is the strongest predictor of educational success (García & Weiss, 2017; Whitney & Bergin, 2018).

Prejudices and discrimination can impact the engagement of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and could pose a social identity threat that can compromise self-esteem and self-control (Benner et al., 2018; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Minority students experiencing discrimination struggle with their social identity, affecting their academic engagement and compromise growth and achievement (Leath et al., 2019; Verkuyten et al., 2019; Zhao & Ngai, 2022). The gap in the literature appears to be that as experts and educators focus on low SES at-risk minority students' achievement gap and the interventions to bridge the gap, they still do not understand the differential learning environment and instructional practices that low SES at-risk minority students need compared to their White counterparts (Schenke et al., 2017).

Engagement and disaffection prevention within the classroom is directly linked to negative school experiences (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Putwain et al., 2022). The disengaged student has increased behavioral issues and decreased metacognition or thinking about one's thinking (Chick, 2013; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Student engagement

demonstrates active participation in the learning process and engaged students tend to immediately engage not because educators mandate it, but because the lesson is challenging and interesting (Davis & Dague, 2019; Erickson et al., 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

Engaged students are active, interested, and alert, whereas disengaged students become easily distracted, remain unfocused, and demonstrate lack of interest in the lesson (Erickson et al., 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Students that become disengaged struggle with self-confidence as they grapple with shame and anxiety which perpetuate the lack of focus and interest (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019).

When students lack knowledge and skills, they are cognizant and aware of their weaknesses and inabilities (Eleby, 2009; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Educators take notice of the apathy and disinterest and see it as a sign of disrespect and offensive behaviors (Davis & Dague, 2019; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Many educators feel that student disengagement is beyond their control and do not feel capable of changing their students' mindsets (Brooks et al., 2012; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Educators focus on improving student engagement but are not aware of the effect of the interventions on students' emotions or thinking (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Skinner, 2016). Desired student behaviors and student participation cannot be a forced action because it only perpetuates negative student behaviors (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Educators agree that engaged students promote student growth and achievement through positive academic outcomes (Alba & Fraumeni, 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

### **Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students Overrepresented in Special Education**

U.S. school districts need to prevent the overrepresentation of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students identified as students with special needs and used as an intervention tactic to

bridge the racial achievement gap (Farkas et al., 2020; Fish, 2019). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students misidentified or overrepresented as students with special needs are categorized under the special education umbrella of services (Elder et al., 2021; Farkas et al., 2020). Students tested for special education receive a referral by the classroom teacher for underperformance, observations, and regression analyses (Burr et al., 2015; Farkas et al., 2020). Once a student receives a special education referral, a district committee develops to include the student and student's family, along with district personnel and special education services representative to determine if the student needs an individualized education plan (IEP; Burr et al., 2015; Farkas et al., 2020). Research has shown that low SES at-risk minority students are more likely to become identified with a special education label than their White counterparts (Cruz et al., 2021; Elder et al., 2021). Elder et al. (2021) stated that low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are overrepresented in special education when they enrolled in schools where most students are primarily White students.

Research indicated that not only are minority students overrepresented in special education, but they may also be receiving inadequate services providing less opportunity for future success (Bal et al., 2014; Morgan, 2020a). Minority students living in poverty and misidentification by their teacher contributes to the problem of misidentification as students with special needs (Cooc, 2017; Morgan, 2020a). School districts are not correctly identifying low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students labeled as special needs due to emotional disability, intellectual gaps, thereby creating additional barriers for the struggling learners (Kim, 2020; Morgan, 2020a).

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2020) confirmed the inequities in education when it comes to poor minority students in the areas of discipline and special

education. Not only are poor minority students identified as special needs at a higher rate, but they face discipline at higher rates and even misidentified for services that may be more restrictive than beneficial (NCLD, 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students identified as special needs graduate at a lower rate than their White counterparts (Significant disproportionality in special education, 2020).

### **Parental Engagement of Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students**

Parental engagement and stimulation in the home promotes academic achievement (Hardaway et al., 2020). Berkowitz et al. (2021) stated that parental involvement with school-age students includes assisting their child with homework, attending teacher/parent meetings, maintaining communication with the school, and volunteering at their child's school events. However, in some families of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, parental involvement is not present and adverse consequences affect the student (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2018). Parental lack-of-involvement is more prevalent in non-English speaking and low-income families (Park & Holloway, 2018; Yeh, 2019). Parents are not as involved in their student's educational journey when they face communication barriers, social barriers, and linguistic barriers (Kerbaiv & Bernahgrdt, 2018; Murray et al., 2014). According to Llamas and Tuazon (2016), if a parent becomes detached and disengaged from their own child's learning process, it could negatively affect their growth and achievement. Language, class, and race prevent parents from getting involved in their child's education (Miller & Banks-Hall, 2019; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

Teachers must develop relationships, not only with the student, but with the family (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Powers, 2016). Parents play a crucial role in students' growth and achievement (Fenton et al., 2017). Disadvantaged families need support in bridging the gap



between the schools and families (Fenton et al., 2017; Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Resources and collaboration between schools and families are crucial in the establishment of trust between families and schools while emphasizing a shift to engage parental involvement in their student's growth and achievement (Fenton et al., 2017; Jacques & Villegas, 2018). Many times, parents carry the stereotype, particularly the parents of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, that they do not care about the education of their children (Hines-Shelvin et al., 2014; Marchand et al., 2019).

One intervention strategy that schools use when serving low-income minority students is to improve parental involvement; however, it is a dual-engagement, community services along with the school district, strengthen parental involvement with the schools to enable low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement (Lechuga-Pena & Brisson, 2018). Resources and services that communities offer provide security within their environment which may result in improvement in parental involvement and lead to student achievement (Đurišić & Bunjevac, 2017; Lechuga-Pena & Brisson, 2018). Not only do resources from the community support the developing relationship with the school district provides, but the additional services and resources support the parental/student bond (Lechuga-Pena & Brisson, 2018). Parents feel self-conscious, especially those that live in a low socioeconomic status, and believe the teachers and school hold a negative stereotype to low SES families, as this may influence their lack of engagement for their student's education (Norman, 2016; Park & Holloway, 2018). Parents categorized as low-socioeconomic are less involved, despite all efforts placed in overcoming those obstacles (Lechuga-Pena & Brisson, 2018). When low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents are in a majority White school, their participation is scarce because it is

intimidating and deters them from stepping forward (Jeynes, 2016; Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013).

### **Scaffolded/Differentiated Instruction for the Equity of Every Student**

The zone of proximal development is the gap of where a person is today with knowledge and skills and the next quickest success in establishing depth or analysis of the skill (Shabani et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). The range of the gap within the proximal development is where the guidance of the educator lends support for the student to achieve greater depth and understanding of the skill or knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Vygotsky, 1978). As the student and the instructor construct knowledge within the zone of proximal development, the social interactions promote deeper meaning and learning (Shabani et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development, according to Vygotsky (1978), is the most critical and sensitive aspect of student growth and achievement as students are developing skills and higher mental functions, such as analysis and synthesis. It is in the interactions with peers and instructors that cognitive development not only develops but blossoms within the student; these are the precious moments when learning occurs (Kuh et al., 2006; Vygotsky, 1978).

Not only do low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students fall behind in the achievement gap, but the loss of instructional time during the summer affects the most vulnerable students (Alexander et al., 2001; White & Kim, 2008). Through support and resources during the summer months, low-income minority students should have access to books, opportunities to read rich text to expand their vocabulary, and resources to practice their knowledge and skills to enhance their growth and achievement (OECD, 2012; White & Kim, 2008).

A study completed by Battery (2013) where he examined a classroom of Black and Latinx students regarding issues of how relational interactions between the teacher and the

student can mediate and access student growth and achievement. Not all students have equitable access to quality education and low SES at-risk students have the least number of opportunities and resources to obtain a “good” education (Battery, 2013; OECD, 2012). Relational and cultural aspects of classroom environments that serve low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are critical to growing an underserved population of students to reach growth and achievement (Battery, 2013; Siegle et al., 2016).

To respond to the needs of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, implementation of differentiated instruction for meaningful and successful learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Ortega et al., 2018). Differentiated instruction (DI) offers educators a responsive way to address the student’s individualized needs, language proficiency, and style of learning (Ortega et al., 2018). If executed correctly, DI provides equity and individualized instruction to promote student growth and achievement (Ortega et al., 2018).

Scaffolding instruction in education is the learning process, where the instructor supports the learner in developing skills and strategies for the activities the learner cannot accomplish independently (Van de Pol et al., 2010; Wood et al., 1976). Scaffolding education are the symbols, signs, psychology, and tools through which skills and knowledge develop through instruction and guidance (Maksic & Josic, 2021; West et al., 2017). Through the development of creativity, scaffolding encompasses four categories: social, motivational, cognitive, and cultural (Ivcevic et al., 2022; Maksic & Josic, 2021).

When the educator scaffolds instruction, students have shown growth and achievement in word analysis, written compositions, and reading and writing strategies (Park et al., 2019; Shabani et al., 2010). Elementary educators rarely scaffold the development of linguistic knowledge and without intentional and purposeful steps, the student does not make meaning

(Belland et al., 2013; Park et al., 2019). As the educator breaks learning into smaller components, the student can utilize instructional strategies such as, reading by highlighting, the parsing of sentences for deeper metacognition and meaning (Castles et al., 2018; Park et al., 2019). Even with technology assistance, students who partner and collaborate creates discussion and probing for deeper meaning (Park et al., 2019). Differentiation in instructional practices are learner-centered and students are empowered to take control of their own learning (de Jager, 2017). Teachers must take students' cultural backgrounds into consideration to provide appropriate and adequate individualized instruction for low SES at risk Black and Latinx students (Maeng & Bell, 2015).

When the educator delivers quality instruction, research shows it makes a positive difference in students' growth and achievement (Burch, 2007; Yoon et al., 2007). The factors impacting students' growth and achievement are students' ability and socioeconomic status (Burch, 2007). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at poor performing schools consistently score 23 percentile points under students attending high-caliber schools in higher SES areas (Burch, 2007). If educators do not differentiate and scaffold for each individual student, the educator is not teaching in the zone of proximal development (Burch, 2007; Shabani et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). When the teacher does not scaffold and differentiate instruction, it requires the student to adapt to the process instead of tailoring the process to where the student is academically (Burch, 2007; Taylor, 2017). The student does not grow and accelerate within actual development, but growth and achievement occur in the zone of proximal development (Burch, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). Growth and development occur when the student develops strategies for skill acquisition and instruction adjusts and adapts to the individual student learner (Burch, 2007; Tomlinson et al., 2003).

## **Language and its Role in Student Growth and Achievement**

When children develop internal speech, it becomes the transition between inner speech and internal language, and this is the point where language and thought merge to produce verbal speech from thinking (Alderson-Day & Fernyhough, 2015; Vygotsky, 1987). When students have inner and private language, Vygotsky (1987) viewed this as self-regulation and self-monitoring rather than communicational speech. Language becomes an instigator and accelerator to thinking and comprehension (Bruner, 1978; Vygotsky, 1987). Research shows that language links to proficiency and growth and minority students that use minority-language in the classroom acquire and maintain knowledge and skills in the minority-language (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Seuring et al., 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students exacerbate the achievement gap in language-related achievement, specifically reading comprehension and fluency (Seuring et al., 2020; Van Vechten, 2013).

The role of language is critical in the cognitive development of students (Barac et al., 2014; Goldin-Meadow et al., 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). All language domains can develop literacy skills while developing content knowledge and discussion can develop a larger command of not only language, but skill development (Crandall et al., 2020; Motley, 2016). Talk, Read, Talk, Write is an instructional strategy focusing on developing content and literacy skills through intentional turn and talk (Motley, 2016). While low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students spend much of their school day listening to instructors' lecture and then completing busy work to meet compliance standards, they have few opportunities to apply the practices or talk through what they are learning to develop meaning (Leithwood et al., 2004; Motley, 2016). Students develop language through social interactions and through language development, students begin to transmit information and the in-take information becomes a powerful instrument in academic

learning and intellectual adaptation (Noormohamadi, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Students do not learn the skills at an optimal level without the opportunities to read, write, and talk (Eleby, 2009; Schmoker, 2011).

The instructional classroom should be a place of reading, talking, writing, and sharing (Daniels & Zimelman, 2004; Motley, 2016). Low SES Black and Latinx students learn from the construction of meaning and that does not occur naturally; the educator guides the student to construct meaning over time (Krasnoff, 2020; Tovani, 2004). When educators provide opportunities throughout the lesson for students to read, write, and talk regarding the knowledge and skills they are acquiring, they become a more articulate, informed, educated, and capable adult and citizen (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Schmoker, 2011).

Students who communicate in intercultural contexts enhance engagement, participation, and active interaction gaining understanding and rationale for challenge and development for deeper meaning and the formation of new ideas (Adamson et al., 2016; Kim, 2020). If educators utilize a multi-centric view of the world, students have the freedom to become more proficient in language and construct meaning (Adamson et al., 2016; Krasnoff, 2020). Educators need to become culturally competent to avoid misunderstandings regarding students' backgrounds, values, and needs for students to advance in language acquisition and proficiency (Mindel & John, 2018).

### **Inequality in Public Education**

Inequity within American schools is a microcosm of larger societal issues, and schools can either reinforce inequities within the school or purposefully and intentionally set best practices to push back (Jabbar & Wilson, 2018; Langer, 2001). Not only are two thirds of all U.S. high school students struggling readers, but they are not thinking critically or synthesizing

meaning (NAEP, 2009). Low SES minority freshmen students at low SES high schools are reading, on average, two to three years behind their wealthier White counterparts (NAEP, 2009). The disparity of socioeconomics directly relates to the widening achievement gap for the most vulnerable and marginalized students, as the equity distribution of state and federal funding to schools continues to perpetuate the disparities in education (Bruce et al., 2019; García & Weiss, 2017).

Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students have suffered inequities not only in society, but school systems are perpetuating educational inequalities (Churchill, 2021; Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021). Educational interventions need to change to remove all psychological barriers and challenges for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Churchill, 2021; Easterbrook & Hadden, 2021). For effective equity within education, students must develop higher literacy skills by strengthening students' self-esteem, confidence, and views of themselves as their skills are developing (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Schoenback et al., 2012). The economic inequalities within the school system directly affect psychological and depressive symptoms of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in low-performing schools (Coley et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students can develop depressive symptoms due to their own socioeconomic conditions, but when they are attending a low SES school, it intensifies the depressive disorders and can have life-long consequences (Coley et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018). The growing economic inequalities in the United States become economic segregation within the school systems (Coley et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018). Low SES homes, families, and schools are directly affecting the at-risk and most vulnerable students and creating urgency for the schools to become culturally informed and equipped to deal with emerging

mental health issues in the low SES student population (Coley et al., 2019; Hodgkinson et al., 2017; Williams, 2018).

Stress and poverty can impact the development of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Goodman, 2018; Mendoza et al., 2017). The physical environment that the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students reside can create anxiety and stress that carries over into the classroom, which affects academic development and even create an added adverse experience for the child (Goodman, 2018; Williams, 2018). Not only are low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students behind their White counterparts in academics, but also in social emotional outcomes (Becares & Priest, 2015; Riddle & Sinclair, 2019).

Equity in education and excellence in performance outcomes depend on educators' maximizing on excellence with high expectations and minimizing inequities to promote academic growth and achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Lee, 2016). Effective educators within the classroom are the most knowledgeable and advanced in decision-making can promote excellence and high standards as the district with state and federal directions will impact and influence the inequities within the education system (Behrstock & Clifford, 2010; Lee, 2016). Unrealized potential creates gaps in academic achievement and educators must address expectations and rigor within the classroom, as they minimize the inequities that the most vulnerable and marginalized students face (Golann, 2015; Lee, 2016).

### **School Funding Disparities**

Inequities in school funding inevitably affect student growth and achievement with unequal funding (Bruce et al., 2019; Epstein, 2011). Students who receive free or reduced lunch make up the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student population in the highest poverty areas show clear evidence to low academic growth and achievement (Bruce et al., 2019; Crosnoe,



2009). School funding disparities also attract less qualified teachers, many of whom have a broad, generalized background in education but are not specialized in bridging the achievement gap (Baker et al., 2016; Bruce et al., 2019). Schools that receive less support and financial resources deter highly qualified teachers in schools of poverty (Baker et al., 2016; Bruce et al., 2019). If students' support and resources are directly tied to community property taxes, the per student funding in areas of poverty are substantially less than property-rich schools (Bruce et al., 2019; Turner et al., 2016).

### **Summary**

While many studies address the inequities in educational opportunities for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, COVID-19 has only exacerbated the existing achievement gap. The review of literature focused on socioeconomics, ineffective teaching/lack of representation, classroom management and discipline, the engagement gap, overrepresentation in special education, and the added effects of COVID-19. The learning loss during the pandemic affected low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, the long-term effects could produce increased dropouts (Dorn et al., 2021a). It is critical to understand the perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, their academic potential, future trajectory, and their current expectations. It is just as critical to analyze students' perceptions of their own self-efficacy and their metacognition of their strengths and weaknesses academically and socially. Chapter 3 reviews the research method implemented in conducting the study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Method**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas. In addition, this study includes the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

Educators need to learn more about low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and their academic outcomes through the perception of their teachers. The method of research section of the case study demonstrates the qualitative data and the analysis process as the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provide their perspectives on student academic performance. Future research can continue, expand, and extend from this case study. The selected urban south-central Texas district teachers remained anonymous throughout the study.

The overarching research question that guides the focus of the case study is: What are the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance? The research questions that will guide this study are:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

### **Research Design and Method**

The method of research for this study is a case study approach. The research leads to analysis of the collected data to draw conclusions to adequately answer the research questions of the case study (Anderson, 2010; Yin, 2009). The qualitative nature of the study considers the case study participants, the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, with respect, objectivity, and sans judgement (Hyett et al., 2014). The case study is based on interpretive results to answer the research questions, as it considers the lived experiences and perceptions of the case study teachers in context of the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, as the shared perspectives are described to capture the complex route to theory and best practices (Larkin, et al., 2019). According to Merriam (2009), education is the ideal setting for a qualitative study as it deals with real-world issues.

Through various sources of information, the data is presented in the form of a case study, which utilizes detail, descriptions, and themes (Creswell, 2007). The case study uses realistic data, and the research study describes a contemporary problem within a real-world setting (Yin, 2009) giving a rich and detailed account as insight reflects the case study teachers' perceptions

(Merriam, 2009). In a qualitative case study, there is little to no control over the real-world situation and the focus is on a real-world issue (Yin, 2009).

The research study utilizes an explanatory research design (Yin, 2009) to describe the influence of teacher/student relationships on the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The teacher is the closest person to the student and the value of the student/teacher relationship is considered. The teachers in case study gave their perceptions on student social/emotional learning and academic growth and achievement.

The methodology for this proposed research conducted is a qualitative case study approach, as I described the teachers' perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic outcomes that affect the academic performance to include exploration in the natural context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). The case study research connects the results and conclusions to the research questions (Anderson, 2010; Yin, 2009). Through the detail the data provides, the case study participants' words are used to provide detail and context of the data, as it centers on the participants and the everyday problems and challenges (Merriam, 2009; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The case study is simplistic in context and conducted in a specialized environment, a high school campus (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2012; Ridder, 2017). In real-world context, the case study approach obtains in-depth understanding and comprehension of an event (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009; Zainal, 2007). The case study addresses real-life experiences of teachers' perceptions for patterns that led to themes. I analyzed the voices of the case study participants and after much reflection and reflexivity, a complex interpretation of the data is provided and connects to the problem of practice (Austin & Sutton, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

The patterns and themes emerged through the qualitative collection of case study participants' experiences and the analysis of participant feelings to construct meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Inductive coding included clustered patterns that developed into themes (Lotto, 1986). Qualitative research builds a more complex understanding of the whole student through analysis as students perform in their natural setting (Anderson, 2010; Austin & Sutton, 2014; Creswell, 1998). The case study is appropriate because it gives real-lived insight with feedback and real-life perspectives of the teachers rather than large group generalizations (Cuyjet, 2011; Mogra, 2014). Through qualitative research, human complexities and experience through observation and interpretation (Reisetter et al., 2004). The research developed the qualitative findings into a rich and deep understanding in the human experience (Churchill, 2021). Reality or existence is how the research participant thinks, feels, and perceives what is in their consciousness (Lauer, 1967; Moustakas, 1994; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The qualitative data were coded by clustering themes (See Appendix D) through bracketing and horizontalization and structural descriptions which provides a textural-structural analysis (Moustakas, 1994). A teacher questionnaire was securely emailed to each case teacher via email network for return through Google Document submission. Semistructured one-on-one interviews were immediately scheduled to ask probing and follow-up questions (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Terrell, 2016).

Content analysis was used to make predictions and inferences based on the analysis of the teacher participant survey and the semistructured one-on-one interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Terrell, 2016). The apparent and latent meanings of the data materialized, and inferences predicted from the patterns and trends detected in the research (Brown et al., 2017; Terrell, 2016). The questionnaires and the transcripts of the interviews were utilized to quantify

the results (Busetto et al., 2020; Terrell, 2016). Transcripts and field notes will have occurred simultaneously during the structured one-on-one interviews (Terrell, 2016; Tessier, 2012). According to Morgan et al. (2017), "Observation methods have the potential to reach beyond other methods that rely largely or solely on self-report" (p. 1060).

The feelings and beliefs of the case study teachers were observed, noted, and ascertained their reactions to their own perceptions of student academic performance (Davis & Dague, 2019; Terrell, 2016). The data were triangulated (see Appendices E, F, and G) through the observations and field notes with the questionnaires and interviews. Qualitative case studies focus on the feedback and insight gained by the case participants as their perceptions can offer the greatest opportunity at making real change in people's lives (Merriam, 2009; Rashid et al., 2019). The quality of the research focused through the research questions and the triangulation of the data noting for insight and understanding (Stake, 2005).

### **Population**

The selected urban high school is located in south central Texas, enrolled over 3000 students for the 2021–22 school year grades 9-12 (Murphy et al., 2022). The selected urban high school located in south central Texas also employs 184 teachers. The ethnicity breakdown of race/ethnicities of the teachers at the high school are 18 African American teachers, 62 Latinx teachers, and 101 White teachers (Murphy et al., 2022). The case study utilized 10 teachers from the selected urban south-central Texas high school and employed the snowballing sample method to increase the number of teacher participants to 20 case study participants. The research study utilized the data from teacher participants for evaluation and analysis. Teachers from the selected urban south-central high school were chosen as the case study participants because they are the direct link to low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and their academic performance.

Contact with the approved teacher case study participants was made and questionnaires were sent through the teachers' personal email addresses.

The participants of this case study included 20 high school teachers, as listed in Table 1, currently teaching at a selected urban south central Texas high school. The participants consisted of 17 females (85%) with 0 to 25 years of teaching experience and three male teachers (15%) with 10 years and less of teaching experience. Of the 20 case study participants, 11 case study participants (55%) are White, seven case study participants are Latinx (35%), and two case study participants (10%) are Black.

### **Study Sample**

A snowballing sampling method to include 20 teachers in totality of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students was utilized. Snowballing method sampling included non-probability sampling from a designated small size of teachers who help recruit other district teachers to participate in the study (Simkus, 2022). The district teachers collaborate and network with each other and they have similar qualifications (Table 1) and characteristics (Simkus, 2022). Original case study participants identified others within the district who share similar roles and are directly connected to low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Simkus, 2022).

All 20 case study participants (100%) are employed as teachers at a selected urban south-central high school. Of the 20 teachers participating as case study participants, 15 teachers (75%) are English Language Arts (ELA), with two case study participants teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), and one case study participant teaching journalism in addition to their ELA classes. Two case study participants (10%) teach in the history department, one case study participant (5%) is an ESL teacher, one case study participant (5%) is a Special Education teacher, and one case study participant (5%) is a Dyslexic teacher (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Demographic Information of Case Study Participants*

Participant	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Subject area	Grade level	Years of teaching experience
P1	Female	White	English Lang. Arts	High School	Over 16
P2	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	6–10
P3	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	Over 16
P4	Female	White	History	High School	Over 16
P5	Female	Latinx	English Lang Arts/ESL	High School	0–5
P6	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	6–10
P7	Female	Latinx	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P8	Female	Latinx	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P9	Female	Latinx	ESL	High School	0–5
P10	Female	Black	English Lang Arts	High School	Over 16
P11	Male	Latinx	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P12	Male	White	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P13	Female	Latinx	English Lang Arts/Journalism	High School	0–5
P14	Male	Latinx	English Lang Arts/ESL	High School	0–5
P15	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	Over 16



Participant	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Subject area	Grade level	Years of teaching experience
P16	Female	White	History	High School	6–10
P17	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P18	Female	White	English Lang Arts	High School	0–5
P19	Female	Black	Dyslexia	High School	11–15
P20	Female	White	Special Education	High School	Over 16

*Note.* Case Study Participants' demographic information was collected in the questionnaire via Google Forms prior to conducting the semistructured one-on-one interviews.

The sample size snowballed, like a rolling snowball gaining momentum and through non-probability sampling, I selected the first 10 high school teachers of the population, so not all high school teachers were selected (Simkus, 2022). The email sent to each of the ten initial participating teachers requested the teachers to recruit one other teacher from the same high school to participate in the case study and the case study used the same processes to inform new participants of the study, obtained approvals and informed consent, and presented risks/benefits of participating in the study (Simkus, 2022).

To recruit the original population of teachers, a letter via email was sent that stated the propose of the study for teacher participants. Once the case study received teacher approvals and informed consent was distributed, to include the purpose of the case study, teacher participants' expectations and criteria for participating in the study, and the risks/benefits that are associated with the study assure confidentiality, a Google Document of the questionnaire was distributed (See Appendix B).

## **Materials/Instruments**

Data collection consisted of an online questionnaire distributed through secure teacher personal email and one-on-one interviews, to follow-up from the questionnaires I conducted in-person or by Zoom remote conferencing (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). The questionnaire focused on students and their needs based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) and the one-on-one interviews focused on the teachers' perceptions of their students and their self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006) to give feedback on the growth and achievement of their students for the 2022–2023 school year. The one-on-one interviews, questions developed by me based on the review of literature, focused on teacher perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student factors influencing growth and achievement for the 2022–2023 school year. Demographic data forms (See Appendix B) included case study participant information such as, gender, ethnicity, age, and race (Allen, 2017; Terrell, 2016).

In compliance with Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board, all case study participants received informed consent (Appendix A) and a description of the nature of the case study. In addition to informed consent approvals, an overview of the case study was given and informed the participants of potential risks in an email letter. The research includes qualitative data in the form of a teacher questionnaire via email, followed up by a one-on-one interview for data analysis. The qualitative research is based on an interpretive approach in reflection of the natural school/classroom setting to attempt to draw conclusions from teacher perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and their academic performance (Denzin & Lincoln, 2001).

### ***Teacher Questionnaire via Email***

The teacher case study participants were presented with a questionnaire (Appendix B) in a Google Document that teachers completed with a specific time deadline for return. The Maslow Assessment of Needs Scale (MANS; Skirrow & Perry, 2009) was utilized as a framework to develop the questionnaire to evaluate the school academic and learning environment. The questionnaire contains 15 statements designed in a 5-point Likert-scale format with 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree as answer choices. The completion of the questionnaire took the teachers less than half an hour to complete. With an online method of distributing the teacher questionnaire, it allowed for convenience to promote flexibility, transparency, and trustworthiness. The participants received the same questionnaire to learn more about their perceptions and behaviors to analyze the written responses. Questions were asked in a way which allows for case study participants to answer in more spontaneous responses (Popping, 2015).

### ***One-on-One Interviews***

Once the questionnaires were completed, interviews, developed by me based on the review of literature, were scheduled to further the discussions. Interviews were conducted on a scheduled Zoom call. Interviewing was the main data-collection strategy of the case study and gave teacher perspectives as insight into their perspectives and experiences (Hutchinson et al., 2017). Interviews are one of the most important sources of information of the case study (Yin, 2009). Semistructured interview questions, developed by me based on the review of literature, (Appendix C) focused on self-efficacy of students through teacher perspectives (Bandura, 2006) and based on Maslow (1943) hierarchy of needs, as well as research from the review of literature. When designing the interview questions to present, human functioning was considered

in producing a sound one-on-one interview in understanding human behaviors (Bandura, 2006; Roberts, 2020).

Interview questions developed by me based on the review of literature were designed to yield the most pertinent information using open-ended questions and “think back” questions (Krueger, 1998). Interview questions developed by me based on the review of literature should get participants involved and engaged (Krueger, 1998). It is critical to probe for understanding if discussion is inconsistent or vague (Krueger, 1998). The research data were compared and contrasted from the responses across the focus groups to notate themes, patterns, and interpretations (Krueger, 1998). Any intensity was notated as participants respond with depth of feeling and connotation through voice, tone, speed, and the excitement or emphasis on certain words (Krueger, 1998). Patterns and themes emerged by teacher responses based on perceptions of lived experiences and perceived capabilities (Bandura, 2006; Yeung & Yau, 2022). With a refined one-on-one interview process, feedback and responses signaled patterns and themes to enhance the educational needs of each student (Bandura, 2006; Camp & Davis, 2011).

Notes were taken throughout the interview session, to record as field notes and observation (Allen, 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2017). The interview Zoom call interview was transcribed and related to the information analyzed (Bailey, 2008; Hutchinson et al., 2017). Dialogue occurred between the case study participants and me (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). This method of qualitative data gathering allowed for exploration and expansion on teacher perceptions, feelings, and beliefs (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) about their own self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006) regarding their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, the support they received from their educators and campus, completion of the self-needs assessment survey (Maslow, 1943) in relation to their student growth and achievement.

The relevant open-ended interview questions, follow-up to the self-assessment survey, designed to receive meaningful and interpretable information and while the question was neutral, it requires longer statement answers with description and detail (Popping, 2015). Any evaluations or analysis were avoided before all the focus groups conclude. It was critical to have an open mind and remain unbiased (Seidman, 2006).

### ***Coding Procedures***

Coding procedures were utilized to include the raw data from the open-ended questionnaires and semistructured interviews (Busetto et al., 2020). Data were categorized in patterns and themes for evaluation and analysis (Bengtsson, 2016; Roberts, 2020). The data were analyzed using a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative approach used all of the words the case study participants gave in their interviews and compared how these words are interconnected and interrelated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative approach covered a three-step process: open coding, categorizing, and synthesizing themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Topics formulated into codes and the information was organized into categories to then identified categories as topics were grouped in closest relation to show the interrelationships (Klein, 2020; Tesch, 1990). Abbreviations were created for each category and placed in sequential order categories by alphabetizing while the analysis performed on each category; any recoding completed during the analysis stage (Johnson et al., 2020; Tesch, 1990).

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

The case study participants transferred the questionnaire electronically, and I observed and transcribed during the semistructured one-on-one interviews (Tessier, 2012). While teacher participants remained anonymous, each participant completed demographic data forms, to

include gender, ethnicity, age, and race/ethnicity (Allen, 2017; Terrell, 2016). The data collection was broad and opened at the beginning of the study, and the process was flexible and convenient for the teacher participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Data were critically evaluated and analyzed in comparison (Locke et al., 2017).

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data collection led to patterns and themes in the interview transcripts and questionnaires (Patton, 2002). The interviews were not assessed, evaluated, and analyzed until completion of all interviews and synthesis of the data were analyzed following the completion (Seidman, 2006). Anecdotal field notes and observations were transcribed during the one-on-one interviews for preservation of the data (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006; Yin, 2009). Types of information was identified and classified embedded in the data (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). Divided categories were created and subdivided in a stratified sampling (Thomas, 2020). The data were narrowed down until no new categories could be added (Saunders et al., 2018). Finally, the results were validated, and the discussion was supported by the review of literature (Cooper et al., 2018).

To conclude themes from patterns, a full description of the campus, the case study participants, and how the research delineated the data were provided (Creswell, 2007). The consistent patterns provided themes and provided meaning in context (Stake, 2005). All questionnaires and observations/field notes from the interviews were reviewed to make confirmations, draw connections, update any consistencies and inconsistencies (Seidman, 2006). The meaning of the data was provided through the patterns and themes concluded (Seidman, 2006).

## **Ethical Considerations**

The confidentiality of case study participants is the highest priority, and the protocols are secured to ensure the teacher case study participants did not experience potential harm or distress (Barrow et al., 2021; Spratt, 2017). Great care and concern were taken to remain objective, neutral, and trustworthy (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Validity of the case study was secured as the goal and not the outcome (Maxwell et al., 2017). When the data and evidence is secured, it will minimize issues with validity (Maxwell, 2005). Ethics and trustworthiness critically determine the credibility warranting further studies and the process of the case study is described to disclose any nuances or inconsistencies within the study (Mears, 2009). Bias was relinquished and the research was viewed with an objective lens (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Validity and bias when interviewing case study participants was avoided, to not direct or lead the interviewees in direction (Mears, 2009). I have a background in the content area of the study, and I am no longer a teacher at the school; extreme caution to remain objective was maintained and allowed the data to guide the process, rather than bias (Mears, 2009). It was critical for me to allow the case study participants' perceptions to demonstrate their point of view, rather than the researcher's (Mears, 2009). Through the chain of evidence, all case study participants' explanations were evaluated and analyzed, even when they may rival each other (Yin, 2009). Caution was taken to maintain a valid chain of evidence in a secure laptop (Yin, 2009). The protection of the human case study participants was priority, and no harm or risk affected the participants (Mears, 2009; Seidman, 2006). The case study participants and the chain of evidence remained confidential, and pseudonyms were given to each case study participant as numbered participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009).

The expertise of the case study doctoral committee reviewed data collection and data analysis for this case study. An objective peer doctoral student was utilized to follow-up with patterns and themes the data produced. Ethical best practices were followed according to Abilene Christian University (Jolls, 2019). All teacher case study participants remained confidential as to not reveal their identity (Allen, 2017). A trustworthy setting was established for case study participants, while remaining balanced and objective, respecting all beliefs and appreciative of the participation (Terrell, 2016; White, 2020).

### **Assumptions**

Teachers' perceptions are considered honest, accurate, and to include reflective feedback. Teachers' perceptions contained thoughtful feedback as they addressed their own self-awareness, self-efficacy, and feelings about the learning process and environment providing insight into low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic performance. The data were described, synthesized, and evaluated to make references to what is missing in instructional strategies and how relationships influence academic outcomes for low SES at risk Black and Latinx students.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of the study are the sample size, and the study is based on one high school. Since the case study focuses on one south-central school district at its one high school, it is not representative of the whole or greater population of teachers (Simkus, 2022). Due to the small number of case study participants, I faced limitations in large generalizations due to sample size (Mears, 2009).



**Delimitations**

The delimitations of the study include the sample populations with the focus on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic performance through the perceptions of their teachers. The study includes a small teacher participant group.

**Summary**

To understand the academic performance low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students through the perceptions of their teachers, the research study included a case study approach to qualitative data analysis. Questionnaires and one-on-one interviews, through data analysis, provided educators insight and perceptions from the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The research case study provided insight in how teachers perceived the learning process and academic performance to improve academic outcomes for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas. In addition, this study explored the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

This chapter contains the findings including case study participants' demographics, the findings of participants' responses to the questionnaire, and the findings of the participants' responses to the one-on-one semistructured interview. Ten teachers were initially contacted at the urban south central Texas high school. Utilizing the snowball method of data collection, a total of 20 teachers participated in the case study. After electronically signing and submitting the consent form, they each completed a Google Form Likert-scale questionnaire, based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Case study participants answered questions based on a range between five (representing strongly agree) and one (strongly disagree). Following the completion of the questionnaire, each case study participant responded to a one-on-one semistructured Google Meets interview. The interview took approximately 15 minutes to complete and was recorded and transcribed. The interview data were categorized and coded for patterns and trends.

The data were analyzed using a constant comparative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative approach uses all the words the case study participants used in their interviews and compares how these words are interconnected and interrelated (Glaser & Strauss,

1967). The constant comparative approach covered a three-step process: open coding, categorizing, and synthesizing themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The overarching research question that guided the case study was: What are the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance? The research questions that guided this study were:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

### **Case Study Participants Demographics**

The participants of this case study included 20 high school teachers, as listed in Table 1, currently teaching at a selected urban south central Texas high school. The participants consisted of 17 female teachers (85%) with 0 to 25 years of teaching experience and three male teachers (15%) with 10 years or less of teaching experience. Eleven case study participants (55%) are White, seven case study participants are Latinx (35%), and two case study participants (10%) are Black.

All 20 case study participants (100%) are employed as teachers at a selected urban south-central high school. Fifteen teachers (75%) teach English language arts (ELA), two case study participants teach English as a second language (ESL) in a split schedule, and one case study participant teaches journalism in addition to their ELA classes. Two case study participants (10%) teach in the history department, one (5%) teaches students that receive ESL services, one (5%) teaches students that receive special education services, and one (5%) teaches students that receive services for dyslexia (see Table 2).

### **Findings for Research Question 1**

The participants' responses to questionnaire questions: Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q9, and Q12 and interview questions: I17, I18, I19, and I21 described the findings for RQ1. The theme derived from participants' responses is students' needs such as: sleep, food, water, shelter, and security must be met before learning can take place. Research Question 1 states: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

### ***Participants' Responses to Questionnaire Questions***

Participants' responses to questionnaire question 1: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students eat breakfast and lunch at school indicated that 50% of the participants responded neutral to this question. However, 20% of the participants responded with strongly agreed to the question. Participants' responses to questionnaire question 2: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students sleep eight hours a night indicated that 65% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question 3: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are usually hungry throughout the school day indicated that 40% agreed.

Participants' responses to questionnaire question 4: If my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are tired/hungry, it is difficult for them to focus and concentrate, indicated that 63% strongly agreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question 9: My low SES at-risk students feel safe and valued at school indicated 44% felt neutral. However, 39% of participants disagreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question 12: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within my class indicated 55% strongly agreed. The frequency and percentages of responses to RQ1 questionnaire questions are reflected in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Questionnaire Responses per Question in Response to RQ1*

Q#	Total	SD/1	SD/1	D/2	D/2	N/3	N/3	A/4	A/4	SA/5	SA/5
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Q1	20	0	0%	3	15%	10	50%	3	15%	4	20%
Q2	20	6	30%	13	65%	1	5%	0	0%	0	0%
Q3	20	0	0%	1	5%	6	30%	8	40%	5	25%
Q4	19	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	7	37%	12	63%
Q9	18	0	0%	7	39%	8	44%	3	17%	0	0%
Q12	20	0	0%	5	25%	6	30%	8	40%	10	5%

*Note.* Frequency distribution represents questionnaire responses.

***Participants' Responses to Interview Questions***

The participants' responses to interview questions: I17, I18, I19, and I21 informed the findings for RQ1. Participants' responses to interview question 17: Do your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning and about themselves as students (self-

efficacy) indicated that all of the 20 case study participants (100%) do not believe that their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning or think about themselves as students.

Case Study Participant 2 replied, “I think that often the learning and their identity as a student comes very low on their list. Of priorities and what is currently troubling them that takes place within and outside of school. So, no.”

Case Study Participant 3 responded, “Oh no, no, we model we practice. They don't know how to do that, but we constantly teach them through modeling. We reflect constantly before and after assignments with metacognition and reading. And writing.”

Case Study Participant 5 stated,

I feel like at this generation this age group is more concerned about what the future holds, they don't see them. So, the students see themselves as I need to work. So, when we have off and we are on Thanksgiving break spring break Christmas break, they are already thinking of I need to pull in the shifts. They're coming in tired because they've worked late hours in a day because that's their cultural background. They have to hustle. That's all they've ever known. A lot of students don't graduate from high school because they're pulled into, you need to help the family. You need a job; you need to work. You need to help in the farm and the ranch, you need to help at work and them and the factory, whatever they work. So, I feel like they don't see themselves as students, but as a larger paycheck for the family.

Cases Study Participant 6 stated,

I don't think they necessarily think about their learning. I think they do understand. They are students, but I think there are so many other concerns that they have, it's not priority.

And so, I think there's a lot of avoidance as well. I see it every day in the hallway, the circling, circling, circling. I don't think they want to be in the classroom. I think it deals with how they feel about themselves and they rather just not, I don't want to feel. I don't want to feel pressure, I don't want to do anything else because I'm here and that's all I can be.

Case Study Participant 7 added,

No, they don't. So, I do try to get them to with my reading kids, especially because we do have sort of that extra time because I'm not quite as beholden to curriculum and trying to get them ready for a test and because I am only support. So, at least once a week and because the classes are so small, I'll pull up their grades and we'll talk about what's going on in this class, you know, especially with their English. What is it that you're not understanding because then I can help them. But I've noticed that now they're starting to care because they know that I'm a teacher who's going look for them, they're starting to ask on a regular basis. And so, they're more aware of where they stand and who, what classes they need to really be focusing on. And so, I don't think it comes from, you know, it's some, it's a habit that has to be taught because it's not coming from at home, but they do care and we see that right before the end of the semester, and I know that and so knowing that I wanted to get keep them, you know, on a weekly thing. So, I think my students for sure are reflecting more on their learning.

Case Study Participant 11 replied,

No, I don't think so I don't think they see themselves as students. So as learning the, they look at his in terms of like survival, right, in society, and things tools that I need to acquire. But unnecessarily like that, this is something that I'm learning and that they've

gone from point A to point B, as far as their development, right? It is fight or flight for them, but they do not reflect on themselves as students.

Case Study Participant 20 stated,

No, but they're usually shocked when they do well. So mostly they are avoiding and they don't a lot of them don't like school, but after they are successful, their anxiety goes down the behavior clears up, and then they have more support or more confidence in themselves.

Participants' responses to interview questions 18: Is self-efficacy innate or a learned skill? indicated that all of the 20 case study participants (100%) said self-efficacy is a learned skill. Not one case study participant stated that self-efficacy is completely innate.

Case Study Participant 2 answered,

I would definitely something that has to be learned. It has to be taught repetitively. It has to be ingrained that this is something that they do, not come to the table with, in terms of the classroom. No, it's definitely something to be taught.

Case Study Participant 5 stated,

It's a learned skill. I don't think they know how to be a student, how to take notes, how to write this? When I write something on the board, they're like, why are you riding on the board? That's something you have to build in. You have to teach them. Students walk in and I say, "Grab these materials, Grab these pencils. You don't have a pencil, go look for one." They don't know how to be students. They're so cooped up with what's wrong in their society. What's wrong in their world? There's so many problems that's going on their world at home that they forget how to be a child.



Case Study Participant 6 replied, “It is probably learned because my sister says she's even seeing it in third graders and graders. She's seeing the same kind of avoidance behavior in the little ones. Students don't want to think about themselves as students.”

Case Study Participant 12 stated, “I think it's learned. I think self-efficacy is learned through intentional learning about how to be introspective and how to self-evaluate and how to do specific things to make yourself more efficient, more powerful, more efficacious.”

Case Study Participant 18 responded,

I think it's a learned skill. I yeah, I think sometimes they do it, but they don't realize they're doing it. And we have to teach them how to think about their thinking. And when you say that to them, they just think we're crazy. Hey, I'm going teach you to think about your thinking.

Participants' responses to interview question 19: Are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians involved with their child's learning? indicated that 17 teachers (85%) stated their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians are not involved in their child's learning. Three teachers (15%) said that parents/guardians are involved in their child's learning. These teachers teach in specialized categories: one teacher teaches students in honors classes, one teacher teaches emergent bilingual students in ESL (newcomers to the English language), and one teacher teaches students that receive services for dyslexia.

Case Study Participant 2 stated,

If I were to say what I've seen most the answer would be no, there's a select few. Of course, parents that you're going to see involved but in terms of the population as a whole it's you don't get a lot of communication or support from here.

Case Study Participant 3 replied,

No, but we try to encourage, that and I do think I mentioned this before, but I think those two Sub POPs are different answers. I think the Hispanic is yes, more so. Hispanic parents are more involved than the African-American parents. I don't know, I just think there's some differences there.

Case Study Participant 5 responded,

I don't feel like they're involved, if they are involved, it's not that many. I know a lot of parents that either are there, separated divorce, one of the parents, missing absent parents. So, the only parent that is available is constantly working, so they're not acknowledging the behavior or what the child's going through.

Case Study Participant 9 added,

Very little, there's more parents that are not involved. Parents have very little involvement these days. When they do try to be involved parents, I've found that at least for the Latinx students, some of the parents don't feel comfortable with the English language and they, they kind of fear, even reaching out to teachers in the first place. And there, they feel very limited as to what they can do and I feel like sometimes the students use that to their advantage to just keep that that you know that miscommunication between the two and I've found even talking with teachers, they're afraid to call home because of the language barrier because the parent doesn't understand me. I can't call home and then I don't know if the kids use that to their advantage sometimes.

Case Study Participant 13 stated, "I think they're not involved not as much involved as they want to be because they have other things going on that they need to take care of."

Participants' responses to interview question 21: How did COVID-19 impact your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement and was remote learning

effective? indicated of the 20 case study participants (100%) stated COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement. In addition, remote learning was not effective for this population of students.

Case Study Participant 1 responded, "I feel like it was a real detriment. I feel like that they lost social skills. They lost academic skills and some of them lost the will to learn."

Case Study Participant 2 stated, "I feel like this caused a tremendous gap, more so than the one we were already seeing. COVID has hit these families probably harder than any other families."

Case Study Participant 4 added,

Oh terrible. They are far less interactive with others and teachers. I still have kids that are fully masked, they've been fully masked all year. It's like they're hiding. It almost feels like they're hiding. At this point, I don't know. They could live with immunocompromised people. I'm not sure, but it is very odd to be completely masked. And then yes, the lack of interaction with others. It's like they really just interact. Digitally, that's how they're interacting, they'll sit in the classroom instead of getting up. When I say, hey, if you have a question just, you know, wave me over, get up and come talk to me. They will send me an email from their desk through their phone.

Case Study Participant 5 replied,

I feel like, because the lack of technology at available at home or the Internet access at home, they were constricted. They were like limited on what they could do at home. And if they did have technology at home, it was more for to the little ones because they needed to know what was going on at that time. So, they left them simultaneously. They left them asynchronous, so they got to do whatever they could at that time, whatever they

understood, which left them very minimal amount of learning and those who were on the computer technology and I asked them; they were honest with me. Miss, I just put you on mute. I went back I went back to sleep. So, I felt like they just whatever had whatever after they did have, it was taking advantage and those who didn't have that option didn't get the advantage either. I feel like they had to learn some skills at middle school, that should carry it on all the way and had that foundation built and they lack that they skipped that part. So, it's like skipping learning how to walk and they want you to start running. It's not possible, you're you might run some might run some might not but some most will probably stumble and fall and getting up part is getting even harder. Some of these students lost parents and multiple family members to COVID. It has been devastating and we just expect them to pick right up and move forward, not even considering the trauma they have experienced.

Case Study Participant 7 replied,

I think it really is that engagement that motivation especially if they stayed at home, those one and a half years and didn't come on campus. They, I'm noticing, are the ones that are taking longer to adjust back to normal. And cell phones. I mean, I know it's across the board, but with my low socioeconomic, it's they didn't have any type of adult telling me. Okay, it's time to get off. It's time. And so now, their brain chemistry is like different. Like, even if we like, they're literally addicted and don't know what to even do. So, the cell phones for me, that lack of motivation, and really, just like, lots of excuses and complete avoidance. Even when you are building them up, like look, you can do this, look at where you were at the beginning of the year and look at where you are now. There's just and I mean part of that is adults, right? We let them make those excuses. But

really the biggest difference I see between beyond, you know, how engaged they are depending on that cell phone usage between my honors kids, and my low level socioeconomic, they cannot get off of their devices.

Case Study Participant 11 added,

I feel like it affected them negatively. I might think their focus went from how can I better myself as a student and as a son or a daughter? But to okay, how can I survive, right? They may have encountered things at home and not being able to provide for the family. The mom dad, maybe not being able to work and so those individuals went into a mode where it was like. Okay, I needed again fight or flight, right? Like I need to do something to survive to help my mom, my dad. So, I feel like they put their own dreams aside with their work. They're in, you know anything having to do with themselves to put it on the back burner. I feel like they focus just on the family unit as a whole. Most of those students upon when they've returned to school after COVID. But I feel it took them a while to connect again with their peers, very quiet, not very engaged in activities. But then once they have the opportunity to share their experience, what it is that they saw and the reasons behind it. Um, I felt as though that, you know, that they were someone different, right, like, that's their true personality was coming through and everything that they did because they have that opportunity to share it.

Case Study Participant 14 stated,

Oh, I feel like COVID-19 definitely had a big impact because a lot of my students they either didn't log on or they just stop going to school. Like I have a couple of students this year who actually didn't they didn't come to school for two years. And they were from Mexico, they came to the United States. COVID-19 happened. So, they just, they, they

weren't aware of what was going on and how school was being done. So, they just didn't go to school, and one of my students missed the whole year of learning. So, now that I'm in the classroom with them. I know that, you know, not only are they behind because of COVID-19 and stuff, but now at the same time, we're trying to learn a whole different language.

Case Study Participant 17 responded,

I would say it definitely has impacted them negatively. I think they lack a lot of background knowledge. I think they have avoided school and instruction for so long, they're lacking in a lot of the background knowledge. Academic foundation is needed to make freshman successful, so these ninth grade students are functioning at about 2 or more grade levels behind, academic, socially, and emotional.

Case Study Participant 18 stated,

It impacted them in devastating ways. They stopped thinking about school and they started thinking that skipping school and not being there was okay. And I think that we gave them a pass to do that. And now, you know, after we're all back after COVID, it's become a problem. Students are constantly absent and think that it's okay to just go on vacation during school instead of being present.

Case Study Participant 20 replied,

I think that it has impacted them and mainly in the fact that even if there was technology available to them, they did not have, you know, Internet and all this stuff that you needed in the world. And I think everyone was struggling so much that education again took a back seat, and they were taking care of younger siblings, and all of that kind of stuff.

### Findings for Research Question 1 Summary

Research Question (RQ) 1 describes the needs based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and on interview questions I developed based on the review of literature. Analysis of the case study participants' responses resulted in the following descriptions of factors that impact student learning: student needs must be met before learning can occur, self-efficacy of the student is learned, implications of the lack of parental/guardian involvement, and the effects of COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*RQ1 Student Needs and Classroom Environment*

Factors that impact student learning	Frequencies of participants responses	%
Student needs must be met before learning can occur	19 out of 20	95
Self-efficacy is a learned skill	20 out of 20	100
Implications of lack of parental/guardian involvement	17 out of 20	85
The effects of COVID-19	20 out of 20	100

*Note.* Frequency of participants' answers to generate theme to RQ1.

Student needs must be met before learning can occur (Maslow, 1943). The data revealed that low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are not sleeping at night, are often hungry, and that impedes the learning process. The case study participants agreed that when students are tired and hungry, it is more difficult to teach. According to Maslow (1943), physiological and safety

needs must be met for students to move into a sense of belonging and acceptance. Students desire a sense of belonging with other students and within their environment (Maslow, 1943). Case Study Participant 3 stated, “Maslow before Bloom.” The case study participant was referring to student needs before student thinking. With external challenges such as lack of parental/guardian involvement and the effects of COVID-19 pandemic, meeting student needs is more critical than ever. If students cannot get their basic needs, such as food, water, shelter, safety, and security, they can never advance to achieve higher needs such as acceptance, belonging, and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

### **Research Question 2 Findings**

The participants’ responses to questionnaire questions: Q5, Q6, Q7, Q8 and interview questions: I6, I11, I14 described the findings for RQ2. The theme derived from participants’ responses is student/teacher relationships must be developed before learning can take place. Research Question 2 states: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

### **Participants’ Responses to Questionnaire Questions**

Participants’ responses to questionnaire question 5: The school and classes are comfortable and enjoyable for my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated that 50% are neutral. However, 30% of case study participants disagreed. Participants’ responses to questionnaire question 6: The student/teacher relationships are strong and bonded indicated that 45% are neutral. However, 30% of case study participants agreed. Participants’ responses to questionnaire question 7: The low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at school are generally respectful and nice indicated that 74% are neutral. However, 16% of case study participants



agreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question 8: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students feel valued as a member of my class indicated that 60% agreed. The frequency and percentages of responses to RQ1 questionnaire questions are reflected in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Questionnaire Responses per Question in Response to RQ2*

Q #	Total	SD/1	SD/1	D/2	D/2	N/3	N/3	A/4	A/4	SA/5	SA/5
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Q5	20	1	5%	6	30%	10	50%	1	5%	1	10%
Q6	20	0	0%	4	20%	9	45%	6	30%	1	5%
Q7	19	0	0%	1	5%	14	74%	3	16%	1	5%
Q8	19	0	0%	1	5%	4	20%	12	60%	3	15%

*Note.* Frequency distribution represents Questionnaire responses.

***Participants' Responses to Interview Questions***

The participants' responses to interview questions: I6, I11, I14, I15, and I16 described the findings for RQ2.

Participants' responses to interview question 6: How important are student/teacher relationships in student growth and achievement? indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) stated student/teacher relationship is the most important factor in student growth and achievement. All of the 20 case study participants feel that student/teacher relationships must be developed, cultivated, and secure before learning can occur.

Case Study Participant 1 responded, "I think they're very important. The most important thing."

Case Study Participant 2 stated, “The most important I feel like that's above all because if you have no relationship with your students, you will not be able to teach them.”

Case Study Participant 3 replied, “I think it is the most important thing because without relationships, they won't learn if they don't like you and they won't listen to you.”

Case Study Participant 4 responded, “It's the most important, it's the absolute most.”

Case Study Participant 5 answered,

Extremely important. I think it's extremely important because not only can they, they feel comfortable enough to tell you where they're wrong or they are comfortable, not to make a mistake, and they have that confidence that you will help them, and not just put them down in certain ways. It invaded (*sic*), it's encouraging them to do better be better.

Case Study Participant 7 responded,

I think they are important on campus and there's a lot that we can do within the 20 by 20 room that we have. But there are certain academic things and behavioral issues that sometimes no matter how good of a relationship we've built with that student, we don't have control over, they don't have control over. But I do think without any relationship, like you're not going to get anything out of those students.

Case Study Participant 8 said, “Very important.”

Case Study Participant 9 exclaimed, “Oh, a hundred percent. Yeah, super important.”

Case Study Participant 10 responded, “Extremely important particularly with low SES students. Usually there's a need for some trust there before they're willing to take risks.”

Case Study Participant 11 replied,

I think it is detrimental; I mean like they're very, very important, right? Like it's something that has to be established from the get-go in order to have your students, you

know, you want their buy-in. You need to make sure that they feel like they can talk to you openly freely at all times of the school day not just in your classroom, right? But anytime they see you. So, I think it's very important that educators have that open relationship with our students.

Case Study Participant 12 added, "Oh, very important for sure."

Case Study Participant 13 stated,

I think it's really important. There's that Ted talk that says that kids won't learn from teachers they don't like. So, my big thing is spending a majority of my time learning and getting to know my students that way, when it comes down to them, respecting me and learning, for me, they understand that, you know, our relationship can only work if it's both ways.

Case Study Participant 14 said,

I think that's very important because I noticed my surroundings and my school and I see teachers who struggle creating that relationship. Oftentimes, those students fall through the cracks and those very same students who have those relationships with other teachers, they're engaged and they're motivated; they take risks. I think that the number one component of getting that success that you want from your students is making sure you have that good connection first.

Case Study Participant 15 stated,

I think they're very important because if they don't feel like you care and they don't feel comfortable with you, then they're not going to try. Especially ones that have always faced failure and then put down because of that failure. If there's not a trusting and safe environment, then they're not going to try to learn.

Case Study Participant 16 replied, “They are the most critical. A student isn’t going to learn when they don’t feel safe and they’re certainly not going to learn from a teacher that they don’t feel safe or respect.”

Case Study Participant 17 responded, “Very important. I don’t think they’d learn from someone they don’t love.”

Case Study Participant 18 said,

I think it’s everything. I think it’s the most important part of teaching because again that a lot of times they will shut down for teachers that they don’t have a relationship for or with. They don’t want to work hard for that teacher. And they are not as comfortable giving the wrong answer. So, they just don’t answer at all.

Case Study Participant 19 stated,

They are very important. They really need it. They need to know your heart is concerned about them, then particularly, not just first period or second period because they still want to be your favorites. They will still want your attention. They will still want to perform for you. So, we really have to have our hearts open to what does this kid need first? I can’t teach you if your heart is broken and I can’t teach you if you’re worried about what you’re going to eat later on and those kinds of things.

Case Study Participant 20 said, “It is the most important foundation to build on and it happens first.”

Participants’ responses to interview question 11: Do you connect with your students’ cultures and backgrounds? indicated all 20 case study participants (100%) stated they make effort to connect with all students’ cultures and backgrounds.

Case Study Participant 2 responded,

I feel like the connection comes first from the relationships you build with them, you know, getting to know them, especially if you don't know their culture, or if you are just, I guess under educated in that particular area of where student comes from, just taking that time to get to know them and where they come from. So that way you can start building those connections and building backgrounds in the class to help them with the things that they might not understand if they're from a different culture.

Case Study Participant 3 replied,

It was hard coming from a different school that was predominantly White and very academically balanced. This school is very relationship balanced and does not value academics so much. You need both so it was very much a culture shock at first. I had to take about six months to really understand the value and the importance of relationships with students and how to develop that. They say, 'Maslow before Bloom.' You have to learn that and how to foster that before jumping into academics and really spend the first three weeks developing that social and emotional connection before academic instruction. I had to restructure the way I design my English curriculum through relationships.

Case Study Participant 4 responded,

I appreciate cultures. I appreciate differences in diversity; they are just interesting to me. They really are and I try; I like culture, I like music. I like new music and old music. I will tell them, 'alright, give me some new songs for my workout mix, like I need something fresh. Give me something fresh for the cardio.' I'm naturally interested in them, but I am trying to like make it known that I value their opinions and what they like, what they do and their music and things that are important to them.

Case Study Participant 5 stated,

My ESL babies, I'm able to connect with them based on a lot of connections. So, if I teach them something, I always try to connect something that's worldwide or what they're used at home. So, they can understand that and they can build from there. When it comes to my regular general ed classes, I have a variety of students different backgrounds, so I went ahead and tried to see that can get all and try to make connections with what's going on in the world, going society and social media, so that they understand where I'm coming from, and it's a lot of understanding their culture first. So, the first three weeks of school, it's getting to know them. So, I can understand. Okay? This is where you're coming from this is how I can help you.

Case Study Participant 7 said,

It does help that I come from the district. Sometimes I know family members. But really asking them, especially in the beginning of the year, what's important on their student information sheet. What is important to them? It's the holidays right now and I know not everyone celebrates Christmas, but we talk about different holidays. They might celebrate different from everyone. Like SEL surrounding conflict resolution, but looking at how that might look different in different households, right? Because maybe your household does yell a lot but that doesn't mean your parents don't love you and it doesn't mean you are in conflict, right? And so, just kind of taking into consideration what I know and what I've learned. But yeah, I think the student information sheet is probably that first thing in the beginning of the year, where it is like, 'What do you want me to know about you or your family or your culture?' And so, they know they can talk to me about those things.

Case Study Participant 15 stated,

I try to make sure that I pull stories that are going to relate to the different kids population in the room. Like recently, we did a story that dealt with African Americans, a city that was bombed during World War I and that got those children involved in the lesson and then we had done another story that dealt with Mexican culture. So, it just makes them feel appreciated. It's not all Caucasian.

Participants' responses to interview question 14: Do you have a high number of behavioral disruptions in class or submitting discipline referrals for your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated of the 20 case study participants, 16 teachers (80%) do not have a high number of submissions of discipline referrals for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. However, the case study participants do state they have frequent classroom disruptions. All three male case study participants (100%) handle their own classroom disruptions and do not send student discipline referrals. Of the 20 case study participants, four teachers (20%) stated they regularly have behavioral disruptions in class and are submitting discipline referrals for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student population.

The four case study participants (20%) that regularly have behavioral issues are all female and two teachers are third-year teachers (0-5 years), one teacher is a sixth-year teacher (6-10 years), and the remaining teacher is in their 14th year (11-15 years).

Case Study Participant 4 said,

No, not at all. What referral? I don't even know how to write a referral. I haven't written a referral in years. My biggest problem is that they're like little statues in the room.

They're just coming and sitting or they don't interact. They don't talk. They don't look and they don't appear to listen. They tune out, you know, the music, you can't see their

air pods, but it is in the hair. You call their name and you want to ask them a question and you are happy to talk to them and they're totally ignoring you.

Case Study 5 Participant replied,

Yes, but I don't send a lot of referrals because I feel like if I would send a referral every single time, it looks bad on me as a teacher that you don't know how to manage your own classroom. So, the point that I have to ask for help, it makes me look like, 'oh, there's a problem with you, not the students.' So, I kind of feel like I am restricted in what I can ask for. And when they say, 'What can we help you?' I really don't know what they can help me with.

Case Study Participant 7 stated,

Yes, so behavior disruptions, I try to avoid referrals unless it's very disruptive or they are, you know, causing other students issues just because they're likely getting written up in their other classes. And I would rather them come to class and give me a little bit of a problem getting started, then be writing them up all the time and then they don't want to come to class. They will never learn. So, if I can get them in class and I can get them learning, but if I am writing them up all the time, they're not going to want to come.

Case Study Participant 11 responded, "No, I handle all of my own behavioral disruptions. I don't write referrals." Case Study Participant 12 said, "No, actually, if anything, it seems like the minority groups in my classroom tend to be the better-behaved students in my class."

Case Study Participant 14 replied,

Personally, not this year I haven't written any referrals. Even last year, I didn't write one. I don't write referrals. I deal with it on a one-on-one basis or with the parent. I don't really like to write referrals. This year I am seeing more Black and Latino students sent to DAP and that is the alternative center that kind of feeds into the district we are in.



Personally, I don't have but minimal behaviors. All it takes is for me to have a conversation with my student outside and they come back in and the behavior is done.

Participants' responses to interview question 15: How engaged are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated that all of the 20 case study participants (100%) struggle with student engagement.

Case Study Participant 2 stated, "It really depends on the day. So, there are certain times when I have great engagement but then there are other days where these students are just completely tapped out. And they are not engaged at all."

Case Study Participant 4 replied,

When I can get their attention and talk about some of the things that I've gone through, then I hold their attention and they pay better attention like our most recent unit on personal finance. When I give them a little bit of background, it's like their heads turn. And they, they pick their heads up out of the phone if I could just maintain their attention. It's an engagement issue for me more so than anything. Like, how do I get them to connect? How do I get them to like look away from the phone, like having a phone policy would be amazing? And I think I'd reach more people in the classroom. I really do. If I can get their attention there engaged, it's just if I can just quickly get them. It's a hook. They're like fish and see like if I can hook them then I got them if I can hook them. But a lot of them it's like they just you know, they stay on the periphery, they cannot disengage from whatever's happening in their life or whatever their entertainment is, you know, the World Cup has been an issue.

Case Study Participant 6 stated,

It varies. I have one student that came back from DAP. Puts his head down. I have another student. I think he could probably go to University of Texas. So, you know, it's just more challenging to engage them. It's just so hard to predict and I take student by student, each student by where they are and they are all going through so much.

Case Study Participant 7 responded,

The struggle is getting them engaged. The full class period bell to bell, so building in those brain breaks. But that's the engagement for me has been a big thing that kind of took me came from like left field because I'm used to having like engaged classes and not having that issue. But I'm noticing my high flyers kind of keeping the attention where it needed but the lower performing students are checked out. So yeah, definitely engagement.

Case Study Participant 9 added,

I think they are not engaged. It takes a lot of effort to get them engaged and keep them engaged and then there's good days and then there's bad days. Um, so it is difficult, it's difficult to keep them engaged. But I think every day it's kind of like you're pushing them, pushing them, and doing what you can and taking it day by day.

Case Study Participant 20 replied,

In the regular classes when I am co-teaching, there are the amount of kids in there, the class sizes are so large. The amount of distractions, the amount of tension in those classes giving students anxiety is very high and so I see that as an obstacle to their learning and hinders student engagement.

Participants' responses to interview question 16: How important is the role of language for the growth and achievement of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? indicated that for

all 20 case study participants (100%) the role of language is extremely important for the growth and achievement of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. All case study participants ( $N=20$ , 100%) stated that language proficiency is critical to student growth and achievement.

Case Study Participant 1 stated, "It's very important, it's what's going to designate them as educated and successful."

Case Study Participant 7 responded,

That is a very interesting question because I've seen both sides of it. So, I've seen students especially now that I have reading who, of course, like they struggle in in English. So, I always ask like, what can you read and write in Spanish and most of the kids can't read in their native language. No, they don't read and write in Spanish either, they can just speak it. So, they're not even fluent in Spanish. But then I also have kids in colloquium who do fit the low socioeconomic, but they can. I mean, there's some of my strongest, readers and writers, and they can also read and write in Spanish as well. So, I think that one is really like acquisition and also comes down to kind of the home environment too. Like how important is education in that home, how educated are the parents? And so, but I do think that again, if they're not fluent in their native language, then we're going to have so many issues with them in English.

Case Study Participant 9 replied,

Extremely...extremely. It's been my experience that I feel like a lot of the vocabulary, a lot of times is not there and that, sometimes what's keeping them from getting to the next level. A lot of them, I've noticed even if they can read the comprehension might not be there, they're not really understanding everything and I think that's where they fall behind and they can't keep up. I think vocabulary is so big right now, and I mean, there's so

many other factors. But, and not just coming from like, you know, the language. I speak Spanish. And then using the cognates, it's just even basic vocabulary. These kids speak English, but they don't have a big vocabulary, or the academic vocabulary.

Case Study Participant 10 added, "Very important. It's kind of the roadmap to connect with them and, so finding where they are in terms of that language and then building up building upon that language is really important."

Case Study Participant 11 replied,

It's very important because they need to learn how to be able to express themselves to communicate with others. Whether it's in full setting or in a professional setting, right? This is just that opportunity to learn how to do so is very important.

Case Study Participant 12 stated,

It is important in that being having a mastery over language helps us to have a more nuanced approach and engagement with difficult, hard to understand materials. It's also important, just in terms of like interview skills, communication skills, the likelihood of being able to get a job depends on your ability to speak. I call it speaking professionally, but I also acknowledge that that basically means speaking Whiter. You know, using language that is more indicative of like a Caucasian high educated sort of vocabulary. Which is kind of unfortunate because I know that there are different dialects and such like that specific to different racial groups which should be celebrated. But instead, unfortunately, those different dialects tend to be like marginalized and make it harder for students to get jobs. So, it is important to have enough mastery of your language to recognize some of the racism about language that exists. So that way you can get a job you know I don't know about fixing it we'll have to figure that out.

## Findings for Research Question 2 Summary

Research Question 2 described student/teacher relationships and explored how that impacts student academic performance. The analysis of participants' responses to the case study resulted in the following descriptions of factors that impact student learning: student/teacher relationships must be developed before learning can take place, the role of student/teacher background and culture within the classroom, student engagement as a challenge, and classroom management (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Student/Teacher Relationship (RQ2)*

Factors that impact students' learning	Frequencies of participants'	
	Responses	%
Student/Teacher relationship	20 out of 20	100
The role of student background and culture	20 out of 20	100
Student Engagement as a Challenge	20 out of 20	100
Classroom Management	16 out of 20	80

*Note.* Frequency of participants' answers to generate theme to RQ2.

Student and teacher relationships are the most critical investment a teacher can make to impact student performance (Gallagher, 2023). The case study participants verified how critical the student/teacher relationships are to academic growth. The teachers' perceptions confirmed that they value the background and culture of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, establishing value within the classroom. The majority of the case study participants maintain classroom management, with little support, as newer teachers struggle with managing their high school classes. As important as student/teacher relationships are in the academic growth of the student, the teachers' perceptions described that student engagement is a challenge for all of the case study participants (100%). Many factors influence and impact student engagement including

cognitive, metacognitive, communication, social, skill and task related, affective, and native language/new language related, as those factors overlap and intertwine (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021).

### **Research Question 3 Findings**

The participants' responses to questionnaire questions: Q10, Q11, Q13, Q14, and Q15 and interview questions: I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I8, I9, I10, I12, I13, I20, and I22 informed the findings for RQ3. The theme derived from participants' responses is that professional development in cultural proficiency and instruction is needed to assist low SES at risk Black and Latinx students reach their learning potential. Research Question 3 states: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

#### ***Participants' Responses to Questionnaire Questions***

Participants' responses to questionnaire question Q10: Once my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are comfortable and safe within my classroom, it is easy for me to teach indicated 50% strongly agreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question Q11: I value the support I receive from my school, colleagues, and students in my high school indicated 55% strongly agreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question Q13: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within the school indicated 50% disagreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question Q14: My school, colleagues, and students want my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to reach their goals indicated 40% disagreed and 30% strongly disagreed. Participants' responses to questionnaire question Q15: I

am learning new instructional skills in all my classes to meet the needs of my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated 37% agreed and 21% strongly agreed.

**Table 6**

*Questionnaire Responses per Question in Response to RQ3*

Q #	Total	SD/1	SD/1	D/2	D/2	N/3	N/3	A/4	A/4	SA/5	SA/5
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Q10	20	0	0%	1	5%	1	5%	8	40%	10	50%
Q11	20	0	0%	0	0%	3	15%	6	30%	11	55%
Q13	18	1	6%	9	50%	4	22%	4	22%	0	0%
Q14	20	0	0%	0	0%	6	30%	8	40%	6	30%
Q15	20	1	5%	3	16%	4	21%	7	37%	4	21%

*Note.* Frequency distribution represents Questionnaire responses.

***Participants' Responses to Interview Questions***

The participants' responses to interview questions: I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I7, I8, I9, I10, I12, I13, I20, and I22 informed the findings for RQ3.

Participants' responses to interview question 1: Can you tell me what subject do you teach and what grade level indicated 100% of case study participants (20) are certified and teaching at the high school level. Fifteen teachers teach English language arts and with two of those splitting their schedule with ESL classes. Two teachers teach History, one teacher services students receiving special education services, and one teacher teaching students that receive ESL services.

Participants' responses to interview question 2: Are you comfortable in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the knowledge and skills (TEKS) indicated all 20 (100%) were comfortable growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the knowledge and skills (TEKS).

Participants' responses to interview question 3: Do you feel that you receive resources (i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc.) to support you in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated that, of the 20 case study participants, 12 teachers (60%) do not feel they receive resources (i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc.) to support them in growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

Case Study Participant 2 stated,

No, so while there are plenty of resources available and teachers often lean on each other in that area. There is lack of administrative support. There's lack of resources in terms of technology for our student population. There is no planning time given to teachers that is adequate enough to bring forth rigorous instruction.

Case Study Participant 6 replied,

I do not think there is enough planning time or working within the PLCs. I think curriculum development is one of the things that I do as a level lead and so I know we get extra time for the planning but pulling the PLC together. I don't think we do a good job and really diving in looking at that backward planning, I was fortunate to do a lead forward training yesterday that blew my mind. It was fabulous, and really think we take a lot of those skills, and a lot of those strategies and apply them in our tutorial periods. That we're going to be better. I don't think we're as targeted in our checks for understanding and some of that engagement that we could be especially after 10 years of, finally, getting the best training I've ever received. Just yesterday.

Case Study Participant 7 responded,



I would say, behavior rep wise, the resources or there, but growing them academically, I feel like there is some room for improvement. A single conference period is not enough when you have those students, everything is so specialized and individualized.

Case Study Participant 11 added,

No. So while I do feel comfortable and working with those students and empowering them to use the skills that they've acquired thus far. I don't feel that the school district provides adequate resources for me to work with that specific population nor do I feel that they provide adequate time, you know, so that I could do research or maybe connect with others out in the educational field, so that I'm able to service those students.

Case Study Participants 18 replied,

No, I do not. Our planning time is often taken with meetings that really have no benefit for teachers. We are often asked to just paper push paperwork, instead of taking the time to plan high leverage instruction for our students and with accommodations and modifications, based on their needs.

Case Study Participant 19 responded,

I think more time. That's needed to really dig into how to reach a particular group. So, in each class we have that same clientele, and it would take more time. I think to dig into how do I make the needs for this particular group and How do I make the needs for this group in, you know, for each particular class I think that we would need a lot more time to be more specific and be more, I've said zone in how we're approaching them because they do have unique needs based on that particular kid, in that group and that setting, their needs are unique and vary. So, I think yes, while we have support, we need more

time. We just don't have the literal time to dig in per class per person for everything and then make a big plan of attack.

Participants' responses to interview question 4: Do your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning and about themselves as students (self-efficacy) indicated that of the 20 case study participants, 17 (85%) stated their strength in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students is the student/teacher relationship, relationship-building (76%) and the connection teachers make with their students (24%). The 20 case study participants stated that without the student/teacher relationship, student learning could not occur.

Case study participant 2 stated,

Personally, I feel like my strength is my relationship building. I feel like these students do lack in that area of compassion and empathy and I feel like that lack occurs at the district level as well in schools. And so, I feel like the strength there is to build those relationships and then bring forth the knowledge of the curriculum as I've had through my experience as a teacher.

Case Study Participant 5 added, "So, I know I'm great in creating relationships with these kids creating that bonds that communication, just because I know where they're coming from and I understand them at a deeper level."

Case Study Participant 7 replied,

And for me, I feel the strength is that I come from the community that I teach in. And so, sometimes that means I know family members of my students, which helps build that relationship, but even if I don't, I'm familiar with the areas in the district. So, if they tell me they live in a certain place, I can kind of figure out what socioeconomic situation that they're in, but I also grew up with, you know, a lot kids that were a lot like them. So that

relationship building really starts early in the year for me. So, I'm able to get them to trust me a little bit sooner. I think to start in with the content because I'm not dealing with so much behaviors.

Case Study Participant 10 added, "Probably establishing relationships with the kids and getting to know them and then providing a safe, structured environment to build their knowledge base."

Case Study Participant 11 stated,

I think just being able to personally connect with them based on my upbringing and some of the things that I've encountered in life but more. So, some of the Service projects that I have done growing up with my family, in the church ministries and food pantries, and having first hand knowledge and experience with that and working with different populations. I think that really enables me to connect with them because I know where they're coming from.

Case Study Participant 13 replied,

I think my strength and growth is that I'm really good at building relationships. And students are more willing to learn from me because they know I'm not trying to talk down to them or demean them because they don't know.

Case Study Participant 14 added, "I think one of my strengths is definitely establishing positive relationships with my students and just getting that trust from them. Cultivating a good classroom atmosphere so that they're comfortable with taking risks."

Case Study Participant 15 responded,

I think the relationships that I try to build because once they trust and know that they can be comfortable and they can, it's okay to fail. And then I'm still going to support them and show them how to succeed after they fail. I think that's a big key.

Case Study Participant 17 stated, "I'd say my strength is my relationship with the students."

Case Study Participant 18 added,

I think my biggest strength is probably the relationship building part. They cannot learn unless you have a good relationship with them and they're more willing to learn and put forth an effort when they have a good relationship with their teacher.

Cases Study Participant 19 stated,

For me, my biggest strength is building relationships with them because for our kids, when they are suffering in those ways, they really need the bond of somebody they can count on. They really will not work for people that they're not attached to. It is definitely reaching out to them and making that relationship with them and then building the educational piece, it has to go circular. So, as I build relationship, I'm able to build more confidence in the fact that I'm here for them and not just to teach what I teach. Because that's what draws them away. They want to hear that you're there to teach them and not just teach what you teach.

Case Study Participant 20 replied,

I spend a lot of time establishing rapport and relationships with students. I show interest in what they're interested in, and I am able to show them through that, that I really care about them and interested in them and their families. And then they feel comfortable with me and then, they'll work and reach their potential.

Participants' responses to interview question 5: What is your weakness in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? indicated that, of the 20 case study participants, seven teachers (35%) mentioned the lack of time as their greatest weakness. Two teachers (10%) talked about the lack of background knowledge of each student hinders their ability to help the student. One case study participant (5%) stated relationship-building and making connections was the weakness to continuously improve on.

Case Study Participant 9 stated,

For those students, maybe it's I think it has to do a little bit of a combination with lack of parent support and the lack of resources and not enough time and maybe the collaboration with all the teachers. All of us being on the same page sometimes.

Case Study Participant 10 added, "Probably lack of time. I do not have enough time to follow all the way through."

With regards to the lack of student background knowledge on the students and lack of time, Case Study Participant 11 stated,

As far as my weakness, I would say is not enough background information on each individual student. You know, there are so many students out there. Unfortunately, we're not able to touch base with each one of them on that personal level, especially if you only have 45-46 minutes in class. So, between instruction, you know, and just working with them, it's just not enough time, right? So, I think that's the biggest opportunity.

Case Study Participant 16 explained,

I do pride myself on forming strong relationships with students, but I am from a privileged background, so I don't necessarily understand the same struggles they are going through. I want to be able to relate and to support them and provide those

connections. I want to be someone they are comfortable talking to or knowing that they can get resources from. But because I don't always understand their struggles, there's that gap there.

Case Study Participant 18 reflected,

I would say, probably not knowing exactly what their background is. I'm not privy to that information most the time. So, it's hard for me to like change what I need to teach, or how I teach it or even just that relationship building part. The things that they need personally based on what's happening outside of school.

Participants' responses to interview question 7: Do you differentiate and scaffold your lessons for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) said they scaffold lessons and differentiate instruction for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The 20 case study participants stated that scaffolding and differentiation are supportive approaches for students who need additional instructional strategies.

Case Study Participant 2 stated, "Yes. So, differentiation occurs in all levels of the classroom but most importantly, for those specific populations students, as they're the ones who are in need of the most support."

Case Study Participant 3 added,

Yes, you have to scaffold up and down. You start instruction at the level of the TEK, but you always have student choice. Student agency. But always scaffold. Have things prepared for the low all the way up to GT. Yes. It's critical for all students because they're always at different levels to succeed.

Case Study Participant 5 responded, “Definitely differentiate instruction, regardless of their SPED status, regardless their 504, regardless of their emergent bilingual status. I have that option to scaffold and have that option available to all my students.”

Two case study participants (10%) teach advanced placement classes and feel they do not scaffold down and differentiate enough and could scaffold more for struggling students. Case Study Participant 12 stated,

Not always intentionally I tend to automatically scaffold up for my students, who are like really kind of high flyers, but then I am not always very intentional with adding supports for my students who are more struggling in the class.

Participants’ responses to interview question 8: How do you utilize scaffolding/differentiation within the lesson for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students that are underperforming indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) utilize scaffolding lessons and differentiation in instruction with their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

Case Study Participant 2 stated,

So, scaffolding and differentiate differentiation in the English II classroom can take place in terms of scaffolding Lexile level for the reading. So, you could scaffold up and down to accommodate your population of readers. In the class sentence stems, graphic organizers, providing students with extra time, small groups, one to one when available to have those students have a more direct. I guess the word I'm looking for is a direct type of teaching. So like, instead of just having them with the entire class, being able to pull them one-to-one when available.

Case Study Participant 5 responded,

So, it's a lot of images, a lot of charts, a lot of pictures. Some of my kids, we were working on sentences and we went over, like, with my ESL babies. Adjectives. And now Selena, this is the definition of adjective. It's you describing a noun and they're looking at me like, 'what?' and I was like, Okay, so describe in Spanish and I would draw a little stick figure of a person, a person, a place or thing, or an idea. So now they see the picture, they see the words and you're making that connection. So, then I have them turn talk to their partner. What do you think that means? Give me example of a noun. So, it's a lot of scaffolding. Well, we're reading something. It's a lot of up front loading the material before reading what we're actually reading. So, they can now understand it but they know where they're coming from.

Case Study Participant 7 added,

So, in my reading class, it looks a lot like chunking assignments and so I just really depend on the kids' level. So, there's some kids who maybe, you know, especially if they're looking tired. And I know they're coming out of a home where they maybe didn't get a lot of sleep or a lot of food, you know. Hey, can you do two of these questions for me? You know and then another student, you know, maybe I'll have them do four or five, lots of sentence stems I am working on getting now that we're kind of halfway through the kids know each other because they're small classes working on them talking more about their reading. With each other. And then having that the whatever questions they discussed, be the assignment as well so that they have that opportunity to discuss with each other.

Case Study Participant 11 replied,



Yes, I do. So often make sure that I provide things such as graphic organizers or additional time for those individual students. But more importantly, I try to introduce resources that they're familiar with, whether it's cultural background. Something that touches on a topic that maybe their socioeconomic background has to do with. I make sure that they're accessible to those students.

Participants' responses to interview question 9: Do you feel that you are learning and growing as a professional educator indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) are learning and growing as a professional educator. The case study participants stated that the experience they are receiving every day in the classroom contributes to their growth.

Case Study Participant 2 adds, "Yes, I do. I feel like every day is an experience that teaches you whether or not the experience is coming from someone else. Just the experience in the classroom does grow you as an educator."

Growth and learning are priorities to Case Study Participant 10, as they state, "Absolutely. I mean, it has to be a priority, it has to be top of the list, you have to kind of pursue that growth, but yes."

Case Study Participant 11 stated,

Yes, I do. And I think most of that is coming from my fellow educators, whether it's here in my school district or anywhere else. So just the opportunity to have dialogue with them to see what they've encountered, what they know and what works best for them. And then bringing that back to my own classroom.

Case Study Participant 12 stated, "...I feel like I am improving."

Participants' responses to interview question 20: Do you feel that your lessons meet the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student where they are as a student, and do you feel the rigor in

the instruction? indicated that all 20 teachers (100%) try to meet each student where they are at academically. In addition, all 20 teachers (100%) stated they do feel they provide the rigor within the lessons for student growth and achievement.

Case Study Participant 1 stated, "I do and then when I find that it's not there I redo and reteach."

Case Study Participant 2 responded,

Yes, I do meet the students where they are at and I feel like I provide the rigor to grow them. I feel like it can definitely connect with them on certain levels but there's always room for improvement. I feel like that's a big part of my current learning as a teacher right now. My goal for the year is differentiation especially for our special pops and our different pops of kids. And I feel like you have to be able to continuously push yourself to change and grow if you want to meet the students who are struggling the most and currently they're struggling the most.

Case Study Participant 5 replied,

I try to adjust the lesson space on what they can understand and try to push a little farther so they can look into other things, not just what's around them. So, they can get out of their comfort zone. But I feel like the rigor I want to come in the summer and rewrite the proficiency scales because I feel like it's not aligned to what they are. They're pushing us to have them, write a whole essay and a lot of them don't even know how to make a sentence. Writing an essay, the state has these high expectations which are ideal, but the reality is much different. These students are multiple grade levels behind. It's just going to be hard but that's supposed to be a skill that they came in from middle school already

learning and that's not true. That's a misconception. I don't know because COVID they just they're not there.

Case Study Participant 11 added,

Yes, I do again, circling back to the fact that I scaffold and differentiate the lesson but more importantly include things that they can connect with. I feel like it's at their level and at the same time, being able to chat to be more rigorous to be more thorough in their thinking and in their writing taking it to that next level. And I think it's just about encouraging them and letting them know that they are capable of achieving those things.

Participants' responses to interview question 10: When you come to school, do you feel comfortable embracing your background and culture indicated that, of the nine case study participants (45%) identifying as Black (two teachers) and Latinx (7 teachers), eight (89%) feel comfortable to embrace their background and culture when they come to school.

Case Study Participant 11 stated,

Yes, I do. So, I definitely make sure that my students know and see that. So, I often share just different things that are going on in my life, from a cultural standpoint and things that I encountered as growing up. So again, so that they make that connection and they know that the teacher is able to understand where they're coming from.

Case Study Participant 19 responded, "Oh absolutely. Absolutely."

Case Study Participant 5, a Latinx teacher, felt differently,

Yes. And no, it depends on which person that's in my surroundings. They have a misconception about Mexicans. So, I have to be very careful, the students as well, depending on which students, it depends with the art that I am free to express myself and my culture and basically, my identity.

Of the 11 White case study participants, three teachers (27%) feel comfortable embracing their background and culture in school, while eight White teachers (73%) stated they do not feel comfortable embracing their background and culture.

Case Study Participant 3 stated,

I do I like my school because I was married to a Honduran and was a Spanish teacher and got a divorce. And so that was one part of my life and then I'm an English teacher now and so this is the first time where those two worlds come together.

Case Study Participant 6 responded,

Yes. I do. And most of it. This is funny because they see me as a white old lady have a biracial daughter. I was a military brat, they don't have a clue of my background and so when I reveal things I think they're just like oh maybe that's not who so you know, that goes both ways.

Eight White case study participants (73%) answered “sometimes” and “less and less.”

Case Study Participant 2 stated,

Sometimes. That's a tricky question, because culture isn't often a topic that we're allowed to talk about in schools, especially my culture and background. So, it's hard and uncomfortable to embrace your own culture and the culture of your students when that's a subject that's considered to be controversial in nature within the school.

Case Study Participant 4 stated,

Less and less every year because I come from educated people. Well, my mother is 80 and she went to college in the 1960s. That's, that's kind of unusual, but I come from two parents who stayed together. We lived in the same home. All the demographics of

privilege, I guess, according to a lot of people. So, I feel like that that kind of hampers me in the classroom, it really does.

Case Study Participant 15 responded, “Sometimes there's a few issues where I don't feel as comfortable.”

Case Study Participant 16 stated, “Again, I am coming from a privileged culture and what is considered the cultural norm.”

Case Study Participant 17 added, “No, I don't have a ton of background and culture I feel like I have to embrace.”

Case Study Participant 18 replied, “Sometimes. Can I say sometimes? Because it's not always comfortable. But just because the climate of the day, it sometimes feels as if, if you're White, you are not allowed to have opinions on certain things.”

Case Study Participant 20 stated,

The way the world is now; I'm viewed negatively because I'm a White woman. I am judged automatically, as quickly as a possible. I don't want to say they think I am a villain but possibly they're suspicious until they get to know me.

Participants’ responses to interview question 12: Do you feel supported by your school and administrators in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students indicated 13 teachers (65%) do not feel supported by their school and administrators in growing the low SES at-risk and Latinx students. A common comment stated by the case study participants was “it is a box to check” when referring to their administrative support in growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

Case Participant 2 stated,

I think that it's not as big of a deal. At the administrative level, as it is that teachers witness in the classroom. You know, we see often the students who are hungry. We see the students first, who have had a traumatic experience coming from the home. And so, while I feel like there are administrators that want to support teachers, they are often unaware of some of the trauma that we're seeing and some of the gaps that we're seeing, and it just doesn't seem like there's a big push to fix those things at the administrative level.

Case Study Participant 3 replied, "I feel like that's just a box to check."

Case Study Participant 5 responded,

A give and take, again it just depends. Like I did not have planning period for ESL. It was just planning time period for English I and that's great. Now, I know how what to do for English I. When do I have the time to do that for ESL? I am fighting for planning time for ESL and the teachers, prior to my position, didn't have that option. So now I'm fighting for it, I'm advocating for it now.

Case Study Participant 6 added,

I think sometimes we're so concerned about checking the box that we are not really getting to the meat of what we need to do. There is not time to plan adequately. I think they want us to, but I think the tools that they're giving us miss the mark.

Case Study Participant 7 stated,

I know that they're just because of how close I am to my administration that there is a desire but again just kind of the lack of resources from the top down and so you know they're going to professional developments but then what do you do with that knowledge

that you learn and how do you disseminate that out to a campus as big as ours? So, I'm going to say no even though the desire is there.

Case Study Participant 9 replied,

I feel like everybody has a lot on their plate and a lot of times we're not prioritizing specific things or students or groups of students because there's just so much going on.

So, I don't think it's that they don't want to support. I just feel like sometimes it gets overlooked and I think that's what ends up happening.

Case Study Participant 11 responded,

I do not again. I think that goes back to this having not enough, time to plan and having those additional resources to implement into the classroom. And I think it's important that as districts, you know, this is what we are about that. They back it up with you know, the actual resources, again time and things like that, the deliverables, right?

Case Study Participant 13 stated,

Right now it's kind of in the middle because of December STAAR testing and retesting that they're not focused on just growing the student, they're focused more on getting them to a specific standard. But I'm hoping like later on, in the year, it goes up.

Case Study Participant 17 responded,

I would say I'm supported like emotionally, but I don't think that they have, I don't know if it's like the resources or the time. I feel like they're focused so much on the big number rather than like actually caring about the little people. But if I do something, I think they support it.

Case Study Participant 18 replied,

I think that they constantly tell us directives. As teachers that they want to see their growth and they want to see that on, you know, STAAR testing and other state testing. But we are not given the tools to help them grow. We're expected to come to come up with them on our own. We do not have the times we need to do what administrators expect of us.

Case Study Participant 20 added,

Well, I think if they were being supportive or really thinking about the population that we're dealing with, we would be having more discussions, more workshops more information. I worked at a place years ago, a private school that made a point of bringing in professors who were from the University of Mexico's extension program here to educate us, just overview us on the Mexican and Hispanic population, their beliefs, the way, the families ran and stuff like that. That has always stuck in my mind and I've had that, that was the only thing I've ever had on helping me to understand, or become a less ignorant of what the culture and background is like and what they do and so on and what things mean.

Participants' responses to interview question 13: Do you often recommend low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to honors classes or Gifted and Talented classes indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) agreed that they often recommend or get recommended low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students for honors classes. While the district processes are different from recommending students to honors classes than to recommend a student to gifted and talented, the cases study participants stated they do recommend their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to gifted and talented through special education services.

Case Study Participant 7 replied,



Yes, if I can definitely last year, especially and especially because I have that easy segue. But yes, and colloquium that's been something that I've brought up is that we've grown the next population quite a bit but we are still lacking with our black students. So really looking there and seeing what we can do, I'll be making middle school visits this year. So, I'm hoping that that kind of pulls in again. I think I just kind of exude our ISD and so that helps but we definitely have a issues even in when I was teaching just honors. There's a discrepancy there with our black students here.

Case Study Participant 11 stated,

I do often recommend them to those classes because those are the individuals, I feel that have, they're better at expressing themselves in their writing and they're thinking is at a higher level. Versus some of my other students who don't come from a low associate economic background. They're quite comfortable. So, the other students, I feel it's kind of like fight or flight, right? Like they feel like they have to survive. So, in order to do so they challenge themselves both in and outside of the classroom. Now, unfortunately, we have the other side where those students who do struggle for whatever reason, they don't take that opportunity right to challenge themselves and they're thinking.

Case Study Participant 14 added,

Oh yeah, most definitely. So right now, I'm also the Avid Excel coordinator. So, a lot of my students last year, who do I had in my classes I ended up recommending them and writing letters of recommendations for them. To this year participate in avid. And now a lot of them are an avid and transitioning into more advanced core classes.

Participants' responses to interview question 20: Do you feel that your lessons meet the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student where they are as a student, and do you feel the rigor is

in the instruction indicated that all 20 case study participants (100%) try to meet each student where they are at academically. All of the 20 case study participants (100%) said they feel they provide the rigor within instruction for growth and achievement in their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

Case Study Participant 1 stated, “I do and then when I find that it's not there I redo and reteach.”

Case Study Participant 2 responded,

Yes, I do meet the students where they are at and I feel like I provide the rigor to grow them. I feel like it can definitely connect with them on certain levels but there's always room for improvement. I feel like that's a big part of my current learning as a teacher right now. My goal for the year is differentiation especially for our special pops and our different pops of kids. And I feel like you have to be able to continuously push yourself to change and grow if you want to meet the students who are struggling the most and currently they're struggling the most.

Case Study Participant 5 replied,

I try to adjust the lesson space on what they can understand and try to push a little farther so they can look into other things, not just what's around them. So, they can get out of their comfort zone. But I feel like the rigor I want to come in the summer and rewrite the proficiency scales because I feel like it's not aligned to what they are. They're pushing us to have them, write a whole essay and a lot of them don't even know how to make a sentence. Writing an essay, the state has these high expectations which are ideal, but the reality is much different. These students are multiple grade levels behind. It's just going to be hard but that's supposed to be a skill that they came in from middle school already

learning and that's not true. That's a misconception. I don't know because COVID they just they're not there.

Case Study Participant 11 added,

Yes, I do again, circling back to the fact that I scaffold and differentiate the lesson but more importantly include things that they can connect with. I feel like it's at their level and at the same time, being able to chat to be more rigorous to be more thorough in their thinking and in their writing taking it to that next level. And I think it's just about encouraging them and letting them know that they are capable of achieving those things.

Participants' responses to interview question 22: Is there any valuable information you would like to contribute to the topic of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in relation to the academic achievement gap indicated that eight of the case study participants (40%) declined to add further information. Twelve case study participants (60%) addressed education inequity in schools that influence low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student growth and achievement.

Case Study Participant 2 responded,

I just don't know if I'm contributing any information but I just, I guess questions of just, why do we not see change happening faster? Why do we not see a push on the administrative or even just education in general to help these students where we know the gaps are you know each year we're being pushed to fill the gaps. Fill the gaps, obtain higher test scores, but we're not going to the root of the problem and the struggle. And so, I guess myself as an educator, I just don't understand that. It's like, we see the problem. We know where it's at, but it's not getting fixed and so it's making the gap larger and larger, and we're losing students to drop out rates, you know. So, I don't mean. I wish I could contribute more but I just have questions.

Case Study Participant 6 added,

I just think we need a lot of help. I think we've got to redesign school. I really do. I think we need more planning and I think we need more thinking partners. You know, I think what we're doing is not working with this group and I don't think it will for a while. And that scares me. Because they are the ones, these people, in my classroom are able to vote. And holy hell. Does that scare me? Yes, it does.

Case Study Participant 7 replied,

Oh, I do know that there is also just a discrepancy with good teachers, sticking with low socio-economic, especially if they also have if they're also at risk, if they also are Getting spent services or 504 services. And so, although my reading classes can drive me crazy. And I, you know, I have told teachers who ask me why I'm doing it. I'm like if I don't do it it's been the habit to stick a new to campus or a brand new teacher there and will either lose them to turn over or the next year. They're in another content and we're having to retrain someone, and you know, we have a whole group of students that isn't getting the reading instruction that they need. And so, I think the biggest issue is keeping and retaining good teachers to this population because you can keep and retain good teachers to honors programs. We see that across the nation, but I think where a lot of this retention where districts are having retention issues is because teachers aren't provided the resources that they need to really see success in these students. Because we know for teachers like It's not enough to just pass them, we want to see them grow. We want to see that success in them and so just getting them to the line isn't enough for good teachers.

Case Study Participant 14 added,

When it comes to low socioeconomics and at-risk students, they need many forms of learning and many opportunities to learn skills. I just think that as educators and you know, this year, I've learned a lot even to the point where even last year, I am a stronger educator every year. When it comes to testing, like, assessing, or even star a lot of our points as a district, a lot of the points come from African-American boys. So, if you want to really, really get your scores up and your data, your focus should be around African-American boys. And then, even Hispanic and Latinos. So, with that being said, it's important to give that specific group multiple opportunities, to learn things as far as like and reading class inferencing. How many ways are you giving them that inferencing skill? Are you just giving it to them one way? Or are they able to learn in different ways and then just providing like tutoring hours?

Case Study Participant 20 concluded,

Well, I just want to say that I see a lot of well this is probably I'm just going to say it. I think that many of the students are also and they're as well as some of their parents and their family for generations past are victims of generational poverty and trauma, compounded by the devastation of COVID-19. You know, the way they have been raised and the things that they've lived with and lived under and that it has affected them overall. That if they were in a different setting, they would be way higher and doing well, but I don't think that their parents want that for them. I think they want them to be successful. They just don't know what to do. And school was not a joyful place for them either. So, there they don't want to come up. They're always, you know, that kind of feeling. So, I mean, I understand, I think it's just like that nightmare cycle for them.

### Summary of Research Question 3

Research Question 3 examined the perceptions of teachers regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made within the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The analysis of the case study participant responses resulted in the following descriptions of factors that impact student learning: teachers as professionals, support needed from district/administration, and cultural proficiency/professional development.

**Table 7**

*Professional Development, Cultural Proficiency, and Best Practices (RQ3)*

Factors influencing student learning	Frequencies of participants' responses	%
Teachers as Professionals	20 out of 20	100
Support Needed from District/Administration	13 out of 20	65
Cultural Proficiency/Professional Development	11 out of 20	55

*Note.* Frequency of participants' answers to generate theme to RQ3.

The study revealed the teacher proficiency and confidence that they are receiving adequate training in pedagogy and continued professional development to teach the content, skills, and knowledge. The research also discovered the teachers in need of more district and administrative support in the collective effort to academically grow low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, through additional time to prepare and adequate resources. Teachers need more time when planning for such diverse learners. Finally, the study revealed that Black and Latinx teachers feel culturally competent and confident within their own background and culture to help

low SES Black and Latinx students in their academic growth at the urban south central Texas high school where this study took place. However, the majority of White teachers in the urban high school in south central Texas do not feel comfortable to embrace their background and culture within the classroom.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban high school in south central Texas. In addition, this study includes the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

The overarching research question that guided the focus of the case study was: What are the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance? The research questions that guided this case study are:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?



The methodology for this case study qualitative research conducted was a qualitative case study approach, as I explored the teacher perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student academic outcomes that affect the academic performance that included exploration in the natural context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). Through the detail the data provided, the case study participants' words were used to provide detail and context of the data, as it centered on the participants and the everyday problems and challenges (Merriam, 2009; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The case study was simplistic in context and conducted in a specialized environment, a high school campus (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2012; Ridder, 2017). In real-world context, the case study approach obtained in-depth understanding and comprehension of an event (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009; Zainal, 2007). The case study addressed real-life experiences of students' and teachers' perceptions for patterns that led to themes. The research analyzed the voices of the case study participants and after much reflection and reflexivity, a complex interpretation of the data was provided and it connected it to the problem of practice (Austin & Sutton, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

### **Discussion of Findings**

At-risk Black and Latinx students from disproportionately low-socioeconomic homes predict disadvantages and barriers for academic success (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Morsy & Rothstein, 2019). Educational interventions which focus on high-leverage instruction, or the explicit precision or clarity of teaching best practices and expectations for teachers, alone failed to bridge the achievement gap for poor, minority students (Morsy & Rothstein, 2019; Weissberg, 2019). Low socioeconomic status (SES) Black and Latinx students experience educational gaps due to limited opportunities for an equitable education (Scarry, 2020). The achievement gap is

the differentiation in academic performance between subgroups, as one group is outperforming the others, an achievement gap sets in for subgroups (Kotok, 2017).

### ***Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Student/Teacher Needs***

According to the data collected and analyzed in this case study, in relation to Research Question 1, student and teacher basic needs must be met for academic growth and achievement in low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The theoretical framework based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs directly connects to learning through student motivations (McLeod, 2007). When students' needs are met, it is optimal time for learning to take place (McLeod, 2007). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, lower-level needs such as psychological and safety occur first before the student can address the higher level of needs (McLeod, 2007).

Maslow's (1943) theory is centered around motivation and the fulfillment of basic needs to advance to more complex needs. Maslow's (1943) basic needs are safety, shelter, and food. The student can then advance to love and belonging, and onto self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). Students must have their basic needs met, such as eight hours of sleep at night, and feel safe when they come to school for them to be successful in their classes. It is a basic need for the student to feel mentally, emotionally, and physically safe at school (Maslow, 1943). Therefore, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory on motivation is consistent with teachers' perceptions of student basic needs must be met before learning can occur. Teacher concern and empathy is an essential aspect of positive relationships in teaching and caring which is related to positive behaviors and positive consequences (Kim, 2017). Once the basic growth needs are met, the more advanced needs such as self-actualization and transcendence can be explored (McLeod, 2007). The role of the school, especially in context of COVID-19 and long periods of absence

from instruction and social interaction, is to foster the well-being of the student and the teacher (Porter et al., 2021).

### ***Students and Bandura et al. (1999) Theory of Self-Efficacy***

According to Bandura et al. (1999), self-efficacy is “the beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). Social cognitive theory, according to Bandura et al. (1999), gives students introspective insight on how they perceive themselves in their own educational journey and how they feel about the achievement gap, growth, and achievement. Students may not understand self-efficacy and how that relates to their own growth and development (Bandura et al., 1999). Self-doubt will be the barrier to success, even with a student having a high level of self-efficacy will not necessarily mean they will always be successful (Bandura et al., 1999). In social cognitive theory, student behaviors can be directly influenced by experience or by observing the behaviors of others, learned positive behaviors (Bandura et al., 1999).

The social cognitive framework gives a basis for understanding student behaviors and through affect, thought, and action, student behaviors can influence personal change (Bandura, 2002). The social cognitive conceptual framework addresses student motivation, self-monitoring, and free will (Bandura, 2002). Reciprocal determinism which is the direct influence between the student, their behaviors, and environmental factors (Bandura, 2002). Agentic engagement is how the students intentionally and personally engaged in their own learning experience (Mehdipour Maralani et al., 2018). By adapting the agentic perspective to the social cognitive theory in relation to the student development, adaptation to environment, and personal change, student self-efficacy is directly related and influenced by their past and current experiences (Bandura, 1997, 2002). The behavior causations include behaviors, external factors, and personal

experiences and directly impact their self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1999). Self-efficacy can directly impact motivation in a positive way, or it can directly impede student success (Bandura et al., 1999).

When a student can effectively regulate their emotions and behaviors as they interact with teachers and peers is crucial to their academic success (Code, 2020). How a student sees themselves personally and in the social context and how they self-regulate, control, and monitor their own learning is critical to academic growth and achievement (Code, 2020). Hayat et al. (2020) found that academic performance is directly related to learning-related emotions and how they impact and influence metacognition (one's thinking about their thinking) which assist in mediating students' emotions in their own academic learning.

Students form their self-efficacy by internalizing the information they receive regarding their own abilities (Bandura et al., 1999). Bandura et al. (1999) stated this can occur through four ways: how the student masters the experience, verbal persuasion (teachers building students up), emotional affective, and vicarious experiences. Through these four sources, teachers can utilize social and emotional learning strategies to teach and build self-efficacy in their students (Kirk, 2022). Through the mastery experience, students are boosted with successful experiences, but they can also be devastated by failures (Kirk, 2022). Teachers are critical in verbal persuasion and how their words impact the students in a positive or negative way (Kirk, 2022). Teachers are the facilitator of the instruction and their feedback to the student must be effective communication (Kirk, 2022). The emotional affective state of a student is influenced by the role of the teacher in reducing levels of tension and anxiety to provide a safe and welcoming environment to learn (Kirk, 2022). The vicarious experience is experiencing the success of others to strengthen the motivation for all to succeed (Kirk, 2022). The classroom teacher can influence

and boost students' self-efficacy if it becomes woven into each class period, each day, through intentional lessons on positivity and self-awareness, along with teacher/student conferencing and reflection.

### ***Implications of Lack of Parents/Guardians Involvement***

Parental engagement and stimulation in the home promotes academic achievement (Hardaway et al., 2020; Schmid & Garrels, 2021). However, in some families of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, parental involvement is not present and adverse consequences affect the student (Berkowitz et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2018). Parental lack-of-involvement is more prevalent in non-English speaking and low-income families (Park & Holloway, 2018; Yeh, 2019). A parent's economic and social status can affect how involved and engaged they are in their child's education (Schmid & Garrels, 2021). Parents face challenges in their student's educational journey when they encounter communication barriers, social barriers, and linguistic barriers (Kerbaiv & Bernahgrdt, 2018; Murray et al., 2014).

According to the case study data, family involvement increases with students in specialized classes, such as honors or English as a second language, yet general education teachers feel a complete absence in parental involvement and engagement. In order to promote increase parental involvement with low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, districts must look at five factors which include: improving communication between school and home, making families feel welcome and a part of the school infrastructure, providing more opportunities for family involvement, and guiding that involvement into family engagement (Baker et al., 2015). School districts need to get creative in alternative ways to increase parental involvement and engagement, as parents have many competing responsibilities and obligations to be a consistent presence at their child's school (Baker et al., 2015). It is critical to identify the specific needs of

each individual student and with the school district's support, assist and empower the parent to take a more active role in their child's education (Schmid & Garrels, 2021). Parental involvement is credited to be a positive impact and explanation for student success, as students need that direction, motivation, and support for academic growth and achievement (Schmid & Garrels, 2021).

### ***COVID-19 and Its Impact: What Teachers Know***

COVID-19 has had devastating and long-term effects on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The long-term economic disparities this creates will ripple in the American economy for years to come and will affect low SES Black and Latinx families currently experiencing poverty (Dorn et al., 2021b; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). Low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are 2 years academically behind their White counterparts prior to COVID-19 and the long-term effects will continue to echo in American education (Dorn et al., 2021b; Goudeau et al., 2021).

Students continue to face COVID-19 pandemic challenges, economic, health concerns, and social barriers (Williams & Drake, 2022). Students have faced a unique challenge throughout the pandemic as critical periods of child development, socially, emotionally, and physically, were impacted and continue to be impacted (Williams & Drake, 2022). The most vulnerable, at-risk students may have lost loved ones during the pandemic, compounding mental health issues for students and families (Williams & Drake, 2022). The greatest impact of COVID-19 is that it has widened an already existing achievement gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Anderson, 2020; Dorn et al., 2021b; Rothstein, 2020). Students endured a prolonged physical and emotional isolation during the school closures of the pandemic, with students facing a heightened degree of loneliness (Elharake et al., 2022).

The mental health toll COVID-19 has taken on students is seen in higher anxiety, feelings of depression and distress are impacting the students with low family socioeconomics (Elharake et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic has had adverse impacts on student mental well-being and school districts need to implement interventions and long-term solutions to care for students' mental health before they can progress in academic growth (Elharake et al., 2022). While school districts cannot feasibly manage the mental health of all of their students individually, it is imperative that they implement preventative measures and intervention support through programs to the broader population of students (Elharake et al., 2022).

### ***Student/Teacher Relationship***

When students feel safe and secure at school, they begin to feel more socially included, which is based on the quality of relationships they have with their teachers (Pastore & Ludor, 2021). When students do not have strong relationships with their teachers, they can view themselves as undesirable, an outsider, and not worthy, as the students will begin to alienate themselves from peers, teachers, and school (Skinner et al., 2014).

The data from this case study support the self-determination theory is a framework in which facilitate the understanding of student factors that influence intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and physiological well-being in direct context with the educational setting and teacher (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Schools are not only a source of knowledge, skills, and strategies for academic growth but also a source of student identity, good or bad (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Basic physiological and psychological needs must be met at school first before confidence, esteem, and self-efficacy can be developed (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The self-determination theory emphasizes that caring bonds between teachers and students are one basic need in boosting autonomous motivation, reflection, and internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

When students and teachers develop deep bonds, the student will see the teacher as an important emotional and cognitive resource (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Teachers know that the student/teacher relationship is the most important factor in student academic growth and achievement yet teachers face barriers through mandated curriculum, pressure to perform, insurmountable paperwork and grading, as well as pressures from high-stakes state testing (Ryan & Deci, 2020). An effective teacher/student relationship cannot be effective without self-awareness and reflection mirrored in shared experiences within the classroom (Camp & Davis, 2011; Whitehead, 2001). Teachers need district support to prioritize student well-being as well as strong student/teacher relationship building and development.

### ***Classroom Management***

Effective classroom management must embody procedures for learning to occur (Long et al., 2019). For learning to occur in the classroom, students must be orderly and maintained (Heriot & Somin, 2018; Sieberer-Nagler, 2015). If teachers do not have strong classroom management, which results in high anxiety and weak emotion management, it becomes the number one reason why teachers become disappointed and dissatisfied with teaching and ultimately leave the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2001).

When classroom teachers can ensure students' basic need of belonging is met in the classroom, the student will become more engaged, experience learning, demonstrate positive classroom behaviors, and achieve academic growth (Viperman, 2021). When classroom teachers can prioritize students' basic needs, genuinely get to know each individual student, and focus on strong student/teacher relationships, it will have a direct and positive impact on classroom management (Viperman, 2021). Student/teacher relationships is the most important component to student growth and achievement, but it is also how to improve classroom



management as a culture of safety, learning, and enrichment (Vipperman, 2021). As classroom management improves, the opportunities for academic achievement improve (Vipperman, 2021).

### ***Student Engagement***

Lower-income students have less motivation and engagement compared to their wealthier counterparts (García & Weiss, 2017; Whitney & Bergin, 2018). Engagement and disaffection prevention within the classroom can be directly linked to negative school experiences (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Putwain et al., 2022). The disengaged student has increased behavioral issues and decreased metacognition or thinking about one's thinking (Chick, 2013; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Student engagement demonstrates active participation in the learning process and engaged students tend to immediately engage not because educators mandate it, but because the lesson is challenging and interesting (Davis & Dague, 2019; Erickson et al., 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

Engaged students are active, interested, and alert, whereas disengaged students become easily distracted, remain unfocused, and demonstrate lack of interest in the lesson (Erickson et al., 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Students that become disengaged will struggle with self-confidence as they grapple with shame and anxiety which will perpetuate the lack of focus and interest (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2019). When students lack the knowledge and skills, they are cognizant and aware of their weaknesses and inabilities (Eleby, 2009; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Educators take notice of the apathy and disinterest and see it as a sign of disrespect and offensive behaviors (Davis & Dague, 2019; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Many educators feel that student disengagement is beyond their control and do not feel capable of changing their students' mindsets (Lawson & Lawson, 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

Educators focus on improving student engagement but are not aware of the effect of the interventions on students' emotions or thinking (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020; Skinner, 2016). Desired student behaviors and student participation cannot be a forced action because it will only perpetuate negative student behaviors (Darling-Hammond, 2016; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Educators agree that engaged students will promote student growth and achievement through positive academic outcomes (Alba & Fraumeni, 2020; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

### ***Teachers as Professionals***

According to the Texas Education Agency (2021), the requirements to be a classroom teacher in a public education school district are as follows:

- Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university,
- Must have completed or are completing an Educator Preparation Program,
- Pass the state educator's exam in the content area,
- Pass national criminal background check and place fingerprints on file with the state of Texas.

Quality trained teachers are the direct connection to improved student academic performance (Khan & Irshadullah, 2018).

Teacher autonomy is the independence and the freedom to study, learn, and teach (Sehrawat, 2014). When teachers are trusted by the district and the administration to have the freedom and autonomy to teach, they can reach optimal teaching (Schwarz-Franco, 2022). With the amount of diversity and unique student needs within a classroom, it is essential the teacher have the autonomy that encourages and facilitates teacher collaboration rather than administrative micromanagement (Sehrawat, 2014). Just as the student needs the secure space and freedom to learn, the teacher deserves the same safe atmosphere (Sehrawat, 2014). The

teacher is the change-agent and has the power to promote educational success as the closest person to the student (Sehrawat, 2014).

### ***What Teachers Need From Administration/District***

Teachers need their leaders to be empathetic, connected to the day-to-day, and trustworthy (Goleman, 2006). Teachers want to feel the trust and security to approach their leaders with confidence to receive a fair response (Miller et al., 2008). Teachers give their 100% to trusted leaders that follow-through and take a vested interest in their students, their teachers, and the community (Miller et al., 2008). A trusted leader will provide the training and professional development to teachers that need it and give autonomy to master teachers to grow students academically (Miller et al., 2008). Support, time, and resources are what teachers need from their administrators and these are necessary to build school trust, ensure teacher effectiveness, and make the overall school improvements (Miller et al., 2008). Teachers want to feel their leaders care about the teachers, the students, and the school (Miller et al., 2008).

Teaching is more complex than decades ago and a full immersion experience, teachers need the time to plan each lesson just as the student needs the time to learn (Merritt, 2022). Many high school teachers are teaching more than one subject area and grade level but receive the one conference period daily for preparation, which amounts to approximately 45 minutes daily to plan and prepare lessons (Merritt, 2022sh). Time for a teacher is a valuable commodity and it is commonly wasted due to weak leadership (Anderson, 2019). Administration can focus on teachers' time needs to be preserved and respected, build the master schedule around teacher time being a priority, reduce teaching administrative duties that do not serve a critical purpose, provide teachers the technology and resources they need to grow students, and assist teachers in time management (Anderson, 2019).

### ***Culture and Background at School***

Teachers must take students' cultural backgrounds into consideration to provide appropriate and adequate individualized instruction for low SES at risk Black and Latinx students (Maeng & Bell, 2015). While low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students do benefit from exposure to teachers of color, training and education are critical for growth and development of students (Cherry-McDaniel, 2019; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Leath et al., 2019). The social and cultural background and environment the student grows up within influences what and how the student thinks (Hurst et al., 2013; Vygotsky, 1978).

Of the nine Black and Latinx case study participants (45%) in this case study, two Black (10%) teachers and seven Latinx (35%) teachers, eight teachers (89%) feel comfortable to embrace their background and culture at the selected urban south central high school. Teachers of color support the social and emotional learning as well as the academic learning of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). Black and Latinx teachers feel they can bond and connect better with same-race students (Shafer, 2018).

As children adapt to their social and cultural environment, they begin to acquire decision-making skills and processes for metacognition through internalizing their social and environmental interactions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Vygotsky, 1978). Students' cognitive development and functions depend on their beliefs, values, and social adaptations within the culture in which that student has developed in and therefore is socio-culturally determined through the social constructs of their environment (Bandura, 2012; Vygotsky, 1978).

Within the case study, 11 out of 20 (55%) case study participants are White and eight teachers of the 11 (73%) do not feel comfortable to embrace their background and culture at a selected urban south central Texas high school. Teachers, understanding the importance of

culture and background to students, must reflect on their position in the classroom and reflect on the context of classroom diversity (Goldenberg, 2014). White teachers must understand that the way they view the world and the way their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students view the world is according to a particular cultural frame of reference, which are vastly different (Goldenberg, 2014). While admittedly, the majority (8 out of 11 White teachers) do not embrace their own background and culture, all 20 case study participants (100%) find the value of embracing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' cultures and backgrounds within the classroom. According to Goldenberg (2014), the key to a successful multi-cultural classroom is to bring cultural relevance into the curriculum while developing and investing in those student/teacher relationships.

### ***Limitations***

The case study had several limitations to include, the sample size, and the study is based on one high school. Since the case study focuses on one south central school district and it is one high school, it is not representative of the whole or greater population of teachers (Simkus, 2022). Due to the small number of case study participants, I faced limitations in generalizations due to sample size (Mears, 2009). The study only focused on 20 high school teachers from one selected urban high school in south central Texas and does not represent all high schools across the nation. Another limitation included in the case study was to include teachers' perceptions of three large subpopulations of students together. For example, teachers were asked to give their perceptions on their low SES at-risk Black students, Latinx students, and newcomer Latinx students. Each of these subpopulations of students could be separated out and reflected upon in individual groupings. While this case study revealed the breadth of teacher perceptions on their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic progress, it did not go into the depth of

each student sub-population for more specific information and nuances. The limitations include the broad themes revealed by teachers' perceptions of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic performance, which when researched individually could go to the depth of the category and shed more specific information under each theme:

- Student Needs based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs framework
- Teacher Needs based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs framework
- Student/Teacher Relationships
- Cultures and Backgrounds in the Classroom
- Teacher Readiness
- Time, Respect, and Trust to Teachers from Administrators
- Student Self-Efficacy is a Learned Skill
- Parental/Guardian Involvement
- The Long-Term Effects of COVID-19.

While the research was fruitful, it was broad in context and included a broad subpopulation, to include Black, Latinx, and emergent bilingual/newcomers, whereas any one focus area would provide depth into that specific sub-population and/or the focus area for future research.

### ***Participants***

The case study participants represented the district demographically. Of the 20 case study participants, 11 case study participants (55%) are White, seven case study participants are Latinx (35%), and two case study participants (10%) are Black. According to the Texas Tribune (based on the demographic data from the 2020–21 school year) the selected urban high school has a demographics of teachers: 54% White, 33% Latinx, and 10% Black (Murphy et al., 2022). The

case study participants of this study were indicative of the teachers at the selected urban south-central high school.

### ***Purpose Statement and Research Questions***

The purpose of this qualitative case study described the school experiences of teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas. In addition, this study included the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at the selected urban high school in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, with the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, were described through the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at an urban school district located in south central Texas regarding how those perceptions can shape, positively or negatively, the outcomes of students' growth and achievement. The perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students provided context in the student/teacher relationship and how that influences the students' academic outcomes.

The overarching research question that guided the focus of the case study is: What are the perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' teachers at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance?

The research questions that guided this study are:

RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

### ***Review of the Study Design***

The case study was based on interpretive results to answer the research questions, as it considered the lived experiences and perceptions of the case study participants in context of the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, as the shared perspectives were explored to capture the complex route to theory and best practices (Larkin et al., 2019). The case study research connected the results and conclusions to the research questions (Anderson, 2010; Yin, 2009). Through the detail the data provided, the case study participants' words were used to provide detail and context of the data, as it centered on the participants and the everyday problems and challenges (Merriam, 2009; Sutton & Austin, 2015). The case study was simplistic in context and conducted in a specialized environment, case study participants from one high school campus, as the questionnaire was completed electronically and the interview was conducted over Zoom (Aaltio & Heilmann, 2012; Ridder, 2017). In the real-world context, the case study approach obtained in-depth understanding and comprehension of the factors that influence academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009; Zainal, 2007). The case study addressed real-life experiences of teachers' perceptions for patterns that led to themes related directly to the research questions. The research



analyzed the voices of the case study participants and after much reflection and reflexivity, a complex interpretation of the data was provided and it connected it to the three research questions, the overarching question, and the problem of practice (Austin & Sutton, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

### **Summary of Findings**

The following is a summary of the findings in relation to the three research questions. The case study participants were asked questions designed around Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs assessment within the Google Form Questionnaire and the case study participants were asked 22 semistructured, open-ended interview questions. Research Question 1 explored how teachers perceive the needs of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the selected urban south central high school. From the frequency of the answered questions on the Google Form Questionnaire and the patterns generated by categorization through the line-by-line coding on the Google Meets Interview, the following themes were identified. The three overarching themes related to each of the three research questions helped to answer the overarching question: What are the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance?

Research Question 1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' needs and their perceptions of the classroom learning environment influencing student academic growth and achievement?

- Needs such as sleeping, food, water, shelter, and security must be met before learning can take place.

The findings included the following factors that impact student learning:

- Student needs must be met before learning can occur;
- Self-efficacy is a learned skill;
- The lack of parental/guardian as a negative impact to student learning; and
- COVID-19 has had devastating effects on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

Research Question 2 describe the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance.

- Student/teacher relationships must be developed before learning can take place.

The findings included the following factors that impact student learning:

- the importance of student/teacher relationships;
- the role of student background and culture;
- student engagement as a challenge; and
- classroom management

Research Question 3 described the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

- Professional development in cultural proficiency and instruction are needed to assist low SES at risk Black and Latinx students reach their learning potential.

The findings included the following factors that impact student learning:

- teachers as professionals;
- support needed from district/administration; and
- cultural proficiency/professional development.

### ***Research Question 1***

Research Question 1 focused on teachers' perceptions their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' needs and their perceptions of the classroom learning environment influencing student academic growth and achievement. The emergent theme is needs such as: sleeping, food, water, shelter, and security must be met before learning can take place.

According to the data collected and analyzed in this case study, in relation to Research Question 1, student and teacher basic needs must be met for academic growth and achievement in low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The theoretical framework based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs directly connects to learning through student motivations (McLeod, 2007). When students' needs are met, it is optimal time for learning to take place (McLeod, 2007). According to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, lower-level needs such as psychological and safety occur first before the student can address the higher level of needs (McLeod, 2007). In Maslow's (1943) theory is centered around motivation and the fulfillment of basic needs to advance to more complex needs. Maslow's (1943) basic needs are safety, shelter, and food. The student can then advance to love and belonging, and onto self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

The factors that impact student learning identified include (a) student needs must be met before learning can occur, (b) self-efficacy is a learned skill, (c) the implications of the lack of parental/guardian involvement, and (d) the effects of COVID-19.

Student needs must be met before learning can occur. Case study participants shared how student needs must be met before learning can occur.

- According to the questionnaire, 95% of the case study participants (20) say their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are not sleeping eight hours a night.

- According to questionnaire, 65% of the case study participants (20) say their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are hungry throughout the day.
- According to the questionnaire, 100% of the case study participants that answered (19) say that if their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are hungry and tired, it is difficult for the students to focus and concentrate in class.

Self-efficacy is a learned skill. Case study participants feel that students do not think of themselves as students or learners and self-efficacy is a learned skill.

- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) do not believe their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students do not think about their learning or think of themselves as students and 100% of the case study participants (20) feel that self-efficacy is a learned skill.
- According to the interviews, 100% of case study participants (20) feel that self-efficacy is a learned skill.

Lack of Parental/Guardian involvement. Of the 20 case study participants, 17 (85%) stated that parents are not involved with their child's learning.

The effects of COVID-19. The case study participants expressed concerns for the- trauma COVID-19 has caused their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

- According to the interviews, 100% of case study participants (20) feel that COVID-19 has had devastating effects on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 explored the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance.

According to the data and in relation to Research Question 2, the student/teacher relationship is the most important factor in low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student academic growth and achievement. When students feel safe and secure at school, they begin to feel more socially included, which is based on the quality of relationships they have with their teachers (Pastore & Ludor, 2021). When students do not have strong relationships with their teachers, they can view themselves as undesirable, an outsider, and not worthy, as the students will begin to alienate themselves from peers, teachers, and school (Skinner et al., 2014). The data from this case study support the self-determination theory is a framework in which facilitate the understanding of student factors that influence intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and physiological well-being in direct context with the educational setting and teacher (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Schools are not only a source of knowledge, skills, and strategies for academic growth but also a source of student identity, good or bad (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Basic physiological and psychological needs must be met at school first before confidence, esteem, and self-efficacy can be developed (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The self-determination theory emphasizes that caring bonds between teachers and students are one basic need in boosting autonomous motivation, reflection, and internalization (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When students and teachers develop deep bonds, the student will see the teacher as an important emotional and cognitive resource (Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). Teachers know that the student/teacher relationship is the most important factor in student academic growth and achievement, yet teachers face barriers through mandated curriculum, pressure to perform, insurmountable paperwork and grading, as well as pressures from high-stakes state testing (Ryan & Deci, 2020). An effective teacher/student relationship cannot be effective without self-awareness and reflection mirrored in shared experiences within the classroom (Camp & Davis, 2011; Whitehead, 2001). Teachers need district support to

prioritize student well-being as well as strong student/teacher relationship building and development. The emergent theme identified student/teacher relationships must be developed before learning can take place. The factors that impact student learning include (a) the importance of student/teacher relationships, (b) the role of student background and culture, (c) student engagement as a challenge, and (d) classroom management.

The importance of student/teacher relationships. The case study participants answered the questionnaire question on if student/teacher relationships are bonded neutrally, however when the question was asked within the interview the importance of student/teacher relationships, 100% of the case study participants stated it was the most important factor in student growth and achievement. When asked what their strength in teaching low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, 85% of case study participants answer student/teacher relationships (this will be explored more in RQ3).

- According to the interviews, 85% of the case study participants (20) feel that their strength is student/teacher relationships.
- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) feel that student/teacher relationships are very important.
- According to the interviews, 80% of the case study participants (20) do not have high behavioral disruptions or discipline referrals for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.
- According to the interviews, 89% of the Black and Latinx case study participants (8 of 9) say they are comfortable to embrace their background and culture at school.
- According to the interviews, 11 of the 20 (55%) case study participants are White and eight of the 11 (73%) White teachers do not feel comfortable to embrace their

background and culture at school.

- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) say they make time and effort to embrace their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' background and culture.

### ***Research Question 3***

RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?

- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) differentiate and scaffold their lessons for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.
- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) use various strategies for differentiation and scaffolding for their lessons.
- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) say they recommend and receive low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students for honors classes and gifted and talented.
- According to the interviews, 65% of the case study participants (20) say they do not feel supported by their school and administrators in growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.
- According to the interviews, 60% of the case study participants (20) do not feel they receive adequate resources (i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc.) to support them in growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students and 100% of the case study participants do not feel they have the adequate time to prepare and plan for such

diverse needs.

- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants (20) struggle with engagement for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.
- According to the interviews, 100% of the case study participants say the role of language is important for the growth of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

### **Recommendations**

In today's rapidly changing society, public education (K-12) faces a diverse population of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, especially considering COVID-19, that are not showing the academic growth and progress. Current strategies and interventions are not bridging the academic gap for some of the most vulnerable students in the nation. While research has been conducted on low performing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, the challenges and barriers facing American teachers and students coming out of forced isolation from COVID-19 are nuanced, each subpopulation of students affected in unique ways. Researchers should concentrate on the psychological and physiological approaches required to address the widening academic gap for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, the pre-COVID-19 academic deficiencies combined with the trauma and life-lasting negative effects from forced lockdown and isolation during COVID-19, to all of the consequences, economically, physically, socially, and emotionally these students are facing to their subsequent return to "normal life."

### ***Recommendation for Practical Applications***

According to the findings of the case study, practical applications from the case study participants' perspectives on low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student academic growth and achievement would be to focus on student and teacher needs according to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs framework, ensuring basic need are met with the teachers and the students in



safety, security, shelter, food, sleep, and a sense of belonging before the expectation of learning can take place. Once teachers and students had their basic needs met (Maslow, 1943), they can begin to focus on the building and development of student/teacher relationships. According to the findings of this case study, this is the most important factor in low SES at-risk Black and Latinx growth and achievement.

According to the findings of this case study, the case study participants feel secure and confident in teaching the knowledge and skills according to scope and sequence by the state of Texas. Case study participants also feel secure and confident in classroom management, will infrequently discipline referral write-ups for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

According to the data from the perceptions of the teachers, teachers need support to include time allotment and conservation from administrators. Teachers are teaching various grade levels and various subject content, especially in high school, and the data shows that time is the teacher's most value and scarce commodity. Teachers need, according to this case study's participants' perceptions, less instructional skills and strategies trainings and more planning time for all the diverse students they are teaching, However, teachers do need culturally sensitive training and professional development to embrace themselves and diversity and they know how to present and facilitate sensitive conversations on controversial topics, such as backgrounds and cultures.

With 55% (11 teachers) of the case study participants that are White teachers, eight out of 11 (73%) are uncomfortable with their own culture and background, while teaching low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, recommendation include trainings and guidance in how to navigate those sensitive feelings in the most objective and professional ways possible. According to Maslow (1943), everyone must feel safe in the learning environment for advancement to a deeper need. Teachers need to have dedicated time at the beginning of the school year focused

on relationship building and development. Academic instruction can also take place from the onset of the school year, but in conjunction with the focus on developing student/teacher connections. As teachers provide a safe environment for the student, it begins the development of trust between the teacher and the student. School districts, administration, and teachers focus on students' needs being met first (Maslow, 1943) then a conscious effort to develop self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1999) with the students during educational instruction time. With students' basic needs met (Maslow, 1943) and the development of student self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1999), then the teacher can elevate the academic facilitation of knowledge and skills as low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students begin to academically grow and develop (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956).

### ***Recommendation for Future Research***

The recommendation for future research is to separate out the sub-populations, low SES at-risk Black students, low SES at-risk Latinx students, and Newcomer Latinx/Emergent Bilinguals for individual study on the nuances each student subpopulations represent. Each individual subpopulation could be studied for more specific data pertaining to each student group.

With regards to culture and backgrounds within the student/teacher relationship dynamic, as the data shows within the case study, if 55% of the teachers in a selected urban high school in south central Texas are White and 73% of that subpopulation within the study uncomfortable to embrace their own culture and background within their school encourages school districts to provide civics training on diversity and tolerance for all teachers to ensure that all teachers and all students feel safe, secure, and comfortable in the school environment.

However, the review of the literature does not provide broad insight into how White teachers teaching in diverse urban school districts, with low SES at-risk Black and Latinx

students, embrace their background and culture at school. With a teacher shortage in the nation and 57% of selected urban south central high school teacher demographics as White, with 55% demographics White as case study participants, it should be an area for research.

According to the results of the case study, teachers are struggling with student engagement for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, as more research should be conducted on the classroom management and behavioral disruptions. If teachers are not writing behavioral referrals, how are they handling the disengaged student in class? Are teachers not writing discipline referrals because they feel they need to handle behavioral disruptions themselves, but are they carrying too much of the burden? These questions need to be explored more with research.

Long-term effects of COVID-19 to the K-12 students that experienced lockdown and isolation. More studies will need to be conducted on the long-term effects of COVID-19 and the consequences to the social fabric of families, the economic structure of families, and the social context to families of low SES Black and Latinx students. With the trauma and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) not identified for this particular subpopulation of students, the long-term results will need to be evaluated and studied for years to come.

## **Summary**

While many studies address the inequities in educational opportunities for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, COVID-19 has only exacerbated the existing achievement gap. Chapter 1 introduced the problem statement, and purpose of the qualitative case study. Chapter 2 introduced the review of literature focused on socioeconomics, ineffective teaching/lack of representation, classroom management and discipline, the engagement gap, overrepresentation in special education, and the added effects of COVID-19. The learning loss during the pandemic

affected low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, the long-term effects could produce increased dropouts (Dorn et al., 2021b). It is critical to understand the perceptions of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students, their academic potential, future trajectory, and their current expectations. It is just as critical to analyze students' perceptions of their own self-efficacy and their metacognition of their strengths and weaknesses academically and socially. Chapter 3 reviewed the research method discussed the research methods in conducting the study.

To understand the academic performance low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students through the perceptions of their teachers, the research case study include a case study approach to qualitative data analysis. Questionnaires and one-on-one interviews, through data analysis, provided educators insight and perceptions from the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. The research case study attempted to gain insight in how teachers perceive the learning process and academic performance to improve academic outcomes for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.

This study described the perceptions of the teachers of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at a selected urban school district in south central Texas regarding factors that influence students' academic performance. The teacher is the closest person to the student throughout the day and the teaching environment is the student learning environment. Teacher perceptions can provide much insight into the academic performance and low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. Chapter 4 described 20 teachers' perceptions of the academic progress and growth for their low SES Black and Latinx students in an urban selected south-central high school. 20 case study participants consented to the case study and answered a Google Form questionnaire regarding students' needs based on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. When the 20 case study participants submitted the Google Form questionnaire, they were subsequently scheduled for a

Google Meets interview, that was videoed and transcribed. Line-by-line coding was conducted on each transcribed interview that identified patterns. The questions from the Google Form questionnaire and the Google Meets semistructured interview relate to the three research questions centered in the case study.

Chapter 4 presented the data and results of the case study. The results of the case study emphasize the case study participants' perceptions regarding low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic progress and performance. Patterns were detected and categories created that led to three major themes associated with each of the three research questions. A theme related to Research Question 1 shows low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students must have their needs met (Maslow, 1943) before learning can occur. From Research Question 2, the student/teacher relationship is important to student growth and achievement, with background and culture playing a critical role in the development of those relationships. From Research Question 3, teachers need professional development in cultural proficiency. Finally, the impact of COVID-19 shows negative consequences for students, especially low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' academic performance and progress.

Chapter 5 examined the practical and theoretical implications of the results and findings and provide a more detailed summary of teacher perceptions on the academic performance of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. It also highlighted the case study's strengths and weaknesses to include further recommendations for research on the growth and achievement for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students. Chapter 5 included references cited and appendices.

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## **Appendix A: Email to Case Study Participants**

You may take part in a research study. This form will provide you with the important information regarding the study, including any risks and benefits to you as a case study participant. Please read this form carefully and the researcher is available to answer any questions you have regarding the study. You can ask research related questions and any risk or benefit questions. You may discuss the research process with family members, peers, etc. Your participation in the case study is voluntary and you may refuse participation at any point and for any reason. You will receive no penalty or loss to benefit due to lack of participation.

**PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION:** The case study will provide information regarding low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' perceptions and their teachers' perceptions regarding student growth and achievement. If you become a case study participant, you will complete a Google Doc survey (less than 30 minutes to complete) and a face-to-face interview (less than an hour to complete). Throughout the interview, you generate answers about your feelings and perceptions regarding the school, teacher/student relationship, and self-efficacy.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** Limited risks associated to the research student should pose case study participants any foreseeable risks. Few benefits from the case study to include student and teacher self-awareness could benefit case study participants.

**ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES:** There are no known alternative procedures available to case study participants.

**PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information presented in the case study research will remain confidential allowable by law. Any data that shared with individuals outside of case study participants, such as the ACU Institutional Review Board, the privacy of all case study participants is priority. All confidentiality and privacy will be honored and protected. All data

protected through Google Doc survey transmission by a protected laptop with protected passwords. After the conclusion of the study, the researcher will have all data deleted in an acceptable and appropriate manner.

The risk with the case study is any breach of confidentiality. However, the researcher will protect all personal data from the case study participants, with a focus on the protection of all minor participants. While the Google Doc transmission will give the researcher the case study participants email addresses, the researcher will delete all personal email addresses after the collection of the data is complete.

**COLLECTION OF IDENTIFIABLE PRIVATE INFORMATION OR BIOSPECIMENS:**

The researcher will remove all identification of case study participants, as the researcher or other researchers may use the data in future research without contact with case study participants in the future.

**CONTACTS:** If you have any questions or concerns about the case study research study, the lead researcher is Shelly L. Anderson, a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University, and contact information is: xxxxxx@acu.edu. If you cannot contact the lead researcher, you may contact Dr. Dianne Reed at xxxxxx@acu.edu. If you feel concerned about the study or if you believe that you incurred injury or risks because of the study, or you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact ACU's Chair of the Institutional Review Board and Executive Director of Research.

Dr. Dana McMichael may be reached at

xxxxx@acu.edu

16633 Dallas Parkway, Suite 800

Addison, TX 75001

The researcher anticipates 20 survey participants, and the same case study participants in the interviews.

The researcher could terminate the case study participation for various reasons. For example, if the case study participant does not meet the study requirements or the researcher does not believe it is in the case study participants' best interest to continue forward. The researcher will contact you and parents/guardians (for minor participants) in the event you are no longer participating in the study.

Please sign below if you voluntarily agree to participate as a case study participant. Please make sure you have read and agree to all the information in the consent document. You do not waive any legal rights by consenting to this research study.

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Printed name of participant

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Signature of participant and date

*Shelly Lynn Anderson*

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Signature of person obtaining consent and date

### Appendix B: Teacher Questionnaire

For each of the questions below, circle the response that best categorizes your feelings and perceptions of the following statements with 1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-neutral, 4-agree, and 5-strongly agree.

Questions	strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	strongly agree
My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students eat breakfast and lunch at school.	1	2	3	4	5
My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students sleep 8 hours a night.	1	2	3	4	5
My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are usually hungry throughout the school day.	1	2	3	4	5
If my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are tired/hungry, it is difficult for them to focus and concentrate.	1	2	3	4	5
The school and classes are comfortable and enjoyable for my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.	1	2	3	4	5

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The student/teacher relationships are strong and bonded.	1	2	3	4	5
The low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at school are generally respectful and nice.	1	2	3	4	5
My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students feel valued as a member of my class.	1	2	3	4	5
My low SES at-risk students feel safe and valued at school.	1	2	3	4	5
Once your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are comfortable and safe within my classroom, it is easy for me to teach.	1	2	3	4	5
I value the support I receive from my school, colleagues, and students in my high school.	1	2	3	4	5

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My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within my class.	1	2	3	4	5
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My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within the school.	1	2	3	4	5
My school, colleagues, and students want my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to reach their goals.	1	2	3	4	5
I am learning new instructional skills in all my classes to meet the needs of my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.	1	2	3	4	5

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### ***Personal Background***

1. Gender
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary
2. Race/Ethnicity
  - a. Hispanic/Latino
  - b. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - c. Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - d. Black or African American
  - e. White

3. Years teaching
  - a. 0-5 years
  - b. 6-10 years
  - c. 11-15 years
  - d. Over 16 years

### **Appendix C: One-on-One Interview Questions**

1. Can you tell me what subject area you teach and what grade level?
2. Are you comfortable in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the knowledge and skills (TEKS)? Why or why not?
3. Do you feel that you receive resources (i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc.) to support you in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?
4. What is your strength in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?
5. What is your weakness in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?
6. How important are student/teacher relationships in student growth and achievement?
7. Do you differentiate and scaffold your lessons for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?
8. How do you utilize scaffolding/differentiation within the lesson for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students that are underperforming?
9. Do you feel that you are learning and growing as a professional educator?
10. When you come to school, do you feel comfortable to embrace your background and culture?
11. Do you connect with your students' cultures and backgrounds?
12. Do you feel supported by your school and administrators in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Why or why not?
13. Do you often recommend low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to honors classes or Gifted and Talented classes?
14. Do you have a high number of behavioral disruptions in class or submitting discipline referrals for your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain.



15. How engaged are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in your classes?

Explain.

16. How important is the role of language for the growth and achievement of low SES at-risk

Black and Latinx students? Explain.

17. Do your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning and think about themselves as students (self-efficacy)?

18. Is self-efficacy innate or a learned skill?

19. Are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians involved with their child's learning?

20. Do you feel that your lessons meet the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student where they are as a student, and do you feel the rigor in the instruction provides for growth and achievement? Explain.

21. How did COVID-19 impact your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement and was remote learning effective? Explain.

22. Is there any valuable information you would like to contribute to the topic of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in relation to the academic achievement gap?

### Appendix D: Research Question Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Likert Scale Questionnaire	Themes
<p>RQ1: How do the teachers perceive their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' educational needs regarding the influence of the classroom learning environment on students' academic growth and achievement?</p>	<p>I17: Do your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning and think about themselves as students (self-efficacy)?            I18: Is self-efficacy innate or a learned skill?            I19: Are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians involved with their child's learning?            I21: How did COVID-19 impact your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement and was remote learning effective? Explain.</p>	<p>Q1: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students eat breakfast and lunch at school.            Q2: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students sleep 8 hours a night.            Q3: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are usually hungry throughout the day.            Q4: If my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are tired/hungry, it is difficult for them to focus and concentrate.            Q9: My low SES at-risk students feel safe and valued at school.            Q12: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within my class.</p>	<p>Needs such as sleeping, food, water, shelter, and security must be met before learning can take place.</p>
<p>RQ2: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding the influence of student/teacher relationships on their academic performance?</p>	<p>I6: How important are student/teacher relationships in student growth and achievement?            I11: Do you connect with your students' cultures and backgrounds?            I14: Do you have a high number of behavioral disruptions in class or submitting discipline referrals for your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain.            I15: How engaged are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain            I16: How important is the role of language for the growth and achievement of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain.</p>	<p>Q5: The school and classes are comfortable and enjoyable for my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.            Q6: The student/teacher relationships are strong and bonded.            Q7: The low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at school are generally respectful and nice.            Q8: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students feel valued as a member of my class.</p>	<p>Student/Teacher Relationships must be developed before learning can take place.</p>

<p>RQ3: What are the perceptions of teachers at a selected urban high school located in south central Texas regarding changes, methods, and instructional strategies that can be made in the classroom environment to influence the academic performance of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?</p>	<p>I1: Can you tell me what subject area you teach and what grade level?  I2: Are you comfortable in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the knowledge and skills (TEKS)? Why or why not?  I3: Do you feel that you receive resources, i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc., to support you in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?  I4: What is your strength in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?  I5: What is your weakness in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?  I7: Do you differentiate and scaffold your lessons for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?  I8: How do you utilize scaffolding/differentiation within the lesson for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students that are underperforming?  I9: Do you feel that you are learning and growing as a professional educator?  I10: When you come to school, do you feel comfortable embracing your background and culture?  I12: Do you feel supported by your school and administrators in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Why or why not?  I13: Do you often recommend low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to honors classes or Gifted and Talented classes?  I20: Do you feel that your lessons meet the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student where they are as a student, and do you feel the rigor in the instruction provides for</p>	<p>Q10: Once your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are comfortable and safe within my classroom, it is easy for me to teach.  Q11: I value the support I receive from my school, colleagues, and students in my high school.  Q13: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within the school.  Q14: My school, colleagues, and students want my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to reach their goals.  Q15: I am learning new instructional skills in all my classes to meet the needs of my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.</p>	<p>Professional development in cultural proficiency and instruction are needed to assist low SES at risk Black and Latinx students reach their learning potential.</p>
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	<p>growth and achievement? Explain. I22: Is there any valuable information you would like to contribute to the topic of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in relation to the academic achievement gap?</p>		
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## Appendix E: Research Question 1 Triangulated Data

*The participants' responses/percentages of frequency for questionnaire/interview (RQ1)*

RQ1 Questions (Q/I)	Frequency Percentages	RQ1 Participants' Responses
Q1: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students eat breakfast and lunch at school.	50% of case study participants are unsure or neutral; 20% strongly agreed	P2, P4, P8, P9, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P20  P7, P10, P11, P19
Q2: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students sleep 8 hours a night.	65% of case study participants disagreed	P1, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16, P17
Q3: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are usually hungry throughout the school day.	40% of case study participants agreed	P5, P11, P13, P15, P16, P17, P19
Q4: If my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are tired/hungry, it is difficult for them to focus and concentrate	63% of the case study participants strongly agreed	P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P15, P16, P18, P20  P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P14, P19, P20
Q9: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students feel safe and valued at school.	44% of case study participants are unsure or neutral; 39% of case study participants disagreed.	P3, P11, P12, P13, P16, P17, P18
Q12: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within my classes.	40% of case study participants agreed	P2, P3, P5, P10, P12, P14, P15, P20
I17: Do your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students think about their learning and think about themselves as students (self-efficacy)?	100% of the case study participants do not believe their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students do not think about themselves as students (self-efficacy).	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I18: Is self-efficacy innate or a learned skill?	100% of the case study participants believe that self-efficacy is a learned skill.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I19: Are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians involved with their child's learning?	85% of case study participants responded that their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' parents/guardians are not involved with their child's learning.	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18, P20
I21: How did COVID-19 impact your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' growth and achievement and was remote learning effective? Explain.	100% of case study participants feel that COVID-19 had devastating effects on their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students'.	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20

## Appendix F: Research Question 2 Triangulated Data

*The participants' responses/percentages of frequency for questionnaire/interview (RQ2)*

RQ2 Questions (Q/I)	Frequency Percentages	RQ2 Participants' Responses
Q5: The school and classes are comfortable and enjoyable for my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.	50% of case study participants were unsure or neutral;  30% disagreed	P2, P4, P5, P10, P11, P13, P14, P16, P18  P1, P3, P6, P7, P17, P20
Q6: The student/teacher relationships are strong and bonded.	45% of case study participants were unsure or neutral;  30% agreed  74% were unsure or neutral;	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P10, P15, P20  P12, P13, P14, P17, P18, P19
Q7: The low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students at school are generally respectful and nice.	16% agreed	P1, P2, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18  P3, P8, P14
Q8: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students feel valued as a member of my class.	60% of case study participants agreed	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P10, P12, P14, P15, P19, P20
I6: How important are student/teacher relationships in student growth and achievement?	100% of case study participants stated student/teacher relationships are very important	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I11: Do you connect with your students' cultures and backgrounds?	100% of case study participants say they make time and effort to connect with their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students' background and culture	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I14: Do you have a high number of behavioral disruptions in class or submitting discipline referrals for your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain.	80% of case study participants say they do not have a high number of behavioral disruptions or discipline referrals	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P18, P20
I15: How engaged are your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain	100% of case study participants struggle with student engagement	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I16: How important is the role of language for growth and achievement of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Explain.	100% of case study participants say the role of language is important for the growth and achievement of their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20

### Appendix G: Research Question 3 Triangulated Data

*Participants' responses/percentages of frequency for questionnaire question (RQ3)*

RQ3 Questions (Q/I)	Frequency Percentages	RQ3 Participants' Responses
Q10: Once your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are comfortable and safe within my classroom, it is easy for me to teach.	50% of case study participants strongly agreed	P3, P4, P8, P10, P14, P15, P18, P19, P20
Q11: I value the support I receive from my school, colleagues, and students in my high school.	55% of case study participants strongly agreed	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P8, P10, P12, P15, P16, P18
Q13: My low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students are meeting their highest potential within the school.	50% of case study participants disagreed	P3, P6, P7, P11, P12, P13, P16, P17, P20
Q14: My school, colleagues, and students want my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to reach their goals.	40% of case study participants agreed	P1, P5, P6, P7, P9, P10, P14, P20
Q15: I am learning new instructional skills in all my classes to meet the needs of my low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students.	37% of case study participants agreed	P1, P3, P4, P13, P14, P15, P16
I1: Can you tell me what subject area you teach and what grade level?	100% of case study participants are certified and teaching at the high school level either in English Language Arts/ESL, History, or Special Ed	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I2: Are you comfortable in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in the knowledge and skills (TEKS)? Why or why not?	100% of case study participants feel comfortable and confident in growing their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I3: Do you feel that you receive resources (i.e., curriculum, planning, administrative, etc.) to support you in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?	60% of case study participants do not feel they receive adequate resources from their district/administration	P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18, P20
I4: What is your strength in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?	85% of case study participants stated their strength was student/teacher relationships	P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I5: What is your weakness in growing low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?	35% of case study participants acknowledge their weakness as the lack of student background and	P3, P8, P11, P15, P16, P18, P20

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	cultural knowledge to help them grow	
	20% of case study participants say there is not enough time for follow-through	P6, P9, P10, P14
I7: Do you differentiate and scaffold your lessons for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students?	100% of case study participants say they differentiate and scaffold lessons for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I8: How do you utilize scaffolding/differentiation within the lesson for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students that are underperforming?	100% of case study participants use instructional strategies to differentiate and scaffold for their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I9: Do you feel that you are learning and growing as a professional educator?	100% of case study participants say they are learning and growing as professional educators	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I10: When you come to school, do you feel comfortable embracing your background and culture?	Of the 20 case study participants, 8 out of 9 Black and Latinx teachers say they are comfortable to embrace their background and culture at school.	P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P13, P14, P19
	8 out of 11 White teachers say they do not feel comfortable to embrace their background and culture at school	P3, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P19
I12: Do you feel supported by your school and administrators in growing your low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students? Why or why not?	65% of the case study participants do not feel supported by district/administration	P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, P9, P11, P13, P15, P16, P17, P18, P20
I13: Do you often recommend low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students to honors classes or Gifted and Talented classes?	100% of case study participants say they recommend/accept low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students into honors or advanced classes	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20

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I20: Do you feel that your lessons meet the low SES at-risk Black and Latinx student where they are as a student, and do you feel the rigor in the instruction?	100% of case study participants say they try to meet their low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students where they are as students and provide the rigor in instruction for growth and achievement	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P20
I22: Is there any valuable information you would like to contribute to the topic of low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students in relation to the academic achievement gap?	30% of case study participants added they do not feel education is equitable for low SES at-risk Black and Latinx students	P2, P11, P14, P16, P18, P19
	10% of case study participants added they believe COVID-19 will have devastating effects on these students for years to come	P10, P20

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## Appendix H: IRB Approval Letter

[do-not-reply@cayuse.com](mailto:do-not-reply@cayuse.com)

Tue, Nov 22, 1:21 PM (12  
days ago)

to dgr18a, me

DATE: November 22, 2022

PI: Shelly Anderson

DEPARTMENT: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

RE: Initial - IRB-2022-92

*Academic Performance of Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students: A Case Study of Teachers' Perceptions*

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Academic Performance of Low SES At-Risk Black and Latinx Students: A Case Study of Teachers' Perceptions*. The administrative check-in date is --.

DECISION: Exempt

CATEGORY: Category 2. (ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

RESEARCH NOTES:

ADDITIONAL APPROVALS/INSTRUCTIONS: Meets criteria for an exempt study. Participants will be informed of study purposes, risks, and participant rights and will sign to document consent.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional

Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

- When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email [orsp@acu.edu](mailto:orsp@acu.edu) to indicate that the research has finished.
- According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
- It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website <http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...> or email [orsp@acu.edu](mailto:orsp@acu.edu) with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board