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REDUCING DISPARITIES IN ACT RESULTS ACCORDING TO RACIAL IDENTITY:
AN APPLIED RESEARCH STUDY INTO THE *We*ACT PROGRAM IN
TINLAKE HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Leadership and Counselor Education
The University of Mississippi

by

MARCUS L. STEWART

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

The ACT provides opportunities for students of various socioeconomic backgrounds, racial identities, and family structures. Throughout the nation, there is a disparity that involves Black students scoring less than White students on the test by a margin of five points. The applied mixed methods research aimed to identify elements to help decrease the gap in student scores. The combined efforts of all the elements, tutorials, boot camps, ACT prep classes, and providing ACT resources in daily instruction formed the *WeACT* program. The students of Tinlake High School were exposed to this pilot program to assist in their ACT growth. Four research questions guided this study. The first question measured the overall effectiveness of the program in reducing the ACT achievement gap. The second question explored the effectiveness of the individual components of the program. The third question inquired about potential improvements to the program. The fourth question evaluated the changes in student confidence relative to the ACT.

Consequently, there was an increase in Black students' ACT scores who participated in the program. The students identified two elements as the most effective, ACT Bootcamps and exposure to ACT resources in daily instruction. Students presented recommendations for program improvement in three categories of factors: teacher actions, school actions, or teacher-school actions. Despite the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, student confidence grew for students during this program.

Keywords: achievement gap, ACT, test preparation, professional development

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Gloria Stewart Mike. If ever it were possible for one person to embody all that is good without prejudice or flaw, you were it. My biggest blessing was the time we shared before my biggest loss. I hope the work I have done and will continue to do, brings a sense of pride. Continue to communicate with me through the rays of the sun and the sounds of the rain.

To James Stewart, the epitome of a standard of excellence. From you, I learned that no work is too hard when it is necessary. Being a living embodiment of servant leadership, love for the fellow man, and helping all in need provided the template I now use to pattern my life.

To Chavita, Anthony, Kelcey, Tonika, Fred, and Lee, thank you all for truly being the best siblings a guy could ask for. The calls, group texts, and posts provided encouragement on my hardest days. I love each of you more than you will ever know. Although Tootie has preceded us, I am at peace knowing the company she has joined.

In life, there are days when all the lessons come together, and meaning is constructed. My day was February 23, 2000. The most significant moment of my life happened as I witnessed the birth of my son. Since that day, all my actions have been geared towards being an example and extension of the great men who invested in me. Son, I thank you for sharing me with the world unselfishly. Because you allowed me to accept challenges that took away our precious time, I achieved. I love you, and I hope this work inspires you to dream without limitations.

To the Stewart family, near and far, we are the present and future generations. It is our challenge to strengthen the bonds to ensure the legacy remains strong, dignified, and unified. One love.

To my Dad, Momma J, and my sister Shonda, I love you all.

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Now, as a nation, we don't promise equal outcomes, but we were founded on the idea everybody should have an equal opportunity to succeed. No matter who you are, what you look like, where you come from, you can make it. That's an essential promise of America. Where you start should not determine where you end up.

-Barack Obama

To my mentor Dr. Tom Burnham, when I doubted if my calling was really a passion, I drew inspiration from you. Thank you for always being there consistently with advice and a lesson to save the day. May this work reciprocate the blessings you have bestowed upon me.

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To my dissertation committee, Dr. Doug Davis, Dr. Susan McClelland, and Dr. Amanda Winburn, thank you for your knowledge, guidance, time, and grace. I am appreciative of your commitments to this process.

To professors Dr. Dennis Bunch, Dr. Jill Cabrera-Davis, and Dr. Doug Davis, I am grateful to have experienced your classes during this program. I truly enjoyed learning from each of you. I hope this is only the beginning of many shared endeavors to improve education in the state of Mississippi.

To CIV, thank you for taking this journey which turned a cohort into a friendship. Especially, my new friends Rob D., Reg, Sherna, and Tee, it has been a joy to experience this with you all. May the friendships continue.

To the many educators who have been a part of my life and career to this point, I thank you and appreciate every act of compassion, kindness, and support you have ever given.

To the Dawson and Tchula Communities, which provided an environment where I could exceed the limitations and restrictions associated with high rates of poverty and low expectations. My heart will never forget the many acts of love and kindness.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

In the Kingsville County School District (KCS D) strategic plan, the district illustrates one of its primary goals, to provide a safe, healthy, and inclusive environment for the students. The school administrators in this district are constantly faced with a multitude of tasks and responsibilities relative to implementing the indicators associated with the strategic plan. A common objective of the district stakeholders involves doing what is best for all students. Ultimately, the goal is maximum student achievement for every student. The KCS D strategic plan is designed to support and provide for each aspect of every student's educational experience. To this end, Allison Skerrett (2008) wrote:

Approaching educational change with a racialized perspective means that in planning new and revised policies [sic], policymakers will consider the greatly changed demographics of their nations and the widely inclusive attitudes that their citizens hold toward this diversity. They will take up their moral responsibility to foster a society that not only respects and values diversity and grants and protects its citizens' rights but one that explicitly directs and supports schools in designing curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and organizational structures that are continuously responsive to, and reflective of, student diversity (p. 275).

According to results from the 2018 ACT report entitled *The Condition of College and Career Readiness*, the percentage of ACT-tested high school graduates meeting the ACT College

Readiness Benchmarks by race and ethnicity revealed a disparity between the three largest racial groups. In the graduating class of 2018, approximately 1,914,817 students, or (55%) of the entire class, took the ACT. The ethnic student breakdown included 243,080 Black students or (13%), 307,358 Hispanic students or (16%), and 996,712 White students or (52%). For this study, the term Black was used to identify students who reported their race as African American. Black student performance was (13%) lower than Hispanics and (36%) lower than White students on ACT Reading. In Science, Black students' scores were (11%) lower than Hispanics and (35%) lower than White students. The student results for math were identical to the reading results as Hispanics scored (14%) higher than Black students, while White students scored (36%) higher than Black students in this subcategory. It was the subcategory of English that produced the most substantial disparity. Black students scored (14%) lower than Hispanic students and (40%) lower than White students (ACT Incorporated, 2018).

The same ACT report examined college readiness levels for underserved learners as an area of measurement. The report illustrated college readiness levels for underserved learners, which provide an area of measurement for this study. An underserved learner was defined as a student who identified with one of the three criteria: they came from low-income families, self-identified their race or ethnicity as a minority, or were first-generation college students. The relationship between the degree to which students were considered underserved while attempting to meet ACT benchmarks for the content areas revealed that as the number of underserved criteria increased, the number of students who met benchmarks decreased. Table 1.1 details the relationship between the number of underserved criteria affecting each student and the ACT benchmarks the students mastered. Of the students who did not identify with any of the three underserved criteria, (35%) met zero or one benchmark, (14%) met two benchmarks, and (52%) met three or four benchmarks. The students who identified with one of the underserved criteria

met zero or one benchmark at a (62%) rate, students met two benchmarks at a (13%) rate, and (25%) of the students met three or more benchmarks. Students who met two of the underserved criteria continued to struggle with meeting ACT benchmarks as (73%) of those students met zero to one of the ACT benchmarks. Additionally, (12%) of the students who identified with two of the underserved criteria met two of the ACT benchmarks, and (15%) of students who fell into this category met three or four benchmarks. If a student was affected by three or more of the underserved learner criteria, they had an (81%) chance of only mastering one of the ACT benchmarks, and (9%) met two of the benchmarks. Students who possessed three of the criteria associated with underserved learners met three benchmarks at a rate of (10%). Perhaps, the most alarming statistic from the research provided that fewer than (25%) of underserved student graduates showed overall college and career readiness (ACT Incorporated, 2018).

Table 1.1

Underserved learners meeting ACT Benchmarks

ACT Benchmarks met	Identify with none of the underserved criteria	Met one of the underserved criteria	Met two of the underserved criteria	Met three or more of the underserved criteria
Met zero to one benchmark	35%	62%	73%	81%
Met two benchmarks	14%	13%	12%	9%
Met three or more benchmarks	52%	25%	15%	10%

The average total Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for the three largest ethnic groups are presented in this section. The total averages for each group were as follows, 946 for Black students, 990 for Hispanic or Latino students, and 1123 for White students. A further

breakdown of these three total scores for the two tested sections, Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW) and Math, illustrated the disparity in greater detail (Table 1.2). Results for the three student groups revealed that Black students scored 483 on ERW and 463 on Math. Hispanic or Latino students scored 501 in ERW and 489 on the Math section. White students scored 566 in ERW and 557 in Math. The disparities of this exam were evident in the score variations between the ethnic groups. In ERW, Black students scored 18 points lower than Hispanic or Latino students and 83 points lower than White students. In Math, Black students scored 26 points lower than Hispanic or Latino students and 94 points lower than White students (CollegeBoard, 2018).

Table 1.2

SAT score breakdown by content area and race

SAT content area	Black students	Hispanic students	White students
Evidence-based reading and writing	483	501	566
Math	463	489	557
Total Score	946	990	1123

Although the SAT report did not provide data for the underserved learner as the ACT report, the SAT report provided benchmark achievement statistics (Table 1.3). In this regard, (50%) of Black students met the ERW benchmark, while only (23%) met the Math benchmark. Hispanic or Latino students met the ERW benchmark at (58%) and the Math benchmark at (33%). While (82%) of White students met the ERW benchmark, (61%) met the Math

benchmark. The percentages of students who did not meet either of the benchmarks for each group were as follows: Black (49%), Hispanic or Latino (40%), and White (16%) according to the 2018 report on SAT Participation and Performance (CollegeBoard, 2018).

Table 1.3

Percentage of students meeting SAT benchmarks by race

SAT benchmarks	Black students	Hispanic students	White students
Evidence-based reading and writing	50%	58%	82%
Math	23%	33%	61%
Met none of the benchmarks	49%	40%	16%

Through the use of an applied research design with a program evaluation, the disparities in ACT results from the perspective of a Black student in relation to the other racial student groups at Tinlake High School were examined. Tinlake High School or THS provided a location equipped with resources to implement this action plan effectively. The daily schedule possessed the flexibility that allowed for the implementation of ACT Prep classes and other remedial opportunities to assist students in ACT preparation. The Kingsville County School District has been making strides in preparing students for the ACT. The efforts have increased in each of the last five years. The following sections provided demographic information about this school in the Kingsville County School District, where the action plan was implemented. A description of the problem was also provided, which contained the rationale and implications for the study.

Description of the Problem

In 2005, I was a teacher in one of the poorest counties in Mississippi, Nelson County. I vividly remember the routine drive from Dawson to the classroom in Duvall. The daily commute would proceed through other towns in the county where dilapidated houses and remnants of old

buildings littered the scenery. Daily, I would see the individuals who frequented the street corners staunchly from sun-up to sun-down. Like the saying, "the more things change, the more they stay the same," the faces of the unemployed individuals have changed and now resemble the people I shared classrooms with either as a peer or as a teacher. The daily tasks of these individuals remain the same. Their presence highlights a lost economic opportunity cost to the area and a stark reality as the potential for productivity is virtually nonexistent, and unemployment thrives. Embedded within this community is a sobering reality of unattainable post-high school education due primarily to the cost for most of the residents. Seemingly insurmountable socioeconomic factors subjugate the dreams of many Nelson County families of seeing their children go to college or enroll in other preparational programs. Historically, specific Mississippi areas have been characterized and associated in an educational context through low academic performance, which bears a strong correlation to the state's economic dispersing. In Mississippi, decades-long socioeconomic inequality has negatively impacted the attitudes and perceptions of many in Black communities. As a result of the various inequities established during the tumultuous years of racial injustice and economic inequity, many Mississippi communities are still affected by inadequate educational opportunities. There is seemingly no end in the immediate future for many of the residents adversely affected by the phenomena.

Research Site

The research site, Tinline High School, is located in Tinline, Mississippi, in Kingsville County. The city of Tinline has been consistently ranked as one of the "Top 10" best places to live. It carried the distinction of being one of the five safest cities to live in Mississippi. Some of the forms of economic prosperity evident throughout the community included new subdivisions and other new construction, a state-of-the-art amphitheater, multiple businesses, and various eateries. Prosperity was present in schools as well. The Kingsville County School District was

building a new state-of-the-art high school while it renovated and upgraded other schools in the district. The campus provides educational services to approximately 1629 students in grades 9 through 12. At the time of this study, the school's racial breakdown was (29.7%) Black, (65%) White, and (5%) Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or students who identify with two or more ethnicities (PowerSchool, 2005-2019). At Tinlake High School, the mission is to provide students with a quality education equitably and inclusively, regardless of socioeconomic status, family background, educational attainment, or other related factors. Within THS, there was a noticeable ACT performance gap among the students who theoretically received equal educational opportunities and interventions focused on increased student achievement for all. The impact of this finding is significant to the futures of those students and the many more that will come after.

The ACT is given to high school students to measure their knowledge and provide information to colleges, which aid in student recruitment. This test helps to predict a student's likelihood of success in college. According to national ACT data from 2007-2019, Black students had an average composite score of 17. During the same period, White students had an average composite score of 22.3, five points higher than Black students (ACT Incorporated, 2017, p.8). When the state-level ACT data was disaggregated for Mississippi during 2007-2018, it revealed that Black students received an average composite score of 16.4 while White students received a 20.6 average composite score (ACT Incorporated, 2017, p.8). Lastly, the 2007-2019 ACT data for Kingsville County showed a contrast in scores between the two racial groups. Black students in Kingsville County had an average score of 17, which was higher than the state average of 16.4 and equal to the national average score of 17. Although Black students in

Kingsville County scored higher than the state average for the ethnic group, they failed to measure up to the average composite score of 20.7 for White students in Kingsville County (ACT Incorporated 2017, p.8).

A student who improves their ACT score by one single point has the potential to increase financial offerings by thousands of dollars. A student who achieves a composite score of 22 is eligible to attend junior college in Mississippi free of cost. Another benefit of the ACT is the ability to use the different sub-scores to substitute for failed SATP tests. If students make a 17 subscore in ACT Math, it replaces a failed Algebra I SATP score. If students make a 17 subscore in ACT Science, it replaces a failed Biology SATP score. If students make a 17 subscore in ACT English, it replaces a failed English II SATP score. If students make a 17 subscore in ACT Reading, it replaces a failed U.S. History SATP score. The ACT sub-scores provide another graduation option for students, ultimately being more beneficial to Black students. The graduation rate for Black students in Mississippi is (81.9%) or 16,700 students; for White students, the rate is higher at (88.3%) or 15,284 students (Office of Accountability, 2020, p. 5). If more Black students were able to take advantage of these options, it has the potential to increase the graduation rate of Black students across the state. These statistics illustrated a need for more attention in identifying and providing supports, which potentially could lead to a solution to the deficits.

Moreover, these statistics illustrated a situation where the White students of the Kingsville School District and school districts across the state of Mississippi score higher on the ACT than Black students (ACT Incorporated 2017, p. 8). As a result of this research, I intended to identify strategies to reduce the effects of some of the more prevalent variables that contribute to the three to five-point variations in test scores. More so, I attempted to address the deficits with targeted supports. It was essential to help students complete their high school studies

prepared for college coursework and career endeavors. As a result of these findings, an interesting position can be asserted regarding equity in instruction. If the Tinlake High School students were receiving an equitable and equal education, why are the results not a reflection of the efforts? In theory, the students should have been performing consistently on assessments like the ACT. If THS students perform more consistently on the ACT, in theory, graduation rates should improve, and more students should be financially able to attend junior college tuition-free. An increase in these two factors could become a positive boost for the state of Mississippi by providing a more diversely educated workforce and a possible reduction in the effects of poverty.

Significance of the Problem

At the time of this research, the aforementioned county of Nelson, Mississippi, had 17,010 residents. There were 13,942 Black residents, or (82.8%) of the total population. Regarding the county's educational attainment, (75.1%) of Nelson County residents aged 25 years or older possessed a high school diploma. However, only (9.9%) of this same group had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income of \$21,093 was noticeably lower than the state average of \$43,567 and significantly lower than the nation's median household income of \$60,293. The poverty rate for Nelson County residents was (33.2%), noticeably higher than the state average of (19.7%), and more than three times the national average of (11.8%) (United States Census Bureau, 2018). These statistics illustrate a truth. The state of Mississippi could benefit from a well-developed, highly qualified, educationally sound workforce with increased human capital. An improvement of this sort would involve developing a diverse and skillfully prepared workforce. These actions begin with education. In almost any regard, education is the key to reducing the catastrophic effects of poverty in this state. Ideally, the benefits of this study were to be wide-reaching, inclusive, and contain the unlimited potential

for change. In Nelson County, poverty was the main issue plaguing the community and many others like it throughout the state. Education is the potential solution for the students who otherwise would not have a chance at a successful life.

Significance for the Audience

This study brought attention to disparities in ACT results that existed in the scores of the Black and White student populations of Tinlake High School. A focal point of this applied research study was to use the findings to redefine the methodology, practices, and norms associated with educating students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The testing disparities referenced in the context of this study were part of a nationwide trend. Within each of the data sets produced after ACT administrations, there existed repetitive trends of Black students and their inability to perform in the same regard as their ethnic counterparts.

This research contained efforts that involved implementing, documenting, and continuously improving a series of interventions to reduce the ACT achievement gap. The research focused on identifying elements that could be replicated in other school environments to assist with similar endeavors. Multiple school districts across the state could benefit from the graduation option to reduce the gap in Black and White graduation rates. The study's development was aligned with Tinlake High School's vision to provide solutions to the causes of the inequities present in ACT results. These actions reinforced an organizational objective to provide for the best interest of all students.

Additionally, this study enlightened KCSD stakeholders in their efforts to provide instructional equity in all school environments. It is intended to advise district and school-level administrators in inclusive instructional practices and specific interventions for Black students. Black students were encouraged to increase their investment in the ACT while becoming more aware of the test's benefits. Also, the Black students were encouraged to develop increased

confidence and more favorable perceptions of the ACT and the efforts involved in test preparation. As a result, school leaders would examine the findings after implementing the interventions of this study to reduce the ACT achievement gap between Black and White students. Parents received additional ACT prep assistance for their children without incurring high costs or requiring extensive time commitments. An increase in ACT composite scores for Black students could mean increased assistance in scholarships to higher education institutions or career preparation programs, ultimately proving beneficial to parents.

The community benefits from a study of this kind due to the awareness placed on the need for interventions to close this ACT achievement gap between Black students and their peers. Closing this gap in ACT performance is crucial to improving diversity in the development and preparation of the future workforce of the state. This applied research study advised community stakeholders and enlightened them on the benefits of closing the ACT gap. As a result of this study, stakeholders will be better equipped to understand the educational ramifications of ACT performance disparities as related to Black students.

Purpose Statement

This study addressed the disparities in ACT performance between Black and White students in Tinlake High School. The purpose of the action plan was to identify elements to reduce the disparities in ACT scores of the student populations at Tinlake High School by implementing a program with student support elements and a program evaluation. In the first phase of the study, county, state, and national ACT data were analyzed to identify the extent of the ACT disparities among the Black and White students of THS. An applied mixed methods design was used to collect and analyze the ACT data before establishing the action plan

parameters involved in this research. Individual elements were implemented to gather qualitative data and to explain the quantitative results in depth. The data were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the components of the action plan individually and collectively.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study into the ACT achievement gap were designed to collect information about the effectiveness of the *WeACT* program as a collective and as individual components. The first research question was probably the most important, as it addressed the effectiveness of the entire program. The second question's purpose was to gather information about the effectiveness of the elements of the action plan. The third question focused on the potential for program improvements, which would ensure a continual revision and refinement process. The final research question provided information regarding student attitude and confidence relative to the ACT. The research questions of this study were as follows:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Overview of the Study

In the Kingsville School District, academic success is essential and vital to the futures of the students. This research into the variables associated with ACT preparation stemmed from the potential associated with mid to upper percentile ACT scores and the ability to provide for students who aspired to continue their education after completing high school. Many families are

not able to meet the financial requirements associated with higher education or career preparation programs. Families benefit when their child produces a respectable score the ACT. By scoring a 22 or higher, a Mississippi student is provided life changing opportunities. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to present reasons for investigating the disparities which disproportionately affect Black students. I have attempted to highlight the urgency of closing the ACT achievement gap for Black students. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature associated with the research topic concerning the ACT and the various elements of the action plan. Another intention of the research is to contribute to the existing literature concerning the topic. Chapter Three provides an overview of the action plan's methodology, which includes the development, implementation, and evaluation of the plan. Chapter Four will present a review of the findings from the study. Chapter Five concludes the research and provides future implications for the ongoing improvement of the action plan.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In schools throughout the nation, ACT performance proved to be a critical deciding factor for many students looking to pursue college and other career programs after high school. ACT statistics illustrated a narrative in which Black students scored an average of five points behind White students during ACT administrations. According to national statistics presented by ACT (2017), the average score for a Black student was 17 as opposed to 20 for the average White student. This research's action plan was designed to account for some of the variations in family demographics directly related to student academic success, such as family educational attainment, employment, income, and parental involvement. Additionally, the action plan attempted to control school-specific factors' effects on the students' success in the *WeACT* program, including resource allocation and distribution, student marginalization, and student motivation.

This literature review focused on the research-based literature to identify the effects of various demographics on ACT performance. The literature referenced in this review provides context concerning various factors related to student performance on the ACT. The research of this chapter guided the actions involved in diagnosing discrepancies and designing solutions to address the deficits between Black and White students. Finally, the relationship between student demographics, various intervention strategies, and student achievement on the ACT were examined.

ACT

The Princeton Review (2018) described the ACT as an entrance exam administered by ACT Incorporated that most colleges and universities used to make admissions decisions. This test measured a high school student's readiness for college and provided colleges with one common data point that can be used to compare all applicants. Each year thousands of students from across the nation take this exam in hopes of achieving a high enough score to receive financial assistance to colleges and career preparation programs. In 2020-21, the test was offered nationally up to twelve times. It was offered three times in September, four times in October, and once in each month of December, February, April, June and July. Additionally, school districts elect to give the exam to their students in separate administrations.

Test Preparation

Alon (2010) found that Blacks students were more likely to use test preparation than other racial groups. According to his research, (84%) of Blacks used at least one form of preparation compared to only (68%) of Whites. Most Black students signed up for the ACT Prep classes to conveniently provide test preparation through their regular school day. Blacks were more likely to be engaged in multiple test preparation activities. More so, the Black students were more likely to engage in the school-provided resource. Alon (2010) concluded that the Black-White gap was mainly a private test preparation utilization product, which included private courses and tutors.

Grodsky (2010) referenced a finding from Buchmann, Condrón, and Roscigno (BCR) which asserted children of more affluent parents are more likely than children from lower-income families to engage in private test preparation courses or to enlist the services of a private tutor. They were not more likely to engage in other forms of preparation. The assertion formed a basis for the current study. Applying this logic, the White students of Tinlake were more than

likely to retain private tutors' services in preparation for the ACT. The same students were more inclined to come from affluent households. The class gap in test preparation was most glaring among the students from privileged households (Alon, 2010, p. 467). Grodsky (2010) provided that students who participate in test preparation activities enjoy significantly higher SAT scores than students who do nothing to prepare for the exam. The KCSD focused its efforts on the ACT. As such, the KCSD schools prepared students for the ACT through the resources provided by the district. In this regard, THS offers students access to ACT Prep classes to reduce the deficit in the ACT scores of students who may not have the means to access effective test preparation options. Furthermore, Grodsky (2010) determined that test preparation increases the odds of attending a selective or highly selective four-year college by (24%) and (51%), respectively, net of other measures of social origin and academic achievement. As indicated in the first chapter, Black students greatly benefit when they are allowed to attend college. The advantages are necessary to reverse years of racial inequity evident in the Black population of the state of Mississippi. For many Tinlake High School students, the extra preparation provided from the *WeACT* program's efforts increases the odds of Black students being accepted into college.

Alon (2010) found that for White students looking to prepare for the ACT, engaging in high school courses and self-preparation methods declines as their test scores increase. For Black students, their use of the methods increases as their scores increase. When considering the lower-scoring students, both groups use public forms of test preparation at a similar rate. However, Black students utilized private means of test prep more than White students. One theory that possibly explained this disparity is the increased likelihood of White students having more access to cultural capital. The access to cultural capital provided the context and capacity for students to make relevant connections necessary for better comprehension. Among the high-

scoring students, White students relied on private preparation more than Black students. Alon (2010) reaffirmed that Black students used public preparation methods at a higher rate than White students.

Demographics and student performance

When considering the factors affecting student performance, the influence of student demographics cannot be overlooked due to the strong correlation between the two variables. Carnoy and Garcia (2017) studied math and reading research from the past decades relative to demographics and student academic performance gathered from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) over a substantial period, in most cases, 10 to 17 years. Results exposed a trend of many achievement gaps forming in younger children, which only widened as students progressed through school. Lower-income families were shown to be less able and less likely to invest in academically enriching activities for their children outside of school. Counselors at Tinlake High School intentionally scheduled the students who lacked financial stability in the ACT Prep classes to assist in their preparation.

In a similar study, Reardon, Kalogrides, and Shores (2017) provided a detailed descriptive analysis of the achievement gap patterns between White and Black student groups in addition to White and Hispanic student groups. This analysis relied on the construction of reliable and comparable measures of racial achievement gaps at the school district and metropolitan area levels. The analyses confirmed that family resource differences and segregation patterns are strongly associated with racial achievement gaps in school districts and metropolitan areas. In talking to the Black students of THS, it is easy to gather a sense of inferiority and perceptions of hopelessness for a majority of the students. In all of the studies, racial, socioeconomic disparities, and segregation patterns were consistently the strongest predictors of racial achievement gaps.

In another study on the topic, Powers (2003) presented an analysis of factors that influence school performance on the Academic Performance Index (API) for schools in two large urban districts. There were three main categories of variables in the analysis: (a) variables related to students' socioeconomic background, (b) variables measuring teachers' credentials, experience, and education; and (c) school characteristics. All analyses were conducted separately for each district. Researchers used the same sample of schools throughout the study, which allowed for both cross-district and cross-year comparisons. Her findings revealed a strong influence of the variables measuring the student population's socioeconomic status on school performance. Results in both districts indicate three factors that can explain more than (75%) of the API's variability: percentage of students eligible for reduced-price or free lunch, mobility, and percentage of English learners. All of the aforementioned characteristics are not represented by large populations of THS students. However, students at Tinlake High School are represented by the entire range of the socioeconomic spectrum. Teachers at THS were highly qualified, with at least (97%) of the teachers possessing the designation. The school is an A-rated school annually. The characteristics of the school were numerous; however, the major descriptive characteristics include a majority White student and staff population, Non-Title 1 distinction, and a fairly affluent community school.

Bali and Alvarez (2004) concluded as in prior research that a wide-ranging set of factors had been asserted to explain racial differences in student achievement test scores, with most attention focused on students' background and family or school and educational policy issues.

To gain a longitudinal perspective, a study published by Sirin (2005) was referenced, which reviewed literature published between 1990 and 2000 relative to socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement. The study sample included 101,157 students, 6,871 schools, and 128 school districts gathered from 74 independent samples. Sirin's review was designed to

examine the relationship between students' socioeconomic status and academic achievement. The study revealed that socioeconomic status was a more reliable predictor of academic achievement for White students than for minority students. Parents' status in the socioeconomic structure has a strong correlation to students' academic achievement. Condrón (2009) provides that school factors play an elevated role in generating the Black-White achievement gap, while non-school factors primarily drive social class inequalities.

The findings in this section provided valuable insight into the connection between demographics and student performance. In each of the previous references, various perspectives were offered, which provided correlations between demographics and student achievement that was important in developing the *WeACT* program to reduce disparities in ACT results for the students of THS. In the next section, I elected to identify and examine relationships between student demographics and test performance were identified and examined.

Demographics and Test Performance

One of the main focuses of this research involved identifying the causes of discrepancies in ACT results between Black and White students. The following references will help establish the perspective and context of this research by providing insight into connection between demographics and test preparation. Koca (2017) designed a study to examine the effects of SES, ethnicity, and discipline on standardized test scores using data from the Indiana Department of Education's ISTEP test. The Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress (ISTEP) is a criterion-referenced test that consists of items to assess a student's performance concerning particular criteria. Using ELA and Math results from ISTEP, Koca (2017) analyzed the student results with the Indiana Academic Standards and cut scores on the respective test. Results revealed a correlation between SES and race among the groups. Low SES Black students were identified to have lower scores than white students. White students performed better on both

ELA and Mathematics tests when compared to the other ethnicities. Additional findings indicate that Free and Reduced Public Lunch (FRPL) students had a lower pass rate on ISTEP scores in ELA and Mathematics.

Toldson and McGee (2014) provided reasons for lower standardized test scores among Black students, including the validity and reliability of the tests and the systemic impact of racial oppression and poverty. As discouraging as the prior assertion may appear, Black students of Tinlake High School were more likely to admit to not caring about the test in conversations. Some of the students displayed a lack of interest in the ACT.

The next study in this review came from Marchant, Paulson, and Shunk (2006). The researchers examined state demographic characteristics for each NAEP testing period from 1992 through 2002 to correlate the relationships of high-stakes testing policies to achievement and changes in performances. This study revealed that the few relationships between high-stakes testing and achievement were evident in situations where demographic data were missing. When states were compared concerning high-stakes testing policies, the states with high-stakes testing policies were subjected to slightly lower NAEP Scores. Variability in achievement results was related to aggregation of test scores when shared characteristics were taken into account. The inclusion of family income and parent education proved valuable in predicting variability among testing samples. Both of these factors were consistent in adding significance to the prediction of achievement.

Toldson and McGee referenced previously conducted research in their study and concluded, "any consideration of the gap in SAT and ACT scores or GPAs between Black students and White students should be measured with the same discretion applied to the GPA gap between males and females" (2014, p. 2). Furthermore, Toldson and McGee (2014) assert

that the gap has led to a quiet quota system that mostly benefits White males applying to elite institutions trying to achieve gender parity.

According to Hoffman and Lowitzki (2005), common arguments regarding standardized tests and students of color suggest that test bias presents an unfair disadvantage to students of color. More than anything else in Tinlake High School, there is an embedded belief among Black students that the ACT is designed to the advantage and ultimate benefit of White students.

Comparatively, Grodsky and Warren (2008) conducted a study of standardized testing in American education. They examined how standardized testing has reflected, reproduced, and transformed social inequities by race, social origins, and gender. Racial differences in mean standardized test scores are evident from the earliest years of formal schooling. Black and Hispanic children scored below non-Hispanic White children, and Asian American children scored above non-Hispanic White children on standardized reading and mathematics tests.

In another related study, Willie (2001) investigated Black and White students' achievement behaviors in poverty-concentrated, socioeconomically mixed, and affluent-concentrated school contexts. This study's primary goal was to determine the effect of a school community's socioeconomic contexts on the educational achievement of students by race if any effects are evident. Of approximately 32,000 students enrolled in elementary and middle schools of the Charleston County School District (CCSD), about two-thirds of the population (63%) were Black, and one-third of the population (37%) were identified as White. In this review, Willie (2001) focused on the test of cognitive skills or academic achievement given in the primary, middle, and secondary school years. The findings reveal that the proportion of students performing above the national norm is higher in affluent-concentrated schools than in poverty-concentrated schools for students in both racial groups. The lowest percentage of students scoring above the national standard for the MAT among Black and White students is found in

poverty-concentrated schools. The average achievement score for students in affluent concentrated schools is 23.5 points higher than for students in poverty concentrated schools, which shows a direct correlation between achievement scores and the learning environment's characteristics.

Demographics and Interventional Resources

Wasserberg and Rottman (2016), citing previous research asserted that implementing interventional programs increases students' self-efficacy and engagement while ultimately providing the strategies needed to combat test anxiety. If high school educators are interested in ameliorating the racial test score gap, implementing interventions to help prevent the negative performance consequences evoked by stereotype threat is essential. The *WeACT* program was developed as a combination of all the efforts of Tinklake High School to increase student ACT performance. The ultimate goal was to provide the different interventions and supports in a program or track to maximize the effect of the interventions in assisting the students' development.

This section referenced student demographic literature relative to student achievement and test performance while incorporating different interventions. Chiu and Khoo (2005) examined data from 15-year-old students in 41 countries to determine the effect of three different variables on student performance. They studied how resources at several levels (country, family, and school) can affect students' academic performance. Next, they tested how resource distribution affects student performance. Finally, they examined whether greater disbursement of resources affects overall academic performance at the school or country level. The results suggest that overall student performance would increase if governments distributed limited

educational resources more equally. Additional study findings showed that students in countries with higher inequality, clustering of privileged students, or unequal distribution of certified teachers typically had lower scores.

In another similar analysis, Jeynes (2007) conducted a meta-analysis involving 52 studies to determine parental involvement in high school students' educational outcomes in urban areas. Parental involvement programs are school-sponsored initiatives designed to require or encourage parental participation in their children's education. This meta-analysis examined the relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary student achievement using three analyses. The first analysis consisted of computing effect sizes for the overall parental involvement variable and parental involvement programs. The second analysis assessed the association between specific types of parental involvement with student achievement. The third analysis examined the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement by race. The effects of parent involvement by race and socioeconomic status were also observed in the study. Results indicated that the influence of parental involvement was significant for high school students. The participation of parents proved to be substantial for Black and White students.

According to Bali and Alvarez's (2004) research, as children age, family factors may diminish White and Hispanic students' roles. However, they continually play a strong role for Black students. Bali and Alvarez (2004) concluded that both Black and Hispanic students are affected more by parental and, more generally, environmental effects as they age as opposed to White students.

Lunceford, Sondergeld, and Stretavski (2017) provided research about school programs' effectiveness. They conducted a comparative case study design to understand early preparation efforts for postsecondary education better. One of the study's purposes involved investigating the influence of GEAR UP, a postsecondary prep program. While only quantitative methods of

analysis were used in the study, an in-depth examination and comparison of the cases were conducted by investigating multiple academic (GPA and college enrollment) and non-academic (attendance rate and behavior) measures longitudinally (9th grade –1st-year post-high school) between cohorts (GEAR UP and non-GEAR UP), and by race and income. The variables involved in the study included: high school attendance, rates of retention, behavior incidents, grade point averages, graduation rates, and college attendance, which were correlated with SES and race. The GU cohort performed significantly better on all measures when compared to the NGU cohort, thus reinforcing the effectiveness of preparation programs.

Yeh (2016) performed an investigative study to explore the correlation between educational preparation for all students and their standardized test scores. The current research employed logistic regression with a nationally-representative dataset, controlled for critical covariates, and analyzed the possible effect of raising student test scores by one standard deviation (SD). The study predicts raising scores one standard deviation (SD) above the mean for racial group potentially increases the number of Black male students who attain baccalaureate degrees by (88.6%) and the number of Hispanic male students who achieved baccalaureate degrees (125.7%).

Hanselman, Bruch, Gamoran, and Borman (2014) provided an additional perspective that stated, in part, school contexts with very few marginalized students and racialized achievement patterns had more potential to create threatening environments that ultimately harm the performance of Black and Hispanic students. There are two main implications of the results. First, they suggested that some educational inequalities in individual schools can be improved through social-psychological intervention. Second, the study's findings supported the hypothesis that schools with fewer and more academically marginalized Black and Hispanic students provide more threatening environments.

McBride Davis, Slate, Moore, and Barnes (2015) assert that test scores, facilities, and lifetime achievement of students from marginalized groups indicate a void in parity of resources and positive student outcomes. Therefore, to accomplish a school system that practices equality, procedures reflecting equity should be evident.

Wasserberg and Rottman provided "the students believed that the standardized tests were a clear focus across all content areas, which research suggests fosters low self-efficacy and generates low aspirations because students are dwelling on their deficiencies" (2016, p.63). Furthermore, Wasserburg and Rottman (2016) state the findings concerning those positions are consistent with previous research suggesting that the school's focus on test-centered instruction is associated with decreased self-efficacy and feelings of stereotype threat in minority students.

Deil-Amen and Tevis (2009) examined literature from three fields: higher education, sociology of education, and social psychology to better understand the impact of test scores on college choice. Despite the prominence of the SAT and ACT for college admissions, researchers understand relatively little about how college entrance exams influence students' college planning and transition into college. The findings indicated a negative connection to student motivation and the need to do well on college entrance exams.

Giersch (2018) found that Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and other races of students score lower than Whites, but Asians scored higher than all other categories. Males earn college grades lower than females. Students receiving FRL (free and reduced lunch) have lower grades than their wealthier peers.

Dietrichson, Bog, Filges, and Klint (2017) performed a systematic review of academic interventions for elementary and middle school students from low SES backgrounds. Through research, they found various interventions that possessed the potential to raise student academic performance, mainly due to the potential to fill voids within low SES students' lives. These

programs include parent training, health interventions and awareness, role model interventions, and early childhood intervention programs. Through this research, interventions were identified to counteract the effects of low SES, such as tutoring, cooperative learning, providing feedback, and progress monitoring. They presented research that showed the potential of interventions to improve students' performance from low SES families.

Conclusion

The impact of student demographics provides a troubling insight into the different aspects of student performance. Of which, the most concerning performance area involved standardized testing. In Tinslake High School and throughout other schools in the nation, a trend is present, which illustrates disparities in standardized test scores. This finding has a significant impact and holds tremendous implications for millions of students across the nation. If a student scores a 22 on the ACT in Mississippi, they are eligible for free education at a community college. Currently, White students in the state of Mississippi have an average ACT score of 20, while Black students' average score is 17. In conducting this review of the literature, components that affect student achievement have been identified.

Sirin (2005), Koca (2017), and Willie (2001) all asserted that the most reliable indicator of student achievement was socioeconomic status. According to Marchant, Paulson, and Shunk (2006) and Jeynes (2007), another factor that influenced student success is parental involvement. The researchers conclude that exposure to resources (family and school resources) is an additional factor important to students' maturation. Carnoy and Garcia (2017), Dietrichson, Bog, Filges, and Jorgensen (2017), and Lunceford, Sondergeld, and Stretavski (2017) support the notion of identifying and providing interventions at earlier ages as significant reinforcements in counteracting the effects of low SES.

In Chapter Three, I detail the elements of the action plan and the program evaluation that measured each element's effectiveness in reducing the disparities in Black and White students' scores on the ACT. The elements will be used in an attempt to increase the performance of Black students. The action plan will utilize mixed methods research to gather data concerning each of the elements' impacts on ACT student achievement.

CHAPTER III:

METHODS

Chapter Three presents the applied mixed-methods design involved in the action plan to close the achievement gap in the ACT scores of Black and White students at Tinlake High School (THS). At the time of this research, the school had an enrollment of 1629 students. The school's student breakdown by ethnicity was Black (29.7%), White (65%), and (5%) Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or students who identify with two or more ethnicities (Membership and Enrollment, 2005-2019). The research theory incorporated standard two of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), which illustrated the need of educators to act ethically to promote each student's academic success and well-being while improving organizational effectiveness (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Additionally, the theory incorporated KCSD Strategic Plan goal five which stated, "We will work with all parents, staff, administrators, and community members to support each aspect of every students' educational experience" (Kingsville County School District, 2019).

The research led to the development of an action plan to identify elements with the potential to close the achievement gap in ACT scores between Black and White students of the Kingsville County School District. The following practices have been identified to produce ACT results:

1. Increase awareness of the capabilities of ACT Online Prep and other test preparation tools.
2. Balance timing of instruction to optimize engagement and learning,
3. Tailor instruction to students' needs,
4. Evaluate test preparation initiatives for their effectiveness,
5. Focus on content and test-taking strategies, and
6. Integrate methods to improve student engagement (Payne et. al 2020, p. 6).

The benefits of higher ACT scores for students include the possibility of college scholarships and providing another graduation option for students. The Graduation Rate for Black students in Mississippi was (81.9%); for White students, the rate was higher at (88.3%) (Office of Accountability, 2020, p. 5). Closing this gap potentially increases opportunities for Black students to pursue post-high school endeavors. Student success on the ACT is a critical factor in many colleges' decisions when determining the students to give acceptance offers.

This chapter provides the details of the applied mixed-methods research design of the action plan, including a list of the elements or individual intervention components. The action plan was implemented to impact the causes of the disparities in ACT student achievement by exposing Black students to the elements for additional ACT Prep support, while collecting student feedback. Chapter Three is presented in three distinct sections. The first section of Chapter Three provides the context of the events, which led to the collaborative efforts with stakeholders to form the action plan, *WeACT*. The *WeACT* program, or "we act," encompasses the combined effort of the elements, or instructional methods used to address ACT achievement disparities. This section provides a chronological account of the events which led to the development of the action plan, an overview of the stakeholders involved in the process, longitudinal ACT data from 2007-2018, and existing research related to the action plan.

The second section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the action plan. This section identified and outlined the *WeACT* program elements, which included ACT Prep Classes, ACT Bootcamps, Tutorial Sessions, and the implementation of ACT resources in daily instruction. Each of the elements contained specific and measurable goals to evaluate the element's effectiveness as an independent component and as a part of the program. Each elements' goals functioned as benchmarks to gauge the effectiveness of the action plan throughout each phase, from program development to program evaluation. Additionally, implementation timelines were presented for each element in this section.

The third section of Chapter Three illustrates the program evaluation methods that measured the effectiveness of the elements involved in the *WeACT* program. Qualitative and quantitative processes and outcome goals were assigned to each action plan element to evaluate them in relation to the research questions. The program evaluation involved a continuous cycle of measurement relative to the program's effectiveness against the established goals. This process was intended to improve the action plan's elements where the identified adjustments were needed to produce a more significant impact on deficits that disproportionately affected Black students. The research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Additionally, this section provides data collection methods, data sources, learning targets, and required resources.

Development of the Action Plan

In 2015, I was hired by Mr. Akers, the Principal of Tinlake High School, for an assistant principal position. After I started the job, we began talking about the most pressing issues which affected the school. Mr. Akers expressed the need to get Black students more involved in the school academically and socially. He noted that the participation rates of Black students in advanced placement and dual credit courses were not a positive reflection of Tinlake High School and, it ultimately constituted a disservice to the population of students.

As responsible educators, we are required to develop structures that foster each student's academic success. This action can be done by establishing a culture of high expectations while providing the necessary supports to help students achieve success. Achieving student success can be accomplished through a continuous process of redefining the elements involved in this action plan until maximum effectiveness is achieved. The actions involved in responding to the situations of inequity in THS aligned with PSEL standard one, which states, "effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student"(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). This ideology was adopted to meet the needs of the Black students of Tinlake High. PSEL standard three was also incorporated into the action plan. The standard states, "effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being," which further aligned the purpose of this action research with the expectations of being a responsible educator (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). The

factors of equity and inclusiveness were taken into account to ensure the implemented actions reached the intended group of students, particularly the Black students of THS. Mr. Akers was later reassigned to a district level position as part of a new district administration before we could devise a plan to address the problem at Tinlake High School.

In the summer of 2016, the Kingsville County School District presented as part of the district's strategic plan an intent to transition to a district more focused on the ACT. Throughout the next four years, the efforts to increase ACT scores in the KCSD intensified. The district hired a full-time ACT Specialist to lead in the efforts to raise student achievement. He was tasked with increasing awareness of the practices associated with the ACT and ensuring that students were capitalizing on the benefits of proficient ACT performance. The district provided the vision for the multiple stakeholders of the KCSD and outlined the roles that needed to be fulfilled by each person during this transition. School-level administrators were granted the flexibility to implement additional ACT preparation measures unique to the student demographics and challenges in their buildings.

During the back-to-school principal's meeting in July 2018, the KCSD administration reaffirmed its commitment to the ACT. Kingsville County's ACT data was shared for each school, which provided student results in multiple data sets. The data sets illustrated the disparities which formed the basis of this research. Black students were found to score lower than White students. At this meeting, the plan for the upcoming school year was revealed and included:

- ACT dates,
- Professional development days for teachers who teach ACT Prep classes, and
- District ACT Bootcamp dates.

In August of 2018, conversations started with other stakeholders in Tinlake High School and the Kingsville County School District to begin development of this research to address the disparities in ACT scores within the student population of THS. As the interactions increased, the number of people interested in this potential research proliferated. In the next phase, research began relative to the ACT score disparities in THS.

As the 2018 school year started, the ACT became a central focus of the Tinlake High School administrative team, as we aligned the vision of THS with the vision of the KCSD. The new principal, Dr. Bond, expressed his concern with students' performance on the ACT. The top students in every year's incoming freshman class were guided through a rigorous course progression in anticipation of maximum student achievement. These students were tracked through the higher-level courses throughout their four years at THS, a practice that has been in place for more than five years. Every year Tinlake High School double-blocks approximately 60 students or roughly (17%) of the incoming freshman class in Geometry/Algebra II math classes to ensure they are prepared for rigorous math classes. This group is also encouraged to take higher-level English, Science, and History courses as part of the track that starts their freshman year. Under these circumstances, it would be logical to expect a higher percentage of those students to score in the upper quartile (scores ranging from 28 to a perfect score of 36) on the ACT by the end of their senior year. Despite efforts to place students on tracks that exposed them to rigorous courses, the results do not consistently correlate.

The administrative team analyzed the longitudinal ACT data results, which confirmed suspicions about ACT performance for the Black students of THS. The findings provided additional confusion due to students being placed on a track of courses necessary to become top scholars. Efforts were made to identify the students' weaknesses relative to the individual ACT strands and address the problem areas. In examining student data, the THS administration began

to notice consistent discrepancies within the scores of Black and White students. After, communication was established with colleagues and other stakeholders from across the state of Mississippi to get their perspectives and insight on the findings. As a result of those conversations, it was determined that many of the educators were confronting similar dynamics.

Riehl (2000) stated that for centuries, educators in the United States had confronted the question of how to organize and administer schools for diverse students. In refocusing our efforts, providing for underserved learners' needs became a priority at Tinlake High School. THS administration implemented initiatives to create a more inclusive environment complete with supports to strengthen the social and cultural structures of the Black students. Hanselman, Bruch, Gamoran, and Boran (2014) asserted that school contexts with very few marginalized students and racialized achievement patterns create more potentially threatening environments that ultimately harm Black and Hispanic students' performance.

The trends evident in the ACT data illustrated a racialized achievement pattern that disproportionately affects the Black students of Tinlake High School. Recently released ACT data further illustrates this discrepancy involving the Black students of Kingsville County, resulting in an average score nearly three and a half points lower than White students on the ACT (ACT Incorporated 2017, p. 8). In Mississippi, the gap increased to a four-point difference in favor of White students (ACT Incorporated 2017, p. 8). Nationally, White student achievement was five points higher than Black students (ACT Incorporated 2017, p. 8). The following table illustrates the county, state, and national average ACT composite scores for Black and White students from 2007-2018 (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Table 1

Kingsville County School District Graduating Class Average ACT Composite Score by Year

Students	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
White	20.5	20.9	20.9	20.6	20.7	21.2	20.8	21.2	20.3	20.5	20.9	20.8
Black	17.1	17.5	17.7	17.7	17.3	17.2	17.7	17.9	16.8	17.0	17.7	17.7
Difference	3.4	3.4	3.2	2.9	3.4	4.0	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.1

Mississippi Graduating Class Average ACT Composite Score by Year

Students	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
White	20.4	20.5	20.5	20.5	20.5	20.6	20.7	20.8	20.8	20.4	20.6	N/A
Black	16.4	16.5	16.5	16.3	16.3	16.3	16.5	16.5	16.6	16.1	16.4	N/A
Difference	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.3	4.2	N/A

National Graduating Class Average ACT Composite Score by Year

Students	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
White	22.1	22.1	22.2	22.3	22.4	22.4	22.2	22.3	22.4	22.2	22.4	22.2
Black	17.0	16.9	16.9	16.9	17.0	17.0	16.9	17.0	17.1	17.0	17.1	16.9
Difference	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.2	5.3	5.3

Cooper (2009) referenced a need to reframe educational accountability discourse and policies, which proved to be integral in the *WeACT* program's design. To develop a system of supports to assist in closing the achievement gap in ACT scores based on race, the logic was applied during the design process. The reasoning stemmed from the complexities involved in

using standardized tests for accountability purposes. One of those complexities involved an intent of tests like the ACT to measure academic achievement without being inclusive of diversity.

I enlisted the help of the KCSD administration, KCSD ACT coordinator, KCSD curriculum specialist, KCSD administrators from various schools, Tinlake High School administration and teachers, the Superintendent of Green County, the Superintendent of Cleveland County, District Coordinators from Cleveland County, and the Principal of Washington County for assistance in the development of this action plan. In conversations with the stakeholders, specific topics kept resurfacing in the dialogues. These topics included: the effect of the students' socioeconomic conditions on test prep, the lack of exposure to quality test preparation, cultural differences that influence the value of the test among students of varying backgrounds, and access to supports outside the school environment.

Alon (2010) referenced a position put forth by Morgan (2005) that stated investment in test preparation is shaped not only by a student's social context, individual capacities, and interests but also by exogenous factors, particularly the perceived market-level costs and benefits of pursuing higher education. Black students were more likely than White and Latino students to take advantage of before or after-school tutoring programs offered to help them prepare for the state test (Thompson, 2012). These perspectives were taken into account while developing the *WeACT* program.

In August 2019, at Tinlake High School, the students were provided a survey at the beginning of the year. Student feedback was gathered to develop insight into the overall perception of the ACT in THS. The ACT Prep classes began in August 2019. The tutorial sessions began in January 2020. The District Bootcamps were held during February and March 2020, both months of the district provided ACT administrations. A school-sponsored boot camp

was scheduled for each month, beginning in January 2020 through April 2020, for the *WeACT* program participants. Tutorial sessions began in January 2020 at the beginning of the second semester.

The process of data collection and communication with the various stakeholders was ongoing throughout the research. The program was scheduled to be evaluated during the summer of 2020 to make adjustments and expand the 2020-21 school year offerings. At the time, adjustments would have been made according to the student feedback data findings.

The Action Plan

Table 3.2 provides the elements and details of the action plan. These elements were implemented to reduce the achievement gap in ACT scores between students of different ethnicities.

Table 3.2*Action Plan*

Element	Goals	Timeline	Stakeholder
ACT Bootcamp	To increase student familiarity and exposure to the ACT's various components while incorporating strategies that help students become more efficient in developing practices and procedures related to test prep and test-taking.	January 2020- May 2020	District ACT Specialist, Researcher
ACT Prep Class	To increase student exposure to ACT strategies and procedures in an everyday class setting, which increases facilitated exposure to ACT-based resources, teacher interaction, and teacher support, complete with feedback.	August 2019-May 2020	Researcher, Teachers
Implementing ACT based resources into regular instruction	To increase student's familiarity and understanding of ACT styled questions through frequent exposure to ACT resources in daily classes.	August 2019-May 2020	Researcher, Teacher
ACT Tutorial Session	To increase a student's access to one on one instruction with a certified educator.	January 2020- May 2020	Researcher, Teachers

ACT Bootcamps

In the Kingsville School District, the ACT has become a top priority in each school. In Tinlake High School, increasing Black students' ACT investments and commitments to taking the ACT multiple times were objectives of the school plan. Any student that received Free and Reduced Lunch qualified for two ACT fee waivers. Those students were allowed to take the

ACT two times free of charge. They had the option to take one ACT exam their 11th-grade year and another during their 12th-grade year, or the students could have elected to take the test twice their Senior year. Additionally, the KCSD has a practice of paying for all the 10th graders in the district to take the test. Furthermore, the Mississippi Department of Education provides a free test for all 11th graders in the state. In 2020, this test was given in February for Juniors. The test was scheduled in March for Sophomores. The KCSD provided ACT Bootcamps for all students in those respective grade levels in the weeks leading up to test administration.

The ACT Bootcamps were designed to increase student test-taking capacity. Students were provided this support to learn strategies to help reduce common mistakes and maximize their time and frustration in the testing process. In essence, students were taught the most efficient and effective ways to take the ACT. The district-sponsored ACT Bootcamps were led by the District ACT Specialist, Mr. Sparkman, one of the KCSD Curriculum Specialists. Mr. Sparkman is an energetic and passionate educator with extensive knowledge of the ACT's structure and other nuisances associated with the test. These sessions were interactive and provided an abundance of tips and strategies.

Students were divided into sections and assigned a time slot for their ACT Bootcamp sessions that lasted approximately four to five hours. Within the sessions, students were exposed to the different content areas of the ACT while simultaneously learning about the different misconceptions and common mistakes students may make. The ACT Bootcamps began with an overview of the importance of the test. Next, the students were taught about the structure of the test by each content area and how the test is scored. Mr. Sparkman started the content area review with an overview of the pertinent information unique to each content area. He provided a plan of approach for each particular content area before discussing the most effective strategies students can utilize to maximize time on each particular section. He led the students through each

of the ACT content areas, covering the core content, and identifying potential trouble areas. Each student was provided a manual to follow along during the session. Mr. Sparkman provided the content via an overhead projector so students can follow along easily. Students recorded notes and other relative information as they advanced through the topics. After completing the ACT Bootcamps, the students were encouraged to email the presenter if they had lingering concerns. He offered individual ACT Prep sessions to students in need. Students could also attend make-up sessions at other schools in the district if they missed their originally scheduled ACT Bootcamp. Abbreviated ACT Bootcamp sessions were available if there was a need. After each district ACT Bootcamp, the student groups involved in this research received a survey to collect data. The data were analyzed to gauge the effectiveness of ACT Bootcamps as a solution to reduce the achievement gap. The students were scheduled to be questioned about the effectiveness of the ACT Bootcamps during focus groups and student interviews after the ACT administration dates and again after results are received. In 2019, Tinlake High School started offering additional ACT Bootcamp sessions conducted by teachers from within the school to expand test preparation availability.

December 2019-April 2020. The Kingsville County School District provided ACT Bootcamps for the various high school students at different times throughout the academic school year. The first ACT Bootcamps of the 2019-20 school year were conducted during the week of October 21st-24th in preparation for the October 26th test administration. The second ACT Bootcamps were held on December 9th-12th in preparation for the December 14th test.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) provided stipends for Tinlake High teachers to conduct ACT Bootcamps for the students whose parents were PTO members. These sessions were not conducted by the district specialist Mr. Sparkman. The first ACT Bootcamp sponsored by the KCSD was offered in December as well. However, it was provided for all KCSD Seniors

who had not passed all the state tests necessary for graduation. The KCSD transported all students to a central location where Mr. Sparkman provided ACT remediation and strategy. In preparation for the 11th grade ACT on February 25th, Mr. Sparkman conducted ACT Bootcamp sessions on February 10th and 12th. To prepare the 10th-grade test administration scheduled for March 24th, Mr. Sparkman would have conducted boot camps from March 4th through March 10th.

ACT Prep Classes

In Tinlake High, ACT Prep classes are implemented according to the Mississippi Curriculum Framework. These classes are focused solely on the different components and strategies of ACT preparation and test-taking. The strategies included exposing students to previously released ACT questions. Additional strategies included test-timing and pacing, reading passage identification and decoding procedures, skill repetition, and test endurance. Preparation materials for the ACT and National Merit Qualifying Test were used in this class. This class was open to 10th and 11th graders. It is a state requirement for students enrolled in this class to take either the PSAT, SAT, or ACT (Kingsville County School District, 2019). The course description in the framework listed the ACT Prep class's focus to develop effective test-taking strategies for the ACT, ACT Workkeys, and PSAT exams. Students had the option to take the second part of the course as a continuation of the first. The second part of this course was open to students who were at least in their 10th-grade year and had previously taken ACT Prep I (Office of Secondary Education, 2019). The class was essentially an extension of the ACT Bootcamps because they were conducted at a slower pace and went into greater depth.

Throughout the years, we have provided the courses in various combinations. We have provided a triple rotation option that involved students starting the semester in one of the core areas Reading-English, Math, or Science, and rotating through the other two core sections at

predetermined intervals throughout the semester. In 2019, THS only offered ACT Prep classes in focus areas according to content. There were no rotations involved, and the students were either scheduled in Math or English-Reading classes. Teachers of this class were trained through professional development that they received directly from the ACT Specialist, Mr. Sparkman. The teachers of this course were also provided resources throughout the academic year from the district level.

At the end of the school year, the research student group was scheduled to participate in a survey to assess the ACT Prep class's effectiveness. Select students would have been involved in a focus group and other student interviews. As with the other elements, the data gathered was analyzed to identify the ACT Prep class's effectiveness as an individual element and with the other various elements of the action plan.

August 2019–December 2019 first semester; January 2020–May 2020, second semester. ACT Prep classes were offered as a part of the standard school curriculum. The class was available for registration during the 2019 pre-registration period. The first semester's offering of the class was populated in the summer. Students were free to choose this class for their schedules. THS counselors encouraged students to sign up to receive assistance to reach graduation goals and other endeavors. This option was a requirement for students who were in danger of failing state tests or who had historically displayed below-average testing abilities.

ACT Resources in Daily Instruction

Perhaps the most controllable element to implement in this action plan involved embedding ACT-based questions and other related resources into daily classes. This practice has manifested in many forms. Some teachers utilized ACT resources as bell-ringers or activities presented to the students upon entering the class to get the settled in for daily instruction. Others choose to use the questions as exit ticket items or activities presented to students before leaving

class to form formative assessments of student knowledge. Geometry and Algebra II teachers were provided access to the Algebra Nation online math platform, which contained test preparation components for skill-building and practice. Method Test Prep and Khan Academy were other online platforms the students were encouraged to use for additional test prep. All THS students had access to these platforms. Also, students had access to program tutors who would assist students who posed questions utilizing the program's "wall" feature. Other students and the teachers also were able to respond to those questions posed while using Algebra Nation.

Regardless of the method teachers used to implement the resources, the expectation was for students to be exposed to ACT-based questions and other related content daily. This frequent exposure was intended to get students familiar with the different question types. These interactions were designed to increase student test-taking capacity through repetition. As a result of the exposure, the students should have been able to apply the strategies and tips learned through the different work sessions, ACT boot camps, and other instructional methods while in a tested situation. Teachers who did not teach in tested areas were required to incorporate ACT resources in the same regard as subject area teachers. Providing ACT content in the different classes gave students more exposure to the various ways the questions could appear on the ACT. All teachers were expected to incorporate ACT resources in their classrooms, which provided multiple representations of the question types in various classroom contexts.

August 2019–May 2020. During Tinlake High School's back-to-school faculty meetings in August 2019, the ACT was one of the professional development topics. The administration set the expectation for teachers to implement ACT resources into their daily instruction. Frequent classroom visits, examining teacher plans, and visual displays on the whiteboards provided evidence of compliance.

ACT Tutorial Sessions

The fourth element, ACT Tutorial sessions, were 30-minute mini-lessons teachers conducted during Zero Block three times a week. These sessions were to help students increase confidence in the test-taking processes involved with the ACT. Another intent of the *WeACT* program's design was to make test preparation accessible to all students. Select teachers taught skills during Zero Block relative to the ACT. Students had access to specific content area teachers to work in small groups or individual sessions to build ACT skills during this time. Zero Block provided a convenient time for students and teachers alike for the ACT Tutorial sessions on select mornings starting at 7:30. Providing the element during Zero Block established another free resource as the time used as part of the teacher's typical Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday workdays. Students came to Zero Block sessions for assistance from teachers in any of the offered content areas. In this regard, the sessions were added to provide interactive sessions planned by each participating teacher. Select teachers planned to provide access to a calendar that showed the ACT skills the teachers would be working on during the zero-block time to help students identify classes that help to meet their needs more effectively.

January 2020–May 2020. THS students were provided ACT tutorial sessions as an additional test preparation method to start the second semester. Students who came to school early during the structured enrichment and remediation time, known as Zero Block, were able to work in individual or small group settings with teachers of their choice on ACT skills. These sessions were offered on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings starting at 7:30.

Resources

In developing this action plan, the intention was to create a program that provided the services students needed without participation fees. Many of the stakeholders involved in this program had a vested interest in the outcome of this study. As such, they volunteered their time

and efforts to assist this endeavor. Teachers were willing to conduct the ACT tutorial sessions during Zero Block, which was part of their workday. Virtually all costs of this program were opportunity costs associated with Kingsville County School District employee's regular duties. The ACT Bootcamps were provided each year by the district. The school-sponsored ACT Bootcamps were paid by sponsors and donations from other school-affiliated organizations. The student resource materials were provided via online materials and resources.

Stakeholder Responsibility

The responsibility of this action plan was distributed between the Kingsville County School District personnel and the Tinlake High School staff. The KCSD provided the personnel to assist in planning the ACT Bootcamp element. The district personnel assisted in selecting the content for the ACT Prep class and in the facilitation of the class. The teachers of Tinlake High facilitated the ACT Tutorial sessions. They decided on the content for the sessions as a department. The administrations of Tinlake High School and Kingsville County School District functioned in advisory capacities throughout the process.

Evaluation Plan

The purpose of the evaluation plan was to collect the data from each element of the action plan. Analyzing this data helped determine each element's level of success and the action plan's effectiveness in reducing the achievement gap in Black and White students on the ACT. This information was pivotal to the administration of Tinlake High School in developing policies and procedures to provide for the diverse needs of all its learners.

Logic Model

The following logic model listed the elements involved in the research action plan and the details of the evaluation plan. The table listed the elements, goals for each element, timeline for implementation of the elements, stakeholders involved in the process, and the data sources

used for evaluation (Table 3.3). Additionally, this section summarized the action plan and provided insight into the program evaluation's different components.

Table 3.3

Logic Model/Evaluation Plan

Element	Goals	Timeline	Stakeholder	Evaluation Data Source
ACT Bootcamp	To increase student familiarity and exposure to the various components of the ACT while incorporating strategies that help students become more efficient in developing practices and procedures related to test prep and test taking.	January 2020-May 2020	District ACT specialist Researcher	Student survey Student focus group Student interview
ACT Prep Class	To increase student exposure to ACT strategies and procedures in an everyday class setting which increases facilitated exposure to ACT based resources, teacher interaction, and teacher support complete with feedback.	August 2019-May 2020	District ACT specialist District level personnel Researcher	Student survey Focus group Student interview
Implementing ACT based resources into regular instruction	To increase student's familiarity and understanding of ACT styled questions through frequent exposure to ACT resources in daily classes.	August 2019-May 2020	Researcher Teachers	Student survey Teacher survey
ACT Tutorial Session	To increase a student's access to one on one instruction with a certified educator.	December 2019- May 2020	Researcher Teachers	Student survey Teacher survey

ACT Bootcamps

The first element of the action plan to be evaluated was the ACT Bootcamp. There were many goals attached to this element. The central goal of this element was to increase student familiarity and exposure to the various components of the ACT while incorporating strategies to help students develop efficient practices and procedures related to test-prep and test-taking. The research group participated in ACT Bootcamps before each district ACT administration to increase knowledge and gain exposure to question types and formats while reinforcing test strategies. KCSD provided human capital for the ACT Bootcamps for each of the schools in the district. During the 2019-20 school year, Tinlake High School involved more stakeholders in ACT Bootcamps to serve a broader range of students according to and specifically for the needs present within each student group. A short-term goal associated with this element was the expectation that the students, especially the Black students, would experience increased incremental growth between each ACT administration throughout the year. Ideally, the Kingsville County School District would have liked to see a four-point increase between each ACT, which may prove to be a long-term task. Another long-term goal was for Black student achievement to improve during the first three years of the program implementation.

This evaluation was conducted to produce more information about the impacts the ACT Bootcamps had on the Black students' ACT scores. Additionally, it provided insight into the longitudinal effects consistent ACT Bootcamps have on Black students' scores in Tinlake County. The students took surveys that solicited feedback and gathered their positions and thoughts of the ACT Bootcamps after the session. The survey, issued to all students who participate in the ACT Bootcamps, provides insight into various aspects of the ACT Bootcamp. A focus group interview was scheduled with the research group to get more qualitative data

about the element. The students were to be interviewed individually after the district provided ACT administration. Additionally, they were to be questioned about the various components of the ACT Bootcamps during the focus group and individual interview.

ACT Prep Classes

The second element's goal was to increase student exposure to ACT strategies and procedures in everyday class settings, which facilitated ACT-based resources, teacher interaction, and teacher support, complete with feedback. *WeACT* participants were enrolled in ACT Prep classes to interact with other students and facilitators to voice concerns, learn and share strategies, and ask questions while engaging in ACT-related content. Another goal involved the students to developing favorable attitudes while investing in the ACT Prep class. Overall, students were expected to develop improved attitudes relative to the ACT Prep class and its effectiveness in preparing students for increased ACT scores.

The program evaluation was used to learn about the effectiveness of the ACT Prep class in assisting with communication between participants, sharing strategies, and building skills crucial to ACT success. Student participation and passage rates were used to identify the effectiveness of the classes. Student perceptions were explored relative to the ACT Prep classes to determine if these classes provided a practical resource for Kingsville County students. Also, in this exploration, there was a need to examine ACT Prep classes individually and as a part of the *WeACT* program. Students were scheduled to complete a brief survey at the end of the class in May 2020. Students would have been questioned as part of the focus groups and asked to provide feedback regarding this element to make a formative assessment of the element's effectiveness. ACT Prep teachers would be asked to complete a survey at the end of the school year to gather insight and offer additional insight into the element as regular end-of-year teacher exit interviews.

ACT Resources in Daily Instruction

Implementing ACT resources into regular instruction was the next element to be evaluated. This element's goal was to increase student's familiarity and understanding of ACT question structures through frequent exposure to ACT resources in daily classes. Furthermore, implementation of this element intended to develop a culture of teachers who incorporate ACT resources into their daily instruction and produce students who display greater confidence and are better prepared for the ACT. As a short-term goal, (70%) of teachers will incorporate ACT questions into their classes daily. Ultimately, the goal was for THS to become an environment where (100%) of the teachers incorporate ACT resources, test solving strategies, and other efforts to increase student achievement in their classes daily. A long-term goal was to significantly improve student perspectives concerning the implementation of ACT questions in daily instruction during the first three years of implementation.

As a result of this study, an attempt was made to discern the effectiveness of this element in building the skills and attitudes necessary to eliminate the gaps in student achievement. This research would explore the relationship between implementing ACT resources in the classroom daily, higher ACT scores, and improved confidence for Black students. Another focus of this program evaluation is to determine if the exposure to ACT questions in daily instruction will improve the student performance incrementally throughout the first three years of implementation. Finally, an inquiry would be made to determine the extent which all teachers implement supplemental ACT resources in their daily instructional practices with fidelity. The students would be asked for their perspective of the element in focus groups student interviews and surveys.

ACT Tutorial Sessions

The goal of element four or ACT tutorial sessions was to increase student access to individualized instruction with a certified educator. The purpose of the element was to help students increase test-taking capacity and confidence in the ACT while making test prep more accessible to all students. A short-term goal associated with the element was to provide weekly tutorial assistance to students in subjects where remediation is needed. A long-term goal was to create a culture that consistently increased the number of students, especially Black students involved in the *WeACT* program who engaged in this element and the number of tutors to serve the student needs. This element was examined to determine its effectiveness in increasing student academic performance on the ACT. Students were asked to use an ACT zero block QR code to sign into the sessions. This action would allow the school administration to monitor the number of students who sign up for the ACT tutorial sessions. Other data could be tracked using the code, such as the grade level of students, demographics, and frequency of attendance. The results were used to learn about the teacher and student perceptions of the element. There were multiple sources of data produced by the element. It was anticipated that tutorial session attendance would be tracked through the reports generated from the QR codes students used to sign in.

Data Collection Methods

Collection Method for Research Question One. During the 2019-20 school year, the ACT was given nationally in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July. The KCSD provided the February ACT for 11th-grade students and intended to provide a March ACT for 10th-graders before being disrupted by the nationwide pandemic. The KCSD provides the March administration of the ACT for its students without charge, giving them an additional opportunity to take this test. Tentatively, the make-up day for the 10th grade ACT was moved to June.

The ACT scores are uploaded to the student's online accounts and delivered to the school district within eight weeks after the students take the test. Student scores range from a low score of one (1) to a high score of 36. This score is calculated by taking the correct responses, the raw score, and converting it to the scale score. A composite score is an average of the four tested areas' scores in English, math, reading, and science.

The results from each ACT attempt are recorded in the student information system, PowerSchool. The ACT specialist compiled data reports for each school in the district individually and as a district collective. He then shares the information with each school administrative team. During this research, a database of student ACT results was compiled in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which allowed the data to be sorted in various ways for tracking purposes. This longitudinal view of the data allowed for a greater comprehension of the student results. It allowed an opportunity to analyze patterns in student growth.

Collection Methods for Research Questions Two through Four. The students will be asked to provide qualitative and quantitative data about their experiences with the four elements: ACT Bootcamps, ACT Prep classes, ACT resources in daily instruction, ACT tutorial sessions. This data will be gathered through surveys provided to students at the beginning of the year and after the district provided ACT Bootcamp. The beginning of the year survey was provided to each student via a Canvas course all students completed on the first day of the 2019 school year.

The survey was provided in an electronic form where it was limited to one student response. All identifying information was removed from the survey data before it is used in any report. The responses from the surveys were automatically diverted to a spreadsheet which built the database. From this spreadsheet, I was able to sort the data to analyze Black student responses. Due to the pandemic's effects, which included delaying the ACT administration for the 10th-grade students, the follow-up survey has been delayed until the students complete the

ACT Bootcamp. Specific questions will be asked to get students' perspectives on the effectiveness of the individual elements during the pandemic. Students will provide open-ended responses that asks for their input on the different elements. Additionally, the students will be provided Likert scale questions to measure their perceptions of the elements' effectiveness.

Additional student feedback was to be collected through a student interview protocol. This instrument allowed an opportunity to gather more detailed student perspectives into all ACT processes from preparation to actual test taking. As the primary researcher, the task of conducting the focus group and student interviews became a direct responsibility. As such, the validity and integrity of the study would be better preserved. A student focus group was to be conducted after the 10th grade ACT was administered. Again, due to the pandemic, this research was not conducted. After data collection, it will be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the elements from the perspective of the Black students of THS as it relates to the ACT.

Formative and Summative Elements

The action plan's design made it possible to collect robust data from the various elements. Throughout the process of evaluation, data was collected for formative and summative purposes. The data collection methods focused on the individual elements at times and shifted attention to the collective effort of the elements in other instances. As the data was collected, the program was adjusted to reflect the recommended improvements identified through the data trends.

Students were to be asked questions about the disparities between Black and White students and the elements of the action plan during the focus group sessions. The researcher was solely responsible for conducting the student interview sessions and all individual interviews. The focus group interviews will center on the elements involved in the action plan. Ideally, the focus group interviews would be held in April after all ACT administrations were complete to get student perspectives and insight into the impact of the elements in test preparation and

test-taking processes. The students would have been questioned about their confidence, perceptions, and specifically about each of the elements (ACT Bootcamp, ACT tutorial sessions, ACT resources in daily instruction, and ACT Prep classes). This information would have been used for formative and summative assessment of the program and its elements. Student interviews will be conducted with the students after they received their ACT results. During those interviews, an attempt would have been made to correlate the results of the data gathered with the impact the elements have on Black students' ACT results.

Conclusion

Preparing students to be college and career ready is a guiding principle of the Kingsville County School District. Every year, thousands of students take the ACT with hopes of scoring high enough to meet requirements for the college or career preparation program of their choice. The disparities in the ACT scores of Black and White students formed the basis of this action plan. Reducing the deficits in ACT results in which Black students are historically scoring lower is a priority of the *WeACT* program. The Black-White ACT score disparities are evident in state and national results. Implementing this program and program evaluation will help Black students close the achievement gap in KCSD. The benefits of an improvement in this area can impact the Black students of the district by offering more opportunities to those students. Chapter Four will present the findings of the research.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The study, an applied research design with a program evaluation, sought to identify the extent of ACT performance disparities amongst Tinlake High School students, particularly the Black and White students. The action plan's focus involved identifying supports to reduce the disparities in ACT scores of the student populations at THS by implementing a program with student support and program evaluation elements. In the first phase of the research, ACT data from multiple sources were analyzed to identify the various racial groups' disparities. The resulting data was used to identify opportunities associated with and potential areas of improvement related to the *WeACT* program to increase its effectiveness and efficiency.

An applied mixed methods design was used to collect and analyze ACT data before establishing the action plan parameters involved in this research. Individual elements were implemented to gather data, both qualitative and quantitative. The data were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the components of the action plan individually and collectively. Through this research using an applied research design with program evaluation, the disparities in ACT results from the perspective of a Black student relative to the White students at Tinlake High School were examined.

According to national ACT data from 2007-2019, Black students had an average composite score of 17. During the same period, White students had an average composite score of 22.3 (ACT Incorporated, 2017, p.8). In Mississippi from 2007-2018, Black students produced an average composite score of 16.4 while White students produced a 20.6 average composite

score (ACT Incorporated, 2017, p.8). In Kingsville County during the same period, Black students had an average score of 17, and White students had a 20.7 average score.

Initiating actions to reduce the discrepancy in scores remained critical, partly because of the underlying concerns of a lack of equality and equity in treatment that were generally perceived by the Black students of THS. Consequently, I was confronted with the question, “If Tinlake High School students were receiving an equitable and equal education, why were there lagging discrepancies in the performance between the two student groups on the ACT?” This question provided a perspective worthy of investigation.

A student who improves their score by one single point has the potential to increase financial offerings by thousands of dollars. A student who achieves a composite score of 22 is eligible to attend junior college in Mississippi free of cost. Another student who fails an end-of-course subject area test has the option to use the different ACT sub-scores to substitute for failed SATP tests. The Graduation Rate is (81.9%) for Black students in Mississippi; for White students, the rate is higher at (88.3%) (Office of Accountability, 2020, p. 5). Increasing student performance on the test provides an increase in the state graduation rate, which benefits the state of Mississippi. One intention of this research was to identify strategies to reduce some of the effects of the more prevalent variables that directly contribute to the three to five-point variations in test scores. An attempt was made to address the deficits with targeted supports.

Protocols

The protocols used in this applied research were designed to collect data to determine the elements' effectiveness and compare results between Black and White students involved in the *WeACT* test prep program. The resultant data were analyzed to derive student perspectives and program effectiveness. The results were used to identify the elements' significance and make adjustments to the *WeACT* program that ultimately serves student needs more precisely.

Through the survey protocol, various forms of data were gathered from the students. This instrument helped to collect data relative to the multiple aspects of ACT preparation and its related components. The resultant data included race identification and the number of times each student had taken the ACT. The survey also collected information relative to students' test preparation methods, including:

- access to ACT tutors,
- exposure to ACT resources in the classroom,
- teacher provided strategies and tips,
- access to resources, and
- hours spent on test preparation each week.

Additionally, the survey gathered feedback for each of the four elements of the action plan. The survey collected student subgroup data relative to their confidence in performing well on the ACT. A Likert scale was used in the survey protocol to determine confidence level on a scale of lowest to highest confidence. The Likert scale helped to gauge student perception in the form of the effectiveness of the elements. On each survey administered throughout the year, student concerns, questions, and other feedback were gathered to allow an option to voice their perspectives and opinions. The student responses helped to identify opportunities for possible improvements to the elements and program. The student feedback was vital to ensure a continuous cycle of improvement to the program and the corresponding elements.

Another analysis involved the relationship between the students subjected to the different elements of the *WeACT* program. The data was analyzed to determine the effects these elements had on the students' perspectives and confidence, particularly the Black students of Tinlake High School. This information became valuable in determining student preference. Additionally, the

information gathered provided trend information specific to the different races of students. The relationships between the elements of the *WeACT* and the resulting ACT scores were studied to determine if a relationship existed that could consistently provide improvements to ACT scores. The data were used to determine each element's effectiveness individually and collectively as a part of the program. The ACT results of the *WeACT* students provided comparative statistics for in-depth analysis.

Research Site

The research site, Tinlake High School, provides educational services to approximately 1629 students in grades 9 through 12. The school's racial breakdown is Black (29.7%), White (65%), and (5%) Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or students who identify with two or more ethnicities (Membership and Enrollment, 2005-2019).

Research Questions

This research aspired to answer four specific questions. As such, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Research Question One Analysis

Research question one asked, "Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?" The resultant data provides evidence the Black students experienced an increase in ACT scores. At the time of this research in 2019-20, the *WeACT* students were either in their sophomore or junior academic years at THS. Data were gathered from multiple sources to develop a holistic account of the processes involved in the students' test preparation while participating in a program that exposed them to each component of test prep offered at Tinlake High School.

When disaggregated, the April 2019 ACT results provided the benchmark for the different student groups involved in this study. The data included the mean, standard deviation, variance, and N-count for the White students involved in the *WeACT* program. There were 57 students in this data report. The ACT Composite mean for this group was 19.23 (SD = 3.62). ACT math results included a mean of 18.68 (SD = 3.39). Science subscores had a mean of 19.46 (SD = 3.82). English subscores for the White students of THS included a 17.89 mean, (SD = 4.72). The reading subscores produced a mean of 20.12, the highest subscore of the student group (SD = 5.06).

Black student results on the April 2019 ACT were provided for 32 THS students. This group of students' mean composite score was 16.31 (SD = 3.49). For math, the mean score was 16.81 (SD = 2.53). The Science mean was 16.88 (SD = 4.17). For this group, English subscores were an average of 14.88 (SD = 5.22). The average reading subscores were 16.72 (SD = 4.55). (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1*ACT Scores from April 2019 and February 2020*

Test Component	Black 2019	White 2019	Black 2020	White 2020
Composite	16.31	19.23	17.22	20.74
Math	16.81	18.68	16.75	20.46
Science	16.88	19.46	17.56	20.19
English	14.88	17.89	16.72	20.91
Reading	16.72	20.12	17.59	20.98

Black student scores increased overall and in three of the four sub-areas. The increase in scores attributed to the Black students was lower than the increases achieved by the White students. The White students involved in the *WeACT* program experienced growth of at least one point in three of the five sections of the ACT. Black students only outperformed their counterparts in one area, reading by .01 of a point (Table 4.2). As presented in the first chapter of the research, nationally, the subcategory of English produced the most substantial disparity between Black and White students (ACT Incorporated, 2018). Resulting data for this research indicated the largest disparity was found in the 2020 English subscores where White students outperformed Black students by a 4.19 point-margin.

Table 4.2*Differences in ACT Scores from April 2019 to February 2020*

Test Component	Black student ACT growth from 2019 to 2020	White student ACT growth from 2019 to 2020
Composite	.91	1.51
Math	-0.06	1.78
Science	.68	.73
English	1.84	3.02
Reading	.87	.86

Although Black students showed growth in four areas of the ACT, they still performed lower than the White students who participated in the *WeACT*. When the 2019 ACT scores were analyzed for the *WeACT* program students, a performance gap existed in each of the five areas of the ACT, the composite score, reading, math, English, and science subscores. In each area, White students outperformed Black students. There was a 2.92 point gap in favor of the White students on the composite. In math, the deficit was 1.87 points. In science, the deficit was 2.58 points. In English, the Black students scored 3.01 points behind the White students, and in Reading, the Black students were 3.40 points behind the White students.

After a year in the *WeACT* program, the students' ACT results illustrated that the deficits increased in each of the areas of the ACT as the White students continued to outscore the Black students. On the 2020 ACT, the composite score deficit increased to 3.52 points. The math score deficit increased to 3.71 points. Science subscores produced the smallest deficit area of 2.63 points. The reading deficit was 3.39 points, and the English deficit was 4.19 points.

The students were asked to provide data about their experiences with the four elements identified in the study: ACT Bootcamps, ACT Prep classes, ACT resources in daily instruction,

and ACT tutorial sessions. The data were gathered through surveys provided to students at various points in the school year. The survey responses from the students were collected on a spreadsheet to build a research database. From this database, multiple data were available for the analysis. The data were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the *WeACT* elements. This question would have been enhanced if the normal progression from preparation to test was not interrupted by the disruptions caused by COVID-19. There was no opportunity to conduct a focus group or student interview as the school year ended without the ACT being administered to the students involved in this survey.

Research Question Two Analysis

Research question two asked, "What components of the *WeACT* program did participants find effective?" Results for each element associated with this question are provided in this section. The following data provided the most effective elements according to the students of Tinlake High School. Likert scale questions were used to gather information concerning the efficacy of the elements to prepare students for the ACT. The Likert scale contained a four-point range from least to most effective. The results are provided in Table 4.3 and are referenced in the following sections.

How effective have the following actions been in helping you to prepare for the ACT?

(ACT Bootcamps)

ACT Bootcamps were provided by the school district or PTO to help students prepare for the ACT. A score of four was considered most effective on the scale, and a score of one would be regarded as not effective at all. The original class average from the January 2020 survey was 2.73 points. On the survey provided in September 2020, the Black students of Tinlake High School's effectiveness score concerning the ACT Bootcamps was 2.8 points. The mean score of the White students was 3.04 points.

How effective have the following actions been in helping you to prepare for the ACT?

(Tutorial Sessions)

THS teachers provided ACT tutorial sessions during Zero Block to help students develop specific skills to increase their ACT performance. The original class average from the January 2020 survey was 2.52 points. The mean response of Black students regarding the effectiveness of ACT tutorials was 2.56 points. For White students, the mean average was 2.25 points.

How effective have the following actions been in helping you to prepare for the ACT?

(Online Discussion Board)

An online discussion board is defined as a virtual environment where a teacher posts ACT questions for students to respond. Teachers would then interact with and provide feedback to students. The original class average from the January 2020 survey was 2.14 points. The Black students responded with a 2.32 mean on the subsequent survey in September 2020. White students had a mean score of 1.73 on the same survey.

How effective have the following actions been in helping you to prepare for the ACT?

(Exposure to ACT practice questions in each class)

The original *WeACT* student mean from the January 2020 survey concerning teachers providing ACT questions in each class was 3.15 points. On the September 2020 survey, the mean Black student response was 3.24 points. On the same survey, the mean score for the White students was 3.06 points.

This question would have been enhanced if the normal progression to the ACT was not interrupted by COVID-19. There was no opportunity to conduct a focus group or student interview to gather more robust qualitative data to provide insight and context from the student perspective concerning the effectiveness the elements of the *WeACT* program had on preparation.

Table 4.3*Effectiveness of Elements*

Test Prep Element	January 2020 Overall Class	September 2020 Black Students	Difference	September 2020 White Students	Difference
Bootcamps	2.73	2.8	.07	3.04	.31
Tutorials	2.52	2.56	.04	2.25	-.27
Online Discussion Boards	2.14	2.32	.18	1.73	-.41
Incorporating questions in regular instruction	3.15	3.24	.09	3.06	-.09

The students were asked to provide data about their experiences with the four elements identified in the study: ACT Bootcamps, ACT Prep classes, ACT resources in daily instruction, and ACT tutorial sessions. This data was gathered through surveys provided to students at various points in the school year and created a database. From this database, multiple data were available for the analysis to determine the effectiveness of the *WeACT* elements.

A paired t-test or repeated measures t-test was conducted on the resulting data. In total, 89 student participants responded to the survey. The results from the January survey provided that students choose the incorporation of ACT resources in regular instruction ($M = 3.15$) as their preferred ACT prep element. The second choice was the ACT Bootcamps ($M = 2.73$). The Black students chose to incorporate ACT resources into regular instruction ($M = 3.24$) as the most effective element on the second survey. ACT Bootcamps ($M = 2.8$) was the second preferred choice for the most effective element. White students also preferred incorporating ACT resources in regular instruction ($M = 3.06$) as the most effective element and incorporating ACT

resources into regular instruction as their second choice ($M = 3.04$). There were no significant differences in choice for most effective elements, $t(2) = -2.14$, $p = .08$, for the two student groups.

Research Question Three Analysis

Research question three asked, "How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?" The resulting data provided the student responses to increasing the effectiveness of the elements of the *WeACT* program. Teacher actions, school actions, or teacher-school actions were identified as areas in which improvements could be made to increase effectiveness.

The students were provided an open-ended response prompt on the survey to collect feedback for this question. The Black students responded to the question with a (44%) response rate. Students A, B, D, H, N, T, and U provided responses related to actions the school had direct control over, the school-based actions. Other responses included measures the teachers could implement daily, such as reviewing ACT questions in class, more practices, more ACT lessons, and more "hands-on" activities. Three students asked for less support and intervention from the school. However, some students requested resources to make the program more successful. For example, Student I responded with a need for more access for online students, while Student M requested a study book (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Improving ACT Prep Effectiveness (Black student responses)

Student	What can the school do to make ACT Prep more effective in meeting your needs?
Student A	Having us go over questions in class daily
Student B	Do more questions in class
Student D	More, free act bootcamps

Student E	Respect our needs and have patience
Student H	Have more hands-on experience to help better understand questions that could be on the ACT
Student I	More access for online students
Student J	I already have a good way to prepare for the ACT. Plus, the school is doing great as is I believe.
Student M	Send a study book home
Student N	More going over things
Student N	Nothing, they've done everything they can
Student T	More practices. Maybe have Quizizz on some of them or videos to help as a tutor for choice learners.
Student U	More ACT lessons

The White students' responses to the question were categorized as teacher actions or school actions. However, some of the responses could have possibly been included in both designations. The teacher actions to improve ACT prep included responses like Student BO's who stated that teachers should explain how the answers are correct. Student BP responded that the students should be taught more tips and tricks to find answers better and manage time. Student XY provided that ACT practice questions should be provided in class at least once a week. Student ZZ asks that the teacher be capable of touching on all ACT subjects.

School-based actions included responses that are more likely to be enacted by the school, such as Student LL, who conveyed that smaller classes with students of similar performance would be more effective in meeting the student needs. Student TT provided the ACT Bootcamps with smaller groups would help make ACT prep more effective and better for one-on-one learning (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5*Improving ACT Prep Effectiveness (White student responses)*

Student	What can the school do to make ACT Prep more effective in meeting your needs?
Student BD	Touch up on old subjects that are on the act (ex. factorization)
Student BG	Nothing
Student BO	Explain how the answer is correct
Student BP	Telling us more tips and tricks to find answers faster or how to manage time better.
Student BQ	Having time for more questions
Student BX	ACT boot camps like they do
Student CG	When I had ACT Boot camp we mostly talked about the English and reading portions and I really would like to know what to expect on the math and science
Student CJ	Make it more 1 on 1
Student CL	Nothing really, I think they do very well.
Student EE	I've never taken act prep so I don't know. I would like to take the class though if I need it
Student II	They can give homework to help out more
Student LL	Have optional smaller sessions (≤ 40 ?? students) with similarly scoring students so it can be more of a tutoring session than a lecture.
Student TT	ACT Bootcamps with smaller groups. Better for 1 on 1 learning
Student XZ	Maybe once a week in class we could only do ACT practice questions
Student YY	More time specifically for practice
Student ZZ	Make sure that the teacher is able and does touch on all ACT subjects.

Due to the unforeseen circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, questions were added to the survey to gather insight from the students relative to the adjustments needed to help

them during this time of transition and shifting in education practices. The switch to virtual learning created learning environments of unfamiliar instructional methods. The first COVID related question of this research asked, "In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, how can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?"

The Black student response rate for this question was (48%). As presented in the previous sections, the responses were categorized as teacher actions or school actions, while some of the actions could have been categorized as teacher-school actions. Examples of this were students A, F, and H, whose suggestions for improvement included practice questions, boot camps, and Zoom meetings. One of the comments included, "Help people who actually haven't taken it have a better understanding of the material and how to prep for it." School actions for improvement provided by the students included more ACT prep, practice courses, online boot camps, and ACT prep courses. Student T specifically asked for more tutors to help students who are experiencing difficulties (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

COVID Related Preparation (Black student responses)

Student	In light of the impact of the COVID pandemic, what can the school do to make ACT preparation more effective in meeting your needs?
Student A	Practice questions, Bootcamps
Student D	More prep and practice courses
Student E	Respect our needs and have patience
Student F	Zoom meetings
Student H	Help people who actually haven't taken it have a better understanding of the material and how to prep for it
Student N	More lessons

Student R	Provide online bootcamps
Student T	Having tutors to help that people that have a hard time with somethings
Student W	More ACT prep courses
Student O	Nothing, they've done everything they can

The White student response rate for this question was (42%). Again, the responses were categorized as school actions, teacher actions, or teacher-school actions (Table 4.7). School-based actions were provided by five of the THS students. Students BE, BP, BU, CJ, and KK, requested support in the form of free tests and having more boot camps and workshops. The most detailed answer in this category came from Student BE, who responded, "Make the act Bootcamp longer. The information I got in the little amount of time helped a lot, and if we had more time, I think it would help so much."

Ten of the student responses were placed in the teacher action category. Students BD, BQ, BW, CD, CK, CL, II, QQ, and YY provided responses that fit this category. Some of the students requested methods and strategies for answering questions. Others requested suggestions for increasing study habits. One of the most detailed responses came from Student BR, who responded,

"Spend more time than just one class block going over the information to help students learn. It feels rushed and unhelpful to take notes for a whole class block without being able to slow down so students can ask questions and have time to learn the tips. Avoid making the students feel like they are taking a test when trying to learn the strategies. Making students do it on their own can be helpful, but if they feel like it is more of a test than practice, they might become worried about taking the ACT."

The most prevalent responses involved the requests for more exposure to ACT questions in the classrooms.

The student responses categorized as school-teacher actions included requests for resources and services to help develop test-taking skills. Students requested resources such as online tools, videos, pdfs, booklets, and textbooks. Student LL asked for boot camps that are more accessible to the entire student population with more flexible time, afterschool, and weekends. Student WW asked if the school could divide students into ability groups to meet student needs more specifically.

Table 4.7

COVID Related Preparation (White student responses)

Student	In light of the impact of the COVID pandemic, what can the school do to make ACT preparation more effective in meeting your needs?
Student BD	Showing easy and fast ways to get through the act with correct answers
Student BE	Provide as many free tests possible
Student BP	Have more ACT bootcamps.
Student BQ	continuing act problems in class
Student BR	Spend more time than just one class block going over the information to help students learn. It feels rushed and unhelpful to take notes for a whole class block without being able to slow down so students can ask questions and have time to learn the tips. Avoid making the students feel like they are taking a test when trying to learn the strategies. Making students do it on their own can be helpful but if they feel like it is more of a test than practice they might become worried about taking the ACT.
Student BU	Have more bootcamps. But with these bootcamps specialize in a specific subject each camp.
Student BW	Work on practice problems, get help from a teacher/parent.
Student CD	help us study more
Student CH	You could give us papers that show types of questions that will be on the ACT

Student CJ	Make the workshops easier to sign up for
Student CK	The teacher go over more ACT like questions
Student CL	They just need to give options for people to do practice questions
Student II	Have more questions to work from.
Student KK	Make the act bootcamp longer. The information I got in the little amount of time helped a lot and if we had more time I think it would help so much
Student LL	Regularly provide online resources, whether that be links, PDFs, booklets etc; or have optional paper resources in the offices; have more ACT bootcamps (not just for PTO kids) that we can sign up for after school or on weekends;
Student PP	They can recommend certain websites, certain textbooks, learning videos for the ACT.
Student QQ	Provide more resources like having more available questions in class instead of online just in case kids don't have internet.
Student TT	More ACT bootcamps throughout the year.
Student WW	The school could separate students who have taken the ACT with different needs and focus on the needs of students and not just a overall this is what to do.
Student XZ	Maybe once a week in class we could only do ACT practice questions
Student YY	Incorporate practice into every class
Student ZZ	We need more ACT bootcamps.

Descriptive statistics were calculated from the responses on the January 2020 survey to determine a baseline measure. Black student responses collected from the survey provided in September 2020 were compared to the averages from January. A comparison was made between the two surveys. The January survey was not designed to collect racial demographics. The survey was adjusted to collect this data on the September 2020 survey. The COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity to collect data about the impact of the virus on student learning. Questions were added to allow students the opportunity to share their experiences in a COVID

environment while trying to maintain focus on the ACT. Another adjustment to the study due to COVID-19 involved the removal of focus groups and individual student interviews.

Research Question Four Analysis

The final research question was “Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?”

For this research question, the students were provided four Likert scaled questions that provided a score that ranged from one (the lowest) to four (the highest). The first survey question was,

What is your level of confidence and preparation for each section of the ACT? (English)

For this survey question, the overall class average from the January 2020 survey in English produced a mean score of 2.7 (SD = .98). On the September 2020 survey, the overall class average for the same question was 2.80 points (SD = .82). Black student scores increased by .10 from the January survey. For the September 2020 survey, the mean for White students was 2.8 (SD = .83). For the question, (64%) of Black students reported being confident or extremely confident with their preparation for the English section of the ACT, according to the September 2020 survey. Overall, (60%) of the students responded as confident or extremely confident with their preparation for the ACT English section, according to the January 2020 survey.

What is your level of confidence and preparation for each section of the ACT? (Math)

The response to this question on the January 2020 survey produced an overall 2.50 mean score (SD = 1.01). A mean of 2.54 was produced on the September 2020 survey for the overall class. The overall class average for the September 2020 survey was 2.54. Black students' mean was 2.6 (SD = 1.12). The White student mean was 2.53 (SD = .96). On the September 2020 survey, (52%) of the Black students were either confident or extremely confident in their math

preparation. Overall, (50%) of the students surveyed in January 2020 were either confident or extremely confident in their math ACT preparation.

What is your level of confidence and preparation for each section of the ACT? (Reading)

For ACT reading, the original class mean from the January 2020 survey was 2.72 (SD = 1.02). An overall mean of 2.69 was calculated for the September 2020 survey. From this survey, a mean of 2.88 (SD = .83) was produced by the Black students of THS. Black students scores increased by .16 from January 2020 survey. The mean score for White students was 2.65 (SD = .99). Overall, (56%) of the students who took the survey in January 2020 responded that they were either confident or extremely confident with their preparation for the ACT reading section. Of the respondents, (76%) of the Black students were confident or extremely confident with their preparation for the ACT reading section.

What is your level of confidence and preparation for each section of the ACT? (Science)

Students responded with a mean score of 2.32 (SD = .80) on the January 2020 survey. The overall class average of 2.29 was produced on the September 2020 survey. On the September survey, 2.48 was the mean (SD = .87) for Black students of THS. The mean for Black students increased .16 from the January survey.

For White students, the Science mean was 2.24 (SD = .88). Overall, (42%) of the students reported feeling confident or extremely confident in their science ACT preparation. Of that number, (48%) of Black students were confident or extremely confident with their preparation for the ACT science section (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8*ACT Confidence and Preparation*

	January 2020 Overall Class	September 2020 Overall Class	September 2020 Black Students	September 2020 White Students
Math	2.50	2.54	2.6	2.53
Reading	2.72	2.69	2.88	2.65
English	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.8
Science	2.32	2.29	2.48	2.24

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruptions to schools worldwide. Due to the disturbances associated with the pandemic, this research was interrupted. The use of the evaluation instruments outlined in previous sections to gather information was incapacitated. The research was designed to collect survey data, focus group data, individual interview data, and the resultant ACT data for various students in the 10th and 11th-grade classes. The 11th-grade students were able to take the ACT on February 25. The test administration provided data for that particular class of students only. The 10th-grade students were scheduled to take the ACT on March 24, after returning from spring break. Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the March ACT Bootcamp was suspended indefinitely. The students would receive the ACT Bootcamp in early fall 2020 after the schools in KCSD reopened. On March 14, 2020, Governor Tate Reeves issued a State of Emergency declaration that set off a series of events that ultimately closed Mississippi schools for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year. Additionally, the Governor's actions meant all interactions with the students would

end, thus eliminating the possibility to conclude the research as intended in its inception effectively. The efforts of this research were restructured to salvage the study and preserve the action plan.

This research would have been enhanced if the normal progression of activities relative to the ACT were not interrupted by the disruptions caused by COVID-19. There was no opportunity to conduct focus groups or student interviews as the school year ended without the ACT being administered to the students who were 10th graders in the *WeACT* program. The challenge involved resuming a sense of normalcy after the disruption caused during the spring of the 2019-20 school year. Students were removed from traditional learning for more than five months. For the returning students, the traditional notion of school had changed. Not only were they adjusting to life in a pandemic, but they also had to adjust to hybrid and online learning methods in their school. Even in their return, uncertainty remained as students returned to school buildings that were much different from those they encountered before COVID-19. Teachers were expected to adjust their instructional methods to account for virtual learners in order to maintain a high standard of student instruction. Black students experienced an increase relative to their confidence in preparation in each of the four ACT areas between January 2020 and September 2020. Although the original ACT date of March 2020 was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the students were able to complete the ACT Bootcamp before the test was given in October 2020.

The September 2020 survey that was provided to students who would have taken the ACT in March 2020 produced the following results to the question of "How has COVID impacted your test preparation?" There were 25 responses to this question on the student survey. The responses were categorized as either positive, negative, or uncertain. The largest number of student responses illustrated the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses

included students feeling anxious, not prepared, stressed out, or struggling to focus in a virtual setting, in addition to forgetting the previous year's content. Student AA provided that the COVID-19 pandemic made them feel unprepared after the March ACT was canceled. Student HH expressed, "My friend had possibly contracted the virus a day before we went out together. I had to stay home while she got tested to make sure I didn't possibly spread it. Doing this, I missed an ACT boot camp that my school provided." Student CG provided that they are not allowed to go anywhere due to COVID-19 and have not been able to get tutoring. Student BN provided they had not been able to learn "everything" from the Geometry class.

There were only two out of twenty-five that referenced a positive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of positive responses. Student WW stated, "COVID-19 has made me prepare more for my ACT because I had more time on my hands in order to prepare." Similarly, Student YY responded that they had more time to prepare during the summer. The student referred to participating in several online ACT boot camps over the Zoom platform (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

COVID impact

Student	How has COVID impacted your test preparation?
Student A	Feeling like I'm not prepared
Student AA	It made me feel unprepared after the ACT was cancelled. It feels so long since I've been in school so I feel like I won't remember a lot.
Student BB	I do not know I just haven't taken the ACT test yet
Student BD	I just need a refresher on old material now
Student BE	I have not been able to take it as many times as needed
Student BG	A little bit less prepared for test.
Student BN	I didn't get to learn everything from geometry due to Covid. Also I was supposed to take it last year but we have to leave school
Student BW	Pretty well

Student BX	I didn't get to take the ACT in June
Student CG	It has because when I am not at school I am not allowed to go anywhere for Covid reasons and I haven't been able to get tutoring
Student CJ	The 6 month break made me forget a lot of stuff
Student D	It made me anxious
Student GG	I've forgotten things over quarantine
Student H	Yes, cause we wasn't able to take ours in the spring
Student HH	My friend had possibly contracted the virus a day before we went out together. I had to stay home while she got tested to make sure I didn't possibly spread it. Doing this I missed an ACT bootcamp that my school provided.
Student I	Unsure of when I'll actually be able to take it
Student II	I was supposed to take it earlier last year but COVID made it to where I can't.
Student LL	Haven't been able to have act prep classes; no motivation to study; don't have class materials to review
Student N	Study more
Student NN	I have less time and more stress when doing almost everything
Student O	It has made things more stressful
Student OO	Taking the test in April
Student T	Being virtual is kind of hard for me to focus.
Student WW	COVID-19 has made me prepare more for my ACT because I had more time on my hands in order to prepare.
Student YY	During the summer, I had more time to prepare. I did several bootcamps over Zoom.

Program evaluation standards

To evaluate the *WeACT* program, the Program Evaluation Standards were used to measure the program evaluation involved in this research (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The standards provided guidelines to ensure quality evaluations of programs such as *WeACT*. Using the following evaluation standards checklists made it possible to track the standards as they were applied during the implementation of the *WeACT* program. More so, the checklist ensured that all standards were taken into account throughout the process. The standards resonated strongly with the purpose of the program as intended initially during its inception.

Utility Standards

The utility standards were intended to increase the extent to which program stakeholders find evaluation processes and products valuable in meeting their needs (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The Utility Standards of program evaluation involved in the *WeACT* program processes were identified in Table 4.10, along with the compliance level for each. The *WeACT* program components sufficiently met the utility standards of progress evaluation except for standard U7 (timely and appropriate communicating and reporting). As a part of the revision cycle, this standard will be adjusted to ensure the *WeACT* program meets the students' needs adequately. A need for effective communication was evident concerning the availability of ACT resources and supports (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10*Utility Standards*

Program Evaluation Standard	Implementation Status
<p>U1 Evaluator Credibility Evaluations should be conducted by qualified people who establish and maintain credibility in the evaluation context.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U2 Attention to Stakeholders Evaluations should devote attention to the full range of individuals and groups invested in the program and affected by its evaluation.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U3 Negotiated Purposes Evaluation purposes should be identified and continually negotiated based on the needs of stakeholders.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U4 Explicit Values Evaluations should clarify and specify the individual and cultural values underpinning purposes, processes, and judgments.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U5 Relevant Information Evaluation information should serve the identified and emergent needs of stakeholders.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U6 Meaningful Processes and Products Evaluations should construct activities, descriptions, and judgments in ways that encourage participants to rediscover, reinterpret, or revise their understandings and behaviors.</p>	Sufficient
<p>U7 Timely and Appropriate Communicating and Reporting Evaluations should attend to the continuing information needs of their multiple audiences.</p>	Ongoing
<p>U8 Concern for Consequences and Influence Evaluations should promote responsible and adaptive use while guarding against unintended negative consequences and misuse.</p>	Sufficient

Feasibility Standards

The feasibility standards are intended to increase evaluation effectiveness and efficiency (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Relative to the *WeACT* program, the feasibility standards were sufficiently introduced during the creation and implementation of the program. The financial standing and overt prosperity of the Kingsville County School District provided an abundance of resources and overall support in this endeavor. Of all the Program Evaluation Standards, the feasibility standards composed the group most capable of ensuring complete compliance regarding *WeACT* (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Feasibility Standards

Program Evaluation Standard	Implementation Status
F1 Project Management Evaluations should use effective project management strategies.	Sufficient
F2 Practical Procedures Evaluation procedures should be practical and responsive to the way the program operates.	Sufficient
F3 Contextual Viability Evaluations should recognize, monitor, and balance the cultural and political interests and needs of individuals and groups.	Sufficient
F4 Resource Use Evaluations should use resources effectively and efficiently.	Sufficient

Propriety Standards

The propriety standards support what is proper, fair, legal, right, and just in evaluations (Yarbrough et al., 2011). A reason for this research involves the need to address the disparities in Black and White student ACT scores. This premise of fairness, or lack thereof, prompted a

series of actions that ultimately led to the development of *WeACT*. Of all the standards, this was perhaps the most vital to the development of the *WeACT* program as it allowed the opportunity to be an advocate for the students of Tinlake High School to help reduce the gap in ACT performance that can be predicted by race and ethnicity (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Propriety Standards

Program Evaluation Standard	Implementation Status
<p>P1 Responsive and Inclusive Orientation Evaluations should be responsive to stakeholders and their communities.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P2 Formal Agreements Evaluation agreements should be negotiated to make obligations explicit and take into account the needs, expectations, and cultural contexts of clients and other stakeholders.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P3 Human Rights and Respect Evaluations should be designed and conducted to protect human and legal rights and maintain the dignity of participants and other stakeholders.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P4 Clarity and Fairness Evaluations should be understandable and fair in addressing stakeholder needs and purposes.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P5 Transparency and Disclosure Evaluations should provide complete descriptions of findings, limitations, and conclusions to all stakeholders, unless doing so would violate legal and propriety obligations.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P6 Conflicts of Interests Evaluations should openly and honestly identify and address real or perceived conflicts of interests that may compromise the evaluation.</p>	Sufficient
<p>P7 Fiscal Responsibility Evaluations should account for all expended resources and comply with sound fiscal procedures and processes.</p>	Sufficient

Accuracy Standards

The accuracy standards are intended to increase the dependability and truthfulness of evaluation representations, propositions, and findings, especially those supporting interpretations and judgments about quality (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Developing the program evaluation for *WeACT* allowed for the collection of robust data from multiple sources. This data allowed for interpretation and constant improvements that ensure the students' needs are met, and the program is operating efficiently while being effective in achieving the established goals. The accuracy standards were vital in the process of developing the protocols used in the research. This group of standards ensures accountability concerning the data gathered from the various aspects of the *WeACT* program. After analyzing the implementation results, a need for improvement to the A6 standard (sound designs and analyses) became apparent. However, this is to be expected in a newly created program. There is a constant need to revise the protocols involved to stay current with the changing trends, such as the technological measures associated with education (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13*Accuracy Standards*

Program Evaluation Standard	Implementation Status
A1 Justified Conclusions and Decisions Evaluation conclusions and decisions should be explicitly justified in the cultures and contexts where they have consequences.	Sufficient
A2 Valid Information Evaluation information should serve the intended purposes and support valid interpretations.	Sufficient
A3 Reliable Information Evaluation procedures should yield sufficiently dependable and consistent information for the intended uses.	Sufficient
A4 Explicit Program and Context Descriptions Evaluations should document programs and their contexts with appropriate detail and scope for the evaluation purposes.	Sufficient
A5 Information Management Evaluations should employ systematic information collection, review, verification, and storage methods.	Sufficient
A6 Sound Designs and Analyses Evaluations should employ technically adequate designs and analyses that are appropriate for the evaluation purposes.	Could be improved
A7 Explicit Evaluation Reasoning Evaluation reasoning leading from information and analyses to findings, interpretations, conclusions, and judgments should be clearly and completely documented.	Sufficient
A8 Communication and Reporting Evaluation communications should have adequate scope and guard against misconceptions, biases, distortions, and errors.	Sufficient

Evaluation Accountability Standards

The evaluation accountability standards encourage adequate documentation of evaluations and a meta-evaluative perspective focused on improvement and accountability for

evaluation processes and products (Yarbrough et al., 2011). In writing this research, standard E1 Evaluations documentation and standard E2 Internal meta-evaluation are incorporated in the required writing (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Evaluation Accountability Standards

Program Evaluation Standard	Implementation Status
<p>E1 Evaluation Documentation Evaluations should fully document their negotiated purposes and implemented designs, procedures, data, and outcomes.</p>	Sufficient
<p>E2 Internal Meta-evaluation Evaluators should use these and other applicable standards to examine the accountability of the evaluation design, procedures employed, information collected, and outcomes.</p>	Sufficient
<p>E3 External Meta-evaluation Program evaluation sponsors, clients, evaluators, and other stakeholders should encourage the conduct of external meta evaluations using these and other applicable standards.</p>	Sufficient

Summary

A central focus of this study involved identifying elements that actively reduced the disparities in ACT performance between the different student groups of Tinlake High School. The questions in this chapter were designed to produce robust qualitative and quantitative data from the student perspective. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including the mean, ranges, standard deviations, and variances. Data tables were produced to organize the data for presentation and further analysis.

There were four research areas involved in the study. The first involved the impact of the *WeACT* program in increasing the scores for Black students. Black student composite scores increased. They also experienced growth in three of the four sub-areas. The second area

involved identifying the effectiveness of the components. According to the students, the ACT Boot camps were the most effective ACT Prep component at THS. Incorporating questions in regular instruction was identified by the students as the next effective component.

The next point in the research involved improving the elements. For this survey question, the student responses were categorized into groups that provided insight into actions enacted by individual teachers or by the school. Finally, the research aimed to measure the students' changes in attitude confidence during the program. After the final survey, the results indicate that Black students' confidence in test preparation increased on each ACT section.

Conclusion

The findings of this applied research into reducing ACT performance disparities between the student groups of Tinlake High were presented in this chapter. Throughout this process, the immediate benefits of the program's implementation were observed. These benefits include the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, which provides insight into student perspectives relative to the ACT. More so, it produced the initial baseline data needed for comparison. This data created the initial awareness of areas of possible growth and improvement. There is much research to be done in this area. The benefits of the *WeACT* program can best be observed from a longitudinal perspective. Although the initial study provided promise, it failed to reduce the overall ACT achievement gap between the student groups. However, there were positive gains observed. The Black students scores increased in four of the five areas of the ACT. The only exception was the math subscore where the students witnessed a decline in points. Chapter Five will discuss the findings in terms of improvements and future implications for the next phase of the *WeACT* program.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The ACT is given to high school students to measure their knowledge and provide information to colleges, which aid in student recruitment. The test helps to predict a student's likelihood of success in college. According to national ACT data from 2007-2019, Black students had an average composite score of 17, while White students produced an average 22.3 composite score. Mississippi ACT data for the years 2007-2018 revealed that Black students produced an average composite score of 16.4 while White students produced a 20.6 average composite. In Kingsville County School District, the Black students had an average score of 17, and the White students produced an average composite score of 20.7 (ACT Incorporated 2017, p.8). As cited in Chapter Two, McBride Davis, Slate, Moore, and Barnes (2015) assert that test scores, facilities, and lifetime achievement of students from marginalized groups indicate a void in parity of resources and positive student outcomes. Therefore, to accomplish a school system that practices equality, procedures reflecting equity should be evident. The logic behind the research helped form the *WeACT* program's basis, which was developed as an aid to reduce the disparities in ACT scores between Black and White students in Tinline High School.

In Chapter One, an area of deficit within Tinline High School was introduced, specifically the disparities in Black and White ACT scores. Afterward, the purpose of the research was provided, which ultimately led to the development of the *WeACT* program. Chapter Two provided the research relative to the different components of the *WeACT* program.

In Chapter Three, the methods involved in the research were outlined. This chapter also detailed the collaborative effort involved in the development of the *WeACT* program, the implementation timeline, and the program evaluation associated with the program. Chapter Four presented the results of the applied research. Chapter Five presents the results of the study. The chapter includes the research analysis, limitations, and implications of the study to maintain the current efforts and guide the future development of the *WeACT* program.

Discussion

The *WeACT* Program. In response to the persistent discrepancies involved in Black and White students' ACT scores, the *WeACT* program was created in alignment with Tinlake High School's vision to provide solutions for the inequities in ACT results. In establishing the *WeACT* program, there were multiple goals associated with the plan that included implementation, evaluation, and revision. One of the main goals involved creating a program that could be replicated in other school environments. The *WeACT* program was developed to utilize existing school factors to achieve student success effectively.

The program's efforts consisted of implementing, documenting, and continuously improving a series of interventions to reduce the ACT achievement gap. Ultimately, this research would be used to redefine the methodology, practices, and norms associated with educating students of different ethnic and racial groups. Finally, as a result of this research, stakeholders would be better equipped to address the ACT performance disparities present amongst the different student groups of THS. Throughout the research, there have been multiple stakeholders involved in the processes of implementing the *WeACT* program. From district-level personnel to school-level administration and faculty, KCS D educators were instrumental in this research. The

ACT specialist Mr. Sparkman was a vital resource. His assistance helped frame the research context by providing valuable insight, suggestions, resources, and important data to assist in the study.

The ACT Composite score for Black students involved in the *WeACT* program increased by .91 of a point. Science, English, and reading subscores increased during the *WeACT* program. Math ACT scores decreased slightly during the period of program implementation. Overall, the increases Black students achieved were lower than the increases achieved by White students who were exposed to the same elements.

The program's focus was not clearly defined, as students were not provided expectations associated with the program. Overall, there was not a clear vision communicated for students involved in the *WeACT* program. As the efforts failed to detail, there was a need for more communication of the program's efforts and intentions. There was a need for a clearer, more defined rollout of those efforts and resources involved in the *WeACT* program.

ACT Bootcamps. At the beginning of each school year since 2018, meetings were held between the THS administration and Mr. Sparkman, the ACT coordinator for the KCSD, to discuss the ACT data from the previous year. The purpose of the meetings involved constructing plans for the impending school year to increase ACT performance. During a meeting with Mr. Sparkman before the 2019 school year, we discussed the coordination of the elements as outlined in this research in addition to the normal objectives and topics. As in previous years before, Mr. Sparkman conducted the ACT Bootcamp sessions for the KCSD. Over the years, the students of KCSD have grown accustomed to the ACT Bootcamps as a source of test preparation. During the last four years, the practice of conducting ACT Bootcamps had become more common. In the 2019-20 school year, Tinlake High School elected to provide additional ACT prep sessions to complement the offerings provided by the KCSD.

A short-term goal associated with ACT Bootcamps was the expectation of incremental performance growth between each test administration for Black students. This goal was achieved as there was an incremental growth overall for the Black students on the ACT. Long term, the goal for all KCSD students is to achieve a four-point growth between each test administration. Perhaps the most significant long-term goal involved consistent growth for Black students during the first three years of the implementation of *WeACT*. As this program is continued yearly and more data becomes available to form a longitudinal perspective, this goal's progress will be revisited.

During the research period, student surveys were used to gather data. The initial survey was provided in January of 2020 at the beginning of the second semester. For comparison purposes, the results were compared against the follow-up survey that was given in September 2020. The students responded to Likert scale questions that asked about the effectiveness of the *WeACT* program's elements on the survey. The scale ranged from a low score of one (least effective) to the highest score of four (most effective). On the January survey, the original class average was 2.73 points. On the follow-up survey provided in September 2020, the Black students of Tinlake High School provided an effectiveness score of 2.8 points for ACT Bootcamps, a slight growth over the first survey.

ACT Tutorial Sessions. The ACT tutorial sessions' goal was to increase student access to individualized instruction with a certified educator in a remedial or enriching capacity. A short-term goal of the ACT tutorial sessions was to provide weekly tutorial assistance in areas of the test where remediation was needed. A long-term goal was to create a school environment that steadily increased the number of students, especially Black students who participated in this element for assistance in test prep. This option was specifically useful to students of the *WeACT*

program who did not have the financial ability to hire tutors. Additionally, there is long-term interest in increasing the number of tutors to serve the students' needs.

Before the 2019 school year, teachers were approached about the possibility of providing tutorial sessions during the Zero Block period of the school day. Originally, the teachers who agreed to participate were to identify objectives the students did not master or have historically struggled to master to drive their tutorial sessions. After talking with Mr. Sparkman, he agreed to provide resources, additional support, and strategies to assist the teachers in the tutorial sessions. *WeACT* students who utilized Zero Block for ACT tutorial assistance were vocal in their appreciation of the element. Mr. Sparkman was appreciative of the efforts to provide ACT prep in the context of Zero Block conveniently.

Some students participated in the sessions consistently, although the overall usage was lower than anticipated. Inconsistent bus arrival times and other issues with student commutes contributed to this problem. The teachers encountered issues with consistency due to students not attending the tutorial sessions regularly. Another issue involved the use of the QR codes to check-in for the sessions. As a school, THS had only implemented the QR code check-in system for one year before implementing the *WeACT* program, and students were still adjusting to the new format. The students were used to the old process of manually signing in for Zero Block. THS students had not broken from the old routine, and some students struggled to transition using the QR codes for easier sign-in. Consequently, much of the demographic data was not captured for analysis in this research.

In measuring the effectiveness of the element, the original class average relative to ACT Tutorials from the January survey was 2.52 points. The mean response of Black students regarding the effectiveness of ACT tutorials was 2.56 points on the September survey, a slight increase.

ACT Resources in Daily Instruction. As a short-term goal at Tinlake High, (70%) of the teachers would incorporate ACT questions into their classes daily. As a long-term goal, the administration envisioned Tinlake High becoming an environment where (100%) of the teachers incorporated ACT resources, test solving strategies, and other efforts in some form every day to increase student learning over the next three years. The teachers were free to implement the questions into their classes in any manner, such as ice breakers, questions used to get the class settled in and preparing for the days' activities. Remediation, enrichment, and exit tickets or questions issued at the end of the class period to monitor student comprehension or preparedness for the next day's lessons were other ways teachers used the ACT questions and resources. Mr. Sparkman provided teachers with an abundance of resources to eliminate the need to search for resources.

The administration of THS worked hard to get teacher support and buy-in for this particular element as the implementation of the element involved minimal effort but possibly produced significant benefits. The administration believed the students needed to be exposed to the ACT resources as frequently as possible. Ideally, the students would be exposed to these resources in all classes to experience the questions from multiple content perspectives. At the back-to-school teacher meeting of 2018, Tinlake High School's administration began the drive to get teachers to provide more ACT exposure to the students. In evaluating this element's effectiveness, the January survey results provided a score of 3.15 for the *WeACT* participants. This average grew to 3.24 for the Black students on the September survey, which was high considering a score of four was the highest possible. The survey provided options for students to provide feedback concerning possible improvements to the *WeACT* program. The survey produced open-ended questions for students to voice their suggestions for improvements to the

element to make the *WeACT* program more successful. The students provided qualitative responses, which were placed into one of three categories teacher actions, school-institutional actions, or teacher-institutional action.

Attitude and Confidence. In evaluating the effects of the *WeACT* program, student attitude and confidence relative to test preparation were measured. The research was designed to track student attitudes and confidence while the participants were engaged in the *WeACT* program. Specifically, the study would monitor the two variables, attitude and confidence, related to the Black *WeACT* students. On the survey, the students responded to a four-point Likert scale question about attitude and confidence that ranged from a low score of one (least effective) to the highest score of four (most effective).

While in the *WeACT* program, Black students experienced growth concerning their attitude and confidence concerning the English section of the ACT. In 2020, between January and September, Black students experienced a .10 of a point growth in this area. As it related to math, Black students' confidence increased by .10 of a point during the nine-month period between the surveys. Concerning ACT reading, the original class mean from the January survey was 2.72, which increased to 2.88 for the Black students on the September survey. In the area of ACT science, the class produced a mean score of 2.32 on the January survey. This mean increased to 2.48 on the September survey for the Black students. The survey questions used to collect the data were not designed most effectively to gather in-depth student responses. One observed problem with the survey questions involved the format of the responses that were generated. In analyzing the resultant survey data for this particular question, it was impossible to decipher the differences in the growth of the two variables, attitude and confidence independently.

Limitations. The most significant limitation to the research occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. When designing the study, student interviews and focus groups were to be implemented to elicit more robust data. COVID-19 disrupted the ability to conduct the sessions with the students, which would have provided this additional information. Through the surveys, qualitative data was gathered from the students in the form of open-ended questions. The students provided their insight relative to the different elements. Due to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, access to the students was limited for more than five months. During this time, students were removed from the learning environments. The classes transitioned online, where they took on a different meaning and design. Although not explicitly mentioned, to keep students from experiencing regression, most of the transition period focused on building a curriculum to ensure some learning level continued during the disruption.

Most of the data needed for the survey would have been gathered as a result of the individual student interviews and focus groups. Through those interviews, information relative to school factors such as school culture, academic preparation, ACT preparation, and other relevant topics would have contributed to the research. From those interviews, valuable perspectives would have been captured from a qualitative point of view to establish a complete profile of the *WeACT* program students. The student interviews and focus groups would have helped develop a better understanding of the between-school factors that contribute to a student's performance within the THS learning environment.

As stated in the first chapter, underserved learners were students who self-identified as coming from low-income families, identified as a minority, or were first-generation college students. The criteria of underserved learners provided accurate predictors of a student's ACT performance. Revising the data collection methods and protocols to account for more variables, such as the criteria associated with being an underserved learner, is necessary for the next

implementation of the *WeACT* program. This data will provide more insight into the connection between school factors and between school factors. Condrón (2009) provides that school factors play an elevated role in generating the Black-White achievement gap, while non-school factors primarily drive social class inequalities. This research was developed to offset variables that influenced the Black student ACT scores at Tinlake High School. While this research has experienced success in relation to studying the impact of certain school-related factors, the impact of the between-school factors on issues students face outside of the school environment remains unknown. More extensive research is needed to determine the extent of the impact of these variables.

Implications. This study identified an area of improvement in Tinlake High School that is also applicable to each of the schools in the KCSD, disparities in Black and White ACT scores. Each school had its own ACT preparation methods in place to increase student achievement. By implementing the additional measures identified in this study, these schools have options to enhance their efforts to produce more effective results for their student populations. The research revealed opportunities for improvement in the process of test preparation. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses and enhanced other areas of opportunity in school operations. The most imperative opportunity involved revising general school operating procedures due to the enhanced safety protocols and related measures caused by the pandemic. Most schools were not prepared for the transition to online learning. This presented an opportunity to reevaluate and redesign the current instructional procedures. Schools were left with few options outside embracing technology. One year into the pandemic and schools are still adjusting to the many changes associated with COVID-19.

From a technological perspective, an online component is a promising resource that needs to be developed. The original development of the *WeACT* program included an online

discussion board to provide another resource for the students that was flexible, interactive, and consistent. However, the online discussion boards never materialized as the students did not utilize it as a resource. Due to the pandemic, a renewed focus is being devoted to the development of online ACT study modules. These modules would give students access to more specific resources to guide their improvement in the problematic areas of the ACT, as it would allow the students could work on the element at their own pace and convenience.

The research into the *WeACT* program was enlightening in multiple aspects. As a result of the implementation of the program, additional student benefits were discovered. Some students made a conscious effort to share their experiences in ACT prep. Students shared strategies and experiences with the ACT. They became more aware of their weaknesses and proceeded to be more proactive in seeking solutions. The initial implementation provided a baseline for improving the success of high school students of Tinlake High School. In my new role of principal, the program elements that were researched at Tinlake High School are gradually being phased in for my new school environment. There is a three-year plan in place to achieve the same goals outlined in this study. Changes will be made to the protocols involved in this research to streamline the implementation of the *WeACT* program at Bluehill High School.

Recommendations for Future Research

Bali and Alvarez (2004) concluded that a wide-ranging set of factors had been provided in an attempt to explain racial differences in student achievement test scores, with most attention focused on students' background and family or school and educational policy issues. In this research, the variables from each category of the aforementioned study were considered and incorporated to an extent. This research has established a foundation for further research into the ACT's inequities and perhaps other instructional areas.

After implementing the *WeACT* program, the following recommendations emerged after analysis of the results. The first recommendation involves the need to have consistent practices involved in the delivery of the ACT resources. During the frequent progress checks, one of the most frequent complaints involved the students who wanted to be moved to specific ACT Prep classes because of the variance in instructional methods. Granted, teachers will employ strategies that fit their abilities and strengths. However, a strategy must be adhered to in the classes to ensure all students were receiving equal levels of instruction.

As such, professional development is a vital component of a successful implementation of a program such as *WeACT*. Focusing the efforts in two areas, whole staff professional development and professional development specifically for ACT Prep teachers, ensures that they are equipped with the latest resources and instructional methods. Whole staff professional development should incorporate elements of integrating and implementing ACT resources in all classes. Increasing awareness of the importance of the ACT is another critical area of focus. Professional development for teachers of ACT prep classes should be more specific in nature to ensure the most effective teaching strategies are being shared and utilized in the classes. All teachers within the school environment should be sharing ACT resources. The teachers of the ACT Prep classes should actively lead the endeavors.

Racial differences in mean standardized test scores are evident from the earliest years of formal schooling. Black and Hispanic children scored below non-Hispanic White children, and Asian American children scored above non-Hispanic White children on standardized reading and mathematics tests (Grotsky & Warren 2008). Beginning the efforts associated with the *WeACT* program in earlier grades presents another long-term goal of the program. Common teacher

planning time presents another opportunity to increase the teacher capacity of test preparation methods. During those planning sessions, teachers could collaboratively build lessons, activities, and unit assignments to advance the interests.

Promoting the resources and communicating the ACT benefits are other significant actions vital to a successful test preparation program. Students should have a clear understanding of how the ACT impacts their college and career aspirations. Student buy-in is necessary for the success of any program. They need to see the benefits at each step of the program in a clear progression that leads to the test and beyond. Another aspect of communication involves providing students frequent opportunities to provide feedback. Their input is critical to understanding the needed adjustments to the elements of *WeACT*. Better systems of tracking student progress provide other avenues for conversations between teachers and students. This communication should also aim to provide students with an overview of the options associated with test preparation. They need to know what resources (classes, material, or personnel) are available to assist in test preparation. This information needs to be readily available and promoted relentlessly and consistently through social media outlets, posters, email correspondence, presentations, other school-related actions, and in conjunction with any available community functions.

Conclusions

As a result of the efforts involved in this research, the Black students of Tinlake High School became more vocal. When the students discovered the *WeACT* program's purpose, they began to verbalize their concerns, appreciation, and suggestions more freely. While most were appreciative of the many coordinated efforts provided through the *WeACT* program, others were not motivated or interested in increasing their test prep practices. As outlined, several adjustments have to be made to achieve maximum effectiveness.

Perhaps, the most significant development of this study has been the relationship developed with Mr. Sparkman. Correcting an inequity of this magnitude is something we have talked about extensively. He understands my motivation and passion for attempting to reduce the gap in ACT scores between Black and White students. As a result of conversations with other administrators about this research, they have developed an interest in the findings. Two of the administrators expressed interest in incorporating some of the elements of this research in their schools. Since beginning a principalship in a new school, there have been extensive efforts of collaboration with the assistant principals and teachers to phase in the *WeACT* program. Mr. Sparkman has been crucial to the process as he is familiar with the demographics of the school. Mr. Sparkman had been tracking the ACT results of my new student population since 2016. Engaging in this research has increased my relationship with stakeholders with similar interests in closing achievement gaps in ACT scores.

Willie (2001) focused on the test of cognitive skills or academic achievement given in the primary, middle, and secondary school years. The findings reveal that the proportion of students performing above the national norm is higher in affluent-concentrated schools than in poverty-concentrated schools for students in both racial groups. As previously stated in the statistics, students in the KCS D are producing higher ACT composites than the state averages. After completing this study, the *WeACT* program will be implemented in a different school. The first year will involve introducing ACT Tutorials and ACT questions, and other resources in class daily. Over the next two years, all elements outlined in this research will be coordinated with the current ACT Prep classes while introducing online discussion boards. In the third year, a collaboration will begin with the elementary schools in my school zone to identify test preparation methods that students will need throughout their educational careers and introduce them to the methods during the students' early years.

This research has provided insight into methods to affect change within Tinlake High School. By increasing the ACT scores of Black students, the opportunity for many families to benefit also increases. Also, increasing the scores gives the students options in life. If a student manages to score a 22 on the ACT, that student can attend junior college in Mississippi free of cost. Students who manage to score in the upper percentile of the ACT are afforded scholarships that cover most, if not all, of the expenses related to four-year universities. Students who score at least a 17 subscore in the four content areas are provided an option to substitute that score for a failed SATP or state test. In each of these examples, students have the opportunity to graduate high school and pursue higher educational opportunities. When we consider that this student population is more likely to be affected by society than others, it becomes imperative to continue this research. While the study focused on improving the Black students of Tinlake High School's ACT scores, the goal and the means of accomplishment can be applied to any student group. Through this research, the intent was to provide a blueprint that guides other educators to investigate the phenomena as it relates to their respective school environments while serving as my first contribution to literature in this regard.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY PROTOCOL

ACT Student Survey Protocol

Research Topic: Reducing the disparities in ACT results between Black and White students

Research Questions:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Conceptual frameworks: *academic preparation, student achievement, standardized test preparation, standardized test result disparities*

Statement of Consent:

This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Marcus Stewart from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the disparities in ACT results relative to ethnicity. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:

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Any question can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ryan Niemeyer, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:

srniemey@olemiss.edu; (662) 915-7154 (office)

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences at Tinline High School. The purpose of this survey is to capture your perspectives regarding academic and test preparation, student achievement, social and cultural components of Tinline High School and the surrounding community. The information you share will be used to help the school administration be more effective in creating and implementing programs specifically designed for the benefit of all students. You are going to be asked a series of questions which relate to your experiences as an African American student in the Tinline Zone schools. Rest assured, your personal information, including your name, will not be included in any part of the report or the findings. Therefore, I encourage you to be comfortable sharing your exact thoughts, opinions, or concerns as I am interested in your uncensored responses. Be direct and speak honestly, regardless of how strongly you feel. I will be recording your responses to precisely capture your answers in detail. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can stop the interview. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

ACT Survey 2020

As a part of an effort to provide a quality ACT Prep experience, we would like to gather some information in relation to your ACT experiences. Please take a moment to fill out this survey to provide information to assist in future planning and test preparation opportunities.

* Required

1. Email address *

2. What race or ethnicity do you identify? *

Mark only one oval.

- African American/Black
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Latino
- White
- Other
- Prefer not to respond

3. How many times have you taken the ACT? *

4. What is your level of confidence and preparation for each section of the ACT? (Rate each section) *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 (Lowest Confidence)	2	3	4 (Highest Confidence)
English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Math	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Science	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. How effective have the following actions been in helping you to prepare for the ACT *

Mark only one oval per row.

	1 (Least Effective)	2	3	4 (Most Effective)
ACT BootCamps. Bootcamps that are provided by the school district or PTO to help students prepare for the ACT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ACT Tutorial Sessions. Teachers provide ACT test prep during Zero Block to help with specific skills needed to do well on the ACT.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online Discussion Board. An online discussion board where a facilitator posts ACT questions for students to respond. Facilitators will interact with and provide feedback to students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Exposure to ACT practice questions in each class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Do you work with a tutor to prepare for the ACT? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

7. Do you have resources to help you prepare for the ACT at home? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

8. Do your teachers provide ACT type questions as bellringers, exit tickets, or for homework? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 I'm not sure

9. Do your teachers provide strategies and tips to help you with the ACT? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No
 I'm not sure

10. How many hours a week do you work on ACT preparation? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 1 hour
 1-2 hours
 3-5 hours
 More than 5 hours
 I do not prepare for the ACT.

11. What impact has the COVID pandemic had on your preparation for the ACT? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
No impact	<input type="radio"/>	Significant impact				

12. How has the COVID pandemic affected on your confidence in you abilities to do well on the ACT? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
No impact	<input type="radio"/>	Significant impact				

13. How has COVID impacted your test preparation? (If no impact, mark N/A) *

14. In light of the impact of the COVID pandemic, what can the school do to make ACT preparation more effective in meeting your needs? Be specific in your response. (Type N/A if not applicable) *

15. What can the school do to make ACT Prep more effective in meeting your needs? Be specific in your response. (Type N/A if not applicable) *

16. Please provide specific concerns you have regarding the ACT. (Optional)

17. Please feel free to provide any questions, concerns, or other feedback. (Optional)

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Google Forms

APPENDIX B: ACT PREP CLASS STUDENT SURVEY PROTOCOL

ACT Prep Class Student Survey Protocol (*Beginning of the year survey*)

Research Topic: Reducing the disparities in ACT results between Black and White students

Research Questions:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Conceptual frameworks: *academic preparation, student achievement, standardized test preparation, standardized test result disparities*

Statement of Consent:

This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Marcus Stewart from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the disparities in ACT results relative to ethnicity. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:

*mar102@rcsd.ms
mstewar2@go.olemiss.edu*

Any question can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ryan Niemeyer, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:

srniemey@olemiss.edu; (662) 915-7154 (office)

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences at Tinline High School. The purpose of this survey is to capture your perspectives regarding academic and test preparation, student achievement, social and cultural components of Tinline High School and the surrounding community. The information you share will be used to help the school administration be more effective in creating and implementing programs specifically designed for the benefit of all students. You are going to be asked a series of questions which relate to your experiences as an African American student in the Tinline Zone schools. Rest assured, your personal information, including your name, will not be included in any part of the report or the findings. Therefore, I encourage you to be comfortable sharing your exact thoughts, opinions, or concerns as I am interested in your uncensored responses. Be direct and speak honestly, regardless of how strongly you feel. I will be recording your responses to precisely capture your answers in detail. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can stop the interview. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

SURVEY STRUCTURE (Actual survey will be a Google Form)

What race of ethnicity do you identify?

- African American/Black Asian/Pacific Islander
 Hispanic/Latino White
 Other Prefer not to respond

How many times have you taken the ACT?

- I have not taken the ACT 1-2 times
 3-4 times 5 or more

What is your level of confidence for each section of the ACT? (Rate each section)

- | | | | | |
|---------|----------------------|---|---|-----------------------|
| English | 1(Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4(Highest Confidence) |
| Math | 1(Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4(Highest Confidence) |
| Reading | 1(Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4(Highest Confidence) |
| Science | 1(Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4(Highest Confidence) |

Do you work with a tutor to prepare for the ACT?

- Yes No

Have your previous teachers provided ACT type questions as bell ringers, exit tickets, or for homework?

- Yes No I'm not sure

Have your previous teachers provided strategies and tips to help you with the ACT?

- Yes No I'm not sure

Do you have resources to help you prepare for the ACT at home?

- Yes No

How many hours a week do you work on ACT preparation?

- Less than 1 hour 1-2 hours
 3-5 hours More than 5 hours
 I do not prepare for the ACT

In addition to the school provided ACT for Sophomores and Juniors, are you signed (or signing) up for any of the following ACT test dates?

- September 12, 2020 October 24, 2020 December 12, 2020
 February 6, 2021 April 17, 2021 April 17, 2021
 June 12, 2021

Optional. Use this space to provide any feedback (lingering questions, concerns, suggestions) you may have about the ACT.

APPENDIX C: ACT PREP CLASS STUDENT SURVEY PROTOCOL

ACT Prep Class Student Survey Protocol (*End of the year survey*)

Research Topic: Reducing the disparities in ACT results between Black and White students

Research Questions:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Conceptual frameworks: *academic preparation, student achievement, standardized test preparation, standardized test result disparities*

Statement of Consent:

This survey is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Marcus Stewart from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the disparities in ACT results relative to ethnicity. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:

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Any question can also be directed to the Dissertation Chair, Dr. Ryan Niemeyer, by email or by phone at The University of Mississippi:

srniemey@olemiss.edu; (662) 915-7154 (office)

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences at Tinlake High School. The purpose of this survey is to capture your perspectives regarding academic and test preparation, student achievement, social and cultural components of Tinlake High School and the surrounding community. The information you share will be used to help the school administration be more effective in creating and implementing programs specifically designed for the benefit of all students. You are going to be asked a series of questions which relate to your experiences as an African American student in the Tinlake Zone schools. Rest assured, your personal information, including your name, will not be included in any part of the report or the findings. Therefore, I encourage you to be comfortable sharing your exact thoughts, opinions, or concerns as I am interested in your uncensored responses. Be direct and speak honestly, regardless of how strongly you feel. I will be recording your responses to precisely capture your answers in detail. However, if you feel uncomfortable at any time, we can stop the interview. Are you willing to proceed with this interview?

SURVEY STRUCTURE (Actual survey will be a Google Form)

What race of ethnicity do you identify?

- African American/Black Asian/Pacific Islander
 Hispanic/Latino White
 Other Prefer not to respond

What was your grade level for the 2019-20 school year?

- Freshman Sophomore
 Junior Senior

What is your level of confidence for each section of the ACT? (Rate each section)

- | | | | | |
|---------|-----------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| English | 1 (Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4 (Highest Confidence) |
| Math | 1 (Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4 (Highest Confidence) |
| Reading | 1 (Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4 (Highest Confidence) |
| Science | 1 (Lowest Confidence) | 2 | 3 | 4 (Highest Confidence) |

Do you work with a tutor to prepare for the ACT?

- Yes No

Do your teachers provide ACT type questions as bell ringers, exit tickets, or for homework?

- Yes No I'm not sure

Do your teachers provide strategies and tips to help you with the ACT?

- Yes No I'm not sure

Do you have resources to help you prepare for the ACT at home?

- Yes No

How many hours a week do you prepare for the ACT?

- Less than 1 hour 1-2 hours
 3-5 hours More than 5 hours
 I do not prepare for the ACT

How many times did you take the ACT this year?

- 1-2 times 3-5 times
 More than 5 times I did not take the ACT

In addition to the school provided ACT for Sophomores and Juniors, are you signed (or signing) up for any of the following ACT test dates?

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> September 12, 2020 | <input type="radio"/> October 24, 2020 | <input type="radio"/> December 12, 2020 |
| <input type="radio"/> February 6, 2021 | <input type="radio"/> April 17, 2021 | <input type="radio"/> April 17, 2021 |
| <input type="radio"/> June 12, 2021 | | |

How effective have the following actions been in helping you prepare for the ACT?

1 (Least Effective) 2 3 4 (Most Effective)

1. ACT Bootcamps. Bootcamps that are provided by the school district or PTO to help students prepare for the ACT.
2. ACT Tutorial sessions. Teachers provide ACT test prep during Zero Block to help with specific skills needed to do well on the ACT.
3. Exposure to ACT practice questions and resources in each class during the school year.
4. ACT Prep classes. Classes offered as part of the school's curriculum.

What if anything can be done to increase the effectiveness of each of the following? Provide details.

ACT Bootcamps

ACT Tutorial Sessions

Exposure to ACT resources

ACT Prep Classes

What can the school do to make ACT Prep more effective in meeting your needs? Be specific in your response.

Please provide specific concerns you have regarding the ACT. (Optional)

Please feel free to provide any questions, concerns, or other feedback. (Optional)

APPENDIX D: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Student Interview Protocol

Research Topic: Reducing the disparities in ACT results between Black and White students

Research Questions:

1. Did the implementation of the *WeACT* program result in an increase in progress towards the goal of a reduced achievement gap?
2. What components of the *WeACT* program did the participants find effective?
3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
4. Did Black students experience a change in their attitude and test-taking confidence in regards to the ACT during the *WeACT* program?

Conceptual frameworks: *academic preparation, student achievement, standardized test preparation, standardized test result disparities*

Statement of Consent:

This interview is part of an applied research study to fulfill partial requirements for a Doctor of Education degree for Marcus Stewart from The University of Mississippi. The study is analyzing the disparities in ACT results relative to ethnicity. Any questions regarding the project and its findings can be emailed to:

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Icebreakers

1. How is the school year going for you so far?
2. Please tell me what you like most about this school.

School Culture

3. How long have you attended Tinlake High School?
4. How would you describe Tinlake High School?
5. Talk to me about being an African American student in the Tinlake Zone schools.
6. Are you involved in any extracurricular groups? *(if yes go to question 7, if no go to question 8)*
7. Talk to me about balancing extracurricular activities and school work.
8. As an African American student, how would you describe your treatment at Tinlake High School?
9. Overall, how are different student groups treated at Tinlake High School?
10. Talk about the interactions of different groups here at Tinlake High School.
11. What does success look like for various ethnic student groups of Tinlake High School?

Academic Preparation

12. How would you describe the classes you have taken throughout the years?
13. How have your classes prepared you for success?
14. How have those classes failed to prepare you?
15. Tell me about your life plans after graduation.
16. What are your parents' expectations for you after school?

ACT Preparation

17. What courses have you taken that you feel have specifically helped you on the ACT?
 - a. Why did you choose to take those courses?
 - b. How did you *(are you)* perform*(ing)* in those courses?
 - c. What do you think of the quality of the courses?
18. Discuss the school's ACT Bootcamps.
 - a. Have the ACT Bootcamps been beneficial to your preparation? If so, how?
 - b. What, if anything, could be adjusted to make ACT Bootcamps beneficial to your preparation?
19. How do you prepare for the ACT outside of the school?
20. Do you think the ACT is a fair test for all students?
21. Why was it hard for you? Describe the hardest part of the test.
22. Why was it easy for you? Describe the easiest part of the test.
23. What are your perceptions of the ACT from the perspective of a Black student?
24. What are your thoughts on the 30+ ACT club?
25. What else can you think of that made an impact on your ACT score *(both positively and negatively)*?

Closing Questions

26. Describe the community in which you live.
27. What motivates you towards your life goals?
28. Is there anything else you think I should know that I didn't ask?

APPENDIX E: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Student Focus Group Protocol

Research Topic: Reducing the disparities in ACT results between Black and White students

Research Questions:

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3. How can the elements of the *WeACT* program be improved to make the program more successful?
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Conceptual frameworks: *academic preparation, student achievement, standardized test preparation, standardized test result disparities*

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mstewar2@go.olemiss.edu*

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1. How, if applicable, did the different elements of the *WeACT* program change your ACT preparation habits?
2. What are some areas of growth you have observed since completing the program?
3. How have teachers practices and attitudes changed throughout the year in regards to ACT preparation?
4. How can the process of ACT preparation be improved to meet your needs more effectively?
5. How effective or ineffective are the individual elements in preparing students to take the ACT?
6. Overall, how do you rate the effectiveness of the *WeACT* program as it relates to your success throughout this year on the ACT?

VITA

Marcus L. Stewart
(662) 891-3055
marcus.stewart777@gmail.com

SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE

Richland High School
Richland, MS
Principal

June 2020 – Present

- Lead in the development of the vision, mission, and direction of Richland High School
- Collaborate in the development of the master schedule
- Lead the efforts of developing and maintaining the school's strategic plan
- Attend to the budgeting and expenditures
- Implement and monitor teacher improvement efforts
- Monitor student truancy efforts
- Supervise alternative school student placement
- Chair of the Teacher Support Team (TST)
- Coordinator of Title I
- Manage 504 plans
- Manage crisis and school safety

Brandon High School
Brandon, MS
Assistant Principal

June 2015 – June 2020

- Supervised the Math and World Language Departments
- Managed crisis and school safety
- Coordinated fixed asset efforts
- Technology director
- School textbook manager
- Assisted in course master scheduling
- Athletic game day coordinator

Kosciusko School District
Kosciusko, MS
Principal Intern

July 2014 – May 2015

- Assisted head principals at Kosciusko High School and Kosciusko Middle School in the day-to-day operations of the schools
- Conducted action research for the school district
- Facilitated the TE-21 Reading and Math Academies for student remediation
- Developed an inventory system to track and account for textbooks and fixed assets
- Organized a school data room to monitor student progress
- Supervised athletic activities

Williams-Sullivan Elementary School
Durant, MS
Teacher

August 2006 – July 2014

- Participated in and led ongoing staff professional development and training sessions.
- Employed differentiated interventions, assessment tools, and strategies to increase the quality and effectiveness of instruction.
- Assisted in designing math intervention strategies to address student deficits.
- Participated in the Mississippi Math and Science Partnership Science Training, June 2008.
- Facilitator of Draw the Line Sex Education program designed to develop physical, emotional, and social growth of students.

EDUCATION

The University of Mississippi Specialist: Educational Leadership Oxford, MS	2015
Jackson State University Masters: Elementary Education Jackson, MS	2014
Mississippi Valley State University Bachelors: Political Science Itta Bena, MS	2004

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- Founding sponsor of the Minority Student Ambassadors, 2019
- RCSD Minority Recruitment Committee, 2017-present
- RCSD District Safety Team, 2016-present
- Title One Committee, 2011-2014
- Positive Behavior Intervention and Support planning team, 2011-2014
- School-Community Relations Committee, 2011-2014
- Williams-Sullivan Elementary School Leadership Team, 2008, 2010-2014

HONORS/AWARDS

- Rankin County School District Assistant Administrator of the Year, January 2020
- Rankin County School District Secondary Administrator of the Month, February 2019
- Principal Corps Sixth Cohort, 2014-2015
- Phi Delta Kappa, National Honor Society, 2010
- Williams-Sullivan Elementary Teacher of the Year, 2010
- Williams-Sullivan Elementary Teacher of the Year, 2008

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- Mississippi Association of School Administrators, 2019-present
- ALICE Certified Instructor, June 2018
- National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2015-present
- Mississippi Association of Secondary School Principals, 2015-present
- National Education Association, 2008-present
- Mississippi Association of Educators, 2007-present
- Holmes County Association of Educators, 2007-2015

PRESENTATIONS

- Presenter, 2020 NASSP Conference, National Harbor, MD
Beyond the Cliche of Positive School Culture - Creating a Culture of Family
The conference was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Panelist, *From Principal Corps to Principalship*, Oxford, MS, June 2018

PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- National ESEA Virtual Conference, February 2021
- North Mississippi Education Consortium, *Effective Leadership Virtual Workshop with Todd Whitaker*, October 2020
- MASA Conference, Jackson, MS, October 2020
- MASA Conference, Jackson, MS, October 2019
- NASSP Conference, Boston, MA, July 2019
- MASSP Conference, Biloxi, MS, June 2019
- MASSP Conference, Biloxi, MS, June 2018
- MASSP Conference, Biloxi, MS, June 2017
- MASSP Conference, Biloxi, MS, June 2016