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# BUILDING COLLEGE-GOING SELF-EFFICACY FOR RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

LAURA ANN O'DONNELL

172 Pages

This quantitative study examines the role of an explicit college-going intervention on the self-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy for rural middle school students. While there are a multitude of variables that influence a student's decision to pursue formal education beyond high school, this study focused on college-going self-efficacy, which is one of the constructs included in the Social Cognitive Career Theory. Rural seventh grade students answered fourteen questions from a College-Going Self-Efficacy scale pre-intervention and then completed the same questions post-intervention. The intervention consisted of lessons that addressed common barriers students see as prohibiting them from going to college, including finding ways to pay for college, having enough family support for college, and possessing the academic ability to go to college. Findings from the study showed that the self-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy did increase from the first survey administration to the second. Additionally, findings revealed that students qualifying for free or reduced lunches had a lower college-going self-efficacy score than their peers in the paid lunch group. Gains seen in college-going self-efficacy scores were greater for students in the paid lunch category than those in the free / reduced lunch category. While many factors contributing to students post-secondary plans are based in family experiences, culture, or expectations, this study demonstrated that student levels of college-going self-efficacy can be impacted by a school-based intervention.

**KEYWORDS:** College-going self-efficacy, Social Cognitive Career Theory, Middle school, College-going intervention, Equity literacy

BUILDING COLLEGE-GOING SELF-EFFICACY FOR RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL  
STUDENTS

LAURA ANN O'DONNELL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2020

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BUILDING COLLEGE-GOING SELF-EFFICACY FOR RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL  
STUDENTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I grew up in a household that believed in the power of learning and continually stressed that education could lead to a better life. Neither one of my parents attended college but they were the biggest advocates for higher education. I continually heard that I could do whatever I wanted in life as long as I put in the time, effort, etc. I am forever grateful that my parents instilled these values and beliefs in me. They also ensured we had the opportunities to participate in a multitude of activities that all contributed to my love for learning and for education. My parents did not have a lot of money, but they made sacrifices that allowed myself and my sisters to participate in whatever activities we wanted to pursue. They modeled hard work and sacrifice which has helped me in my adult pursuits, including the completion of this doctoral degree.

I have been blessed in my professional life to be surrounded by amazing educators and human beings. They have pushed me, encouraged me, and guided me through some challenging times in my career and life. Throughout all these challenges, this group supported me and made sure I felt valued for what I bring to the table. Teachers and administrators at Normal West High School, Olympia South Elementary, Evans Junior High School, and Olympia have all contributed in some way to the completion of this degree as they all have influenced my thinking, my behaviors as a leader, and my desire to continue to be an advocate for public education. I would also like to thank Carmen Bergmann, whose Pollyanna outlook on life is often what us realists need to provide a little hope and optimism when our work is difficult and the road ahead feels daunting.

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L.A.O.



## CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
TABLES	vi
FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER I: SETTING UP THE PROBLEM OF STUDY	1
Statement of Purpose	5
Definitions and Technical Terminology	6
Conceptual Frameworks	8
Social Cognitive Career Theory	15
The Convergence of Two Frameworks	18
Problem of Practice	20
Research Questions	20
Study Design	20
Significance of Study	22
Assumptions	22
Limitations	23
Organization of the Study	24
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	25
The Status of Rural Education in the U.S.	25
Rural Barriers: Teacher Credentials/Qualifications and Access to Coursework	30
Local Contextual Data: Educational Aspirations	32
Structural Barriers for Students Experiencing Poverty	34

Strengths-Based Approach	37
Social Cognitive Career Theory and Self-Efficacy	38
College-Going Self-Efficacy and Middle School Students	42
College-Going Self-Efficacy and SCCT	46
Chapter Summary	47
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>49</b>
Statement of the Problem	49
Study Alignment to CPED Guiding Principles	50
Positionality of the Researcher	52
Research Questions	57
Design of the Study	57
Participants	59
Phases of the Study	60
Phase I: Designing the Intervention	60
Phase II: Teacher Recruitment and Preparation	63
Phase III: The Intervention	64
Analysis of the Data	65
Feasibility for Further Study	66
<b>CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS</b>	<b>67</b>
Pre-Intervention College Going Self-Efficacy Analysis	68
Post-Intervention College Going Self-Efficacy Analysis	74
Analysis by College Going Self-Efficacy Themes	81
Summary	84

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS	87
Summary and Discussion of Findings	87
Findings	87
Recommendations for Practice	95
Equity Literacy Work	95
Explicit College-Going Experiences	97
Limitations	99
Recommendations for Future Research	100
Conclusion	102
REFERENCES	105
APPENDIX A: COLLEGE-GOING SELF-EFFICACY SCALE	123
APPENDIX B: INTERVENTION LESSONS	125
APPENDIX C: TEACHER RECRUITMENT EMAIL / SCRIPT	162
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER	163
APPENDIX E: TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRESENTATION	164
APPENDIX F: PARENT PERMISSION FORM	170
APPENDIX G: STUDENT ASSENT	172

## TABLES

Table	Page
1. Student Demographics: Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Survey	68
2. Pre-Intervention Data: College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (N = 125)	70
3. Means and Mean Differences by Lunch Code Status (N = 125)	73
4. Post-Intervention Data: College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (N = 111)	76
5. Means and Mean Differences by Lunch Code Status (N = 111)	79
6. Overall Means and SDs on Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Survey	80
7. Overall Means and SD for F/R and Paid Lunch Students (N = 62)	81
8. Pre-Interventions Mean Scores, Post-Interventions Mean Scores, and Paired t-test Results by Theme (N = 86)	83
9. Pre-Interventions Mean Scores, Post-Interventions Mean Scores, and Paired t-test Results by Theme and Lunch Code Status (N = 86)	84

## FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Illinois PaCE Framework	45

## CHAPTER I: SETTING UP THE PROBLEM OF STUDY

The connection between a strong education and the economic viability of a country, or on a much smaller scale, a family, has been a predominant thought since the inception of higher education in the 1700s. Education has been billed as a way to a better life and the mechanism by which individuals or groups of people better their social status and ultimately, their value in society as a whole. Higher education continues to serve the public good - promoting economic growth, national power and cultural richness (Labaree, 2017). According to the 2019 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) report, while higher education has been a social and political mainstay in our country for almost two centuries, the rates in immediate college enrollment were not measurably different in 2017 than in 2000. There has been an increase in college attendance but high dropout rates have resulted in only modest growth in bachelor's degree attainment (Deming & Figlio, 2016). Not only that, but more importantly, there are certain groups of people that are less represented among those who are obtaining college degrees. Completion rates among college enrollers are lower now than in the 1970s, due in part to low completion rates of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Data from NCES (2019) show that postsecondary graduation rates are highest for Asian and white students, while the graduation rates for Native Americans and Black students are significantly lower. Full-time students obtained bachelor's degrees at the following rates: Asian students 74%, White students 64%, Hispanic students 54%, Black students 40%, and American Indian/Native students 39%.

Historically, college degrees have been a way to secure, or advance, one's place in the stratified layers of society. Initially, colleges were not exclusionary of elite with regard to matters of admission. Most nineteenth century colleges had entrance requirements that were

flexible and tuition charges that were low. What these colleges did contribute to American life was a reasonable and affordable entry into a new, educated life (Thelin, 2004). Government policy makers, throughout history, have tried to frame higher education as a public good, to provide economically productive knowledge and skill that promotes the general welfare of society while consumers (students) were pursuing college enrollment to give them credentials to advance their chances of social mobility (LaBaree, 2017). LaBaree also states that for many, college has become the ‘primary mechanism’ for middle class families to pass on social advantage to their children and for working class families to give their children access to a middle class lifestyle. While institutions of higher education have been a part of the U.S. educational landscape for years, the access and equity issues around higher education have recently been on the forefront of academic discourse due to the vast inequalities of power, wealth, and influence that have continued to plague this country. Muhammad (2015) points out the contradictions that exist in this country with regards to equity:

As American citizens, we tend to live between two polarized concepts: the image that we want to project and the reality where we are most comfortable residing. We love to claim concepts like equality, fairness, and justice as the cornerstone of our core value system, while simultaneously living in a society that is not equal and not fair and just to all. (p. 9)

Educational systems are microcosms of society; therefore, as long as issues of equity plague society in general, students will have varied experiences and opportunities based on race and socioeconomic status. Economists Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis and Melissa Groves (2009) argue that parents’ economic status is the best predictor of their children’s economic status. They go on to claim that schools are institutions that prepare students for the workplace through hierarchical relationships that maintain the current distribution of wealth and power.

President Obama's February 2013 State of the Union address called for the United States to redesign public high schools and partner with colleges and employers so that students are exposed to authentic experiences that lead directly to jobs, careers, or higher education (Compton, 2013). President Obama's address linked the quality of our education system, the opportunities of all students to experience a meaningful and skills based experience, to the economic forecast and viability of the country. He advocated for federal dollars to be available to high school students enrolling in dual credit courses as he saw this as a way to get more young adults ready for and matriculating to higher education. The President's vision was to make two years of community college free for "responsible students" (U.S. Department of Education [US DOEd], 2016). As part of an experiment, the US DOEd announced on May 16, 2016 that students taking college level courses, in high school, could access Federal Pell grants to assist with associated costs. Community college sites were selected through the Department of Education to pilot a program that would result in high school students having access to \$20 million in federal Pell Grants to enroll in dual credit courses free of charge (US DOEd, 2016).

However, even with the post-secondary education agenda being brought to the forefront, college going rates and college completion rates show that college is still undesirable or unattainable for most of our country. Currently, only about 34% of the US adult population has a bachelor's degree (NCES, 2018). There has been, and continues to be, a discrepancy between cities, urban, and rural areas with regards to degree completion/degree holders. Provasnik et al. (2007) report that about 30% of adults in cities and urban areas have post-secondary degrees compared to 19% of rural adults. Minoritized students and those who qualify for free and reduced lunches typically do not perform well in school and are less likely to engage in formal education after high school. According to Kena et al. (2016), less than 10% of children born in



the bottom quartile of household incomes earn a bachelor's degree by the age of 25, compared to over 50% in the top quartile. The same report revealed that between 1965 and 2013, the proportion of 24 year olds that earned a bachelor's degree rose from 6 percent to 9 percent for families in the bottom quartile by income, but the proportion rose from 40 to 77 percent for families in the top quartile. Furthermore, between 1970 and 2013, the proportion of students from the bottom quartile who completed a Bachelor of Arts (BA) went from 22 to 21 percent. However, those from the top quartile nearly doubled, rising from 55 percent to 99 percent (Kena et al., 2016).

The degree completion advantage for the top income group grew from 33 percentage points to 78 percentage points over a 40 year span (Jensen, 2013). While many would say college is not just for the rich, it is apparent that the pathway to post-secondary education is much clearer and more accessible for certain groups of students - especially affluent, white students. Achievement gaps have historically existed for minority students and their White counterparts as well as for students living in low income households (Howard, 2010). Our K-12 public education system is creating these achievement / outcome disparities across racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Clearing the pathway and creating both a desire and the opportunity to attend college and complete a degree or a post-secondary credential is critical. Ensuring that all high school students see college as a viable option is an important part of educators' jobs.

While many of the equity and access conversations in this country center on urban youth and inner-city schools, the reality is there are equity concerns in rural schools that influence their students' academic success as well as their post-secondary plans and educational aspirations. In 2013, 57% of U.S. Public School districts were considered rural so approximately 12.4 million

children attend public school in rural places (Aud et al., 2013). More rural youth are aspiring to obtain a college degree but are less likely to actually persevere until degree completion even though parental expectations mirror those of more urban locales (Provasnik et al., 2007). The literature shows that youth attending low income, rural schools are four times less likely to make adequate progress (Farmer et al., 2006). Additionally, economically marginalized rural youth have the highest dropout rates in the country. While urban youth have high dropout rates, economically marginalized rural youth dropout at more than twice the national average (Provasnik et al., 2007). In general, rural students have graduation rates similar to those found among suburban students but after high school graduation, rural students fall behind their urban and suburban counterparts. In 2011, only 45% of high school graduates from rural schools attended colleges immediately after graduation compared to 49 percent of urban students and 52% of suburban students (Mann, Sponsier, Welch & Wyatt, 2017). With so many American children attending rural schools, we have to keep rural students in the ever-present equity conversations that are occurring across the nation and within our state.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study will investigate the impact that a college-going curriculum, delivered to middle school students, will have on self-reported levels of college going self-efficacy of rural students in a central Illinois district. The factors that influence educational aspirations and college-going for rural students are complex and are rooted in contextual behaviors, conditions, and perceptions. While many of the factors are outside of the control of the school, educating rural students about the benefits of post-secondary education, dispelling perceptions about college access, and exposing students to supports that can assist all students with accessing college are factors that can be influenced by educators and districts. After implementing a

college-going curriculum to 9<sup>th</sup> graders, Martinez, Baker and Young (2017) reported that career and college readiness self-efficacy were enhanced for the participants receiving the classroom guidance curriculum / intervention, especially first generation low income students of color. This study builds on Martinez, Baker and Young's research by utilizing different subjects (middle school students) within a different setting (rural school) while only looking at socioeconomic differences in college going self-efficacy scores as opposed to analyzing data based on race, parent education status and special education eligibility. Additionally, previous research findings have shown enhanced levels of college-going efficacy from classroom guidance efforts by school counselors (Galassi & Akos, 2012; Schellenberg & Grothaus, 2011). Implementing a college-going curriculum and assessing the impact on the college-going self-efficacy of rural Illinois, middle school students, will be the purpose of this study in an attempt to inform future practice in local school districts.

### **Definitions and Technical Terminology**

The following terms as defined below will be referenced throughout this study:

- **College culture:** high school climate that cultivates aspirations and behaviors that are conducive to preparing for, applying to and enrolling in college (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).
- **College going self-efficacy:** construct derived from a combination of perceived ability to complete the tasks needed to arrive at college and the ability to be successful at college (Gibbons & Borders, 2010).
- **Intervention:** formal activities planned for a defined period of time, with a precise goal or desired change in mind (Mintrop, 2016).

- **Self-efficacy:** people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce desired levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives and determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave; affects four major processes - cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection processes (Bandura, 1994).
- **Technical problems:** routine issues that require a solution that exists and can be applied to a problem; mechanical or structural responses are applied to technical problems (Heifetz, 1994).
- **Adaptive work / change:** consists of learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold or to eliminate the gaps between the values of people and present reality. During adaptive work or change, there are internal contradictions that occur within individuals and groups that result in people learning in a new way or seeing things differently (Heifetz, 1994).
- **Social cognitive career theory:** framework to understand how people form interests, make choices, and achieve success in education and careers / jobs; includes cognitive factors (self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals) and how these variables interact with other aspects of an individual or their environment to influence career development/educational aspirations (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 2000).
- **Social cognitive theory:** based on the premise that personal factors and environmental events/variables contribute to behaviors and actions of individuals; self-generated factors (motivation, thoughts, and mindset) influence actions, behaviors, and outcomes (Bandura, 1989b).

- **Working class:** individuals that are skilled blue-collar workers, unskilled or semiskilled blue collar workers, or unemployed individuals that have sporadic employment (Finn, 2009).
- **Rural schools:** schools that are located in rural areas. In this study, the local problem of practice is in an area that would be considered both distant rural (more than 5 miles but less than 25 miles from an urbanized area) with some areas of the district being defined as remote rural (area that is more than 25 miles from an urban area and more than 10 miles from an urban cluster) (NCES, 2006).

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

When looking at the local problem of practice being low educational aspirations for rural students and trying to determine which factors are influencing students' academic success and the decisions about their next steps, there are various models that may be used to explain the factors that impact not only a student's academic achievement, but also the value they put on formal education, and ultimately whether or not they see themselves as college-going material. When analyzing local data, it is apparent that there is an outcome disparity between students experiencing poverty and those from more affluent families. Gorski (2018) posits that our society and schools are laden with class-based bias that negatively impacts students who come from working class families. Equity literacy "is the knowledge and skills educators need to become a threat to the existence of bias and inequity to our spheres of influence" (Gorski, 2018, p. 2). This knowledge refers to developing big understandings around structural barriers and strengthening our abilities to recognize inequities and how those impact school engagement and ultimately achievement. In schools that focus on equity literacy, educators look for bias and determine ways to eliminate barriers and speed bumps for some students. The skills refer to

cultivating our abilities to act for equity, in order to advocate for and prioritize the educational success of students experiencing the most inequity by reshaping policies and practices (Gorski, 2018).

Multiple frameworks and tenets are connected to Gorski's equity literacy framework. Gloria Ladson Billings explains that educators need to make equity conversations the center of all their work. Other shared tenets include the refusal to look at students living in poverty through a deficit lens but instead focus on the "funds of knowledge" concept which was coined by Luis Moll, Cathy Amanti, Deborah Neff, and Norma Gonzalez (1992). The idea is that there is a culturally-developed body of knowledge and skills essential to the functioning and well-being of a group, that all groups have strengths they are bringing to the table and the equity literacy framework incorporates this tenet as well. The "cultural proficiency" phrase as described by Randall Linsdey, Kikanz Nuri Robbins and Raymond Terrell (2009) asks us to recognize and understand our own biases and how they are tied to privilege and social inequalities, which is also embedded in the equity literacy framework.

Gorski's (2018) framework outlines four equity literacy abilities that are foundational to his work. The abilities are as follows:

1. The ability to recognize subtle and not-so-subtle biases and inequities in classroom dynamics, school cultures and policies, and the broader society, as well as how these biases and inequities affect students and their families.
2. The ability to respond to biases and inequities as they pop up in classrooms and schools.
3. The ability to redress biases and inequities in the longer term, so that they do not continue to crop up in classrooms and schools.

4. The ability to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment for all students.

Spartanland is a rural district in Illinois with an enrollment of 1800 students. The district is comprised of eight small communities that feed into three elementary schools, one middle school, and ultimately one high school. In the local context of Spartanland, there have been very few conversations about inequities specifically related to socio-economic diversity. Last year, optional professional development sessions were held and bias was introduced to a small group of staff members as well as issues around confronting bias and classroom implications of bias. There was a strong undercurrent of denial, unawareness, and meritocracy mindset in the room. Gorski (2018) explains that the “recognize ability” requires educators to understand how and why various policies and practices punish or humiliate students experiencing poverty and to reject deficit views that locate the sources of outcome inequalities as existing within the culture and mindset of those experiencing poverty. The response of the Spartanland staff to the initial conversations around bias and inequities provided additional evidence that professional development is greatly needed as educators in this system have not been a part of any discussions regarding the inequities that exist in our system and maybe even in society as a whole.

The “respond ability” that is part of Gorski’s (2018) equity literacy framework includes the ability to respond to biases and inequities immediately. An educator that is equity literate is able to intervene when biases are uncovered in policies, learning materials, or student interactions, in addition to foster conversations with colleagues about bias and equity concerns. Conversations that occur in the notorious teacher lunchroom and in the offices of teachers are often rampant with biases and stereotypes about various student groups. Rarely, if ever, is a colleague overheard correcting or even responding to these statements. The question

becomes whether or not these other educators recognize the bias or if they lack the ability (or will) to respond appropriately.

Gorski's (2018) third ability is the ability to redress bias and inequities for the long-term. Many of the day to day examples of bias and inequity are connected to a larger set of inequitable conditions that need addressed. This ability helps us to shift from personal action to changing institutional culture and structural realities. Those that are equity literate, "... will advocate against inequitable practices and advocate for equitable practices and identify ways to mitigate structural barriers that impeded educational engagement for students experiencing poverty by replacing practices that exacerbate these barriers with practices designed to mitigate them" (Gorski, 2018, p. 22). One example of looking for ways to address such barriers long-term is the community schools approach or model. Dryfoos and Maguire (2002) state that a community school, operating in a public school building, is open to students, families, and community at all times. It is jointly operated through a partnership between the school system and one or more community agencies. A full-service community school may include primary health and mental health services, family resource centers, preschool programs, child care, parent programs, employment services, and afterschool enrichment and mentoring (Dryfoos & Maguire, 2002). The community schools movement is designed to bring all the resources families might need to the school location. Community schools vary in the services and supports offered but often provide access to necessities that students living in poverty may otherwise be denied. This is an example of a model that would mitigate barriers for families experiencing poverty.

The final ability identified in Gorski's (2018) equity literacy framework is the ability to create and sustain a bias-free and equitable learning environment. Institutional change is hard, even when benefits of change can be identified and communicated with stakeholders. Educators



that are equity literate must be willing to withstand the challenges of change and consider the interests of the most marginalized students and families in every aspect of their work in the educational space.

Ogbu (1981) contends that “it is nearly always the case that dominant-group control of minority schooling and dominant-group's definition of minority educational problems and needs lead to conflict and distrust between the minorities and the schools.” The class stratification that exists in society and within public schools results in perceptions about various classes and their lack of interest in formal school and/or lack of interest in a home - school relationship. In reality, the minoritized group, low income in this local context, is not invited or is not able to be at the table when parent groups meet or community boards provide input to the school district. Howley, Howley, Howley, and Howley (2006) cite multiple studies that suggest teachers in schools serving poor students are less likely to view parents of low income students as competent partners in educating their children as compared to parents of middle class students. Being a member of the low income group often results in limited access and opportunity to participate in meaningful ways. Studies conducted over the years have illustrated the ways that middle class teachers' deficit views of their economically marginalized students, impact the expectations they have for their students and limit students' intellectual growth (Eder, 1991; Farkas, Grobe, Sheehan & Shuan, 1990). This disconnect may be one reason low income rural students continue to underperform when compared to non-low income rural students.

The community forces that impact academic achievement include the specific opportunities available to students, cultural beliefs about education, and the value of education, as well as the relational domain and the lack of trusting relationships with any authority figure or institution (Ogbu, 1981). Families living in rural areas and those that are economically

marginalized seem to have mixed feelings about school; since they often did not have positive experiences, it is difficult for them to be positive about school and formal education. Some families see little reason to push their children into higher education as a high school diploma was enough for them and navigating the college-going experience is outside their comfort zone. The educational aspirations of rural youth are impacted by cultural factors which may be why rural adults are less supportive of postsecondary education than are urban or suburban adults (Cobb, McIntire, & Pratt, 1989). Additionally, pursuing a college education and the change in social class or socioeconomic status that may result, can complicate already complex family dynamics that often already exist (Olson, 2014).

The expectations and curricula that our rural, economically marginalized students are exposed to is not challenging enough. The educators in Spartanland, in an attempt to make students feel successful, appear to lower the bar for students as is evident by recent grade analysis showing that 80% of students earn A's or B's in all of their courses. Educators make decisions about students, based on their family income, that limit achievement, putting a ceiling on student growth and ultimately aspirations and post-secondary plans. This is evident through course enrollment data at both the middle and high school level. The percentage of low income students represented in higher level courses (AP, Honors) is significantly less than the overall percentage of low income students attending the school. The 2018-2019 course data showed that 78% of students in AP and dual credit courses were in the paid lunch group while only 22% of those enrolled in these more rigorous, college-bound courses were students that qualified for free or reduced lunches.

Some economically marginalized parents and rural citizens still value manual labor much more than intellectual positions and these thoughts and values are passed on to the children in

our district. For many years and in past generations, being the best mechanic, wood worker, or farmer seems to hold greater value than positions that require a college degree. Hatt (2012) writes about smartness as being a social construct. She recognizes that various cultures and communities define smartness and regard various types of intelligence differently. This speaks to how the Spartanland community values manual labor and ‘hard work’ much more than academic or white collar types of jobs. These ideas are passed along conscientiously or unconsciously to future generations. Hatt’s (2012) research showed that students were taught and learned not just whether they were smart themselves, but how other students’ identities were constructed according to smartness. Our students are getting messages from home and school that influence their beliefs about smartness, ability, school and their future. DeYoung, Howley, and Theobald (1995) support this theory in their work:

When rural people are skeptical of schooling, their skepticism can, we think make a lot of sense. Schooling is a national enterprise carried on with little respect for communities. It can perpetuate formal instruction that undermines more broadly conceived kinds of education. (p. 32)

When the term ‘rural district’ or ‘rural area’ is described, people may equate that to a predominantly white / relatively homogeneous population. Rural and small towns have not historically been as racially or ethnically diverse as the nation. The 2010 census showed that 78% of the population in rural and small towns are white and non-Hispanic as compared to 64% of the nation’s population (Council, 2012). The number of African Americans and Hispanics that are choosing to reside in rural America, is on the rise. Data from the 2010 census shows that 1.5% of rural and small town residents are more than two races, which is consistent with the national level. Small and rural towns in the south eastern region of the United States is home to

a large population of African Americans. Rural Native Americans are abundant in the Midwest plains, the Southwest and Alaska (Council, 2012). While Spartanland has enrolled more non-white students in the last five years than previous, we still have relatively low numbers of racially diverse students. The local data shows 2.6% of students are 2 or more races, 2.5% identify as Hispanic and 0.7% are Black. Given the small sample of 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, that would equate to three students from the two or more races, three Hispanic students and one black student. The small numbers of racially diverse students make it almost impossible to consider the impact race may have on college going self-efficacy scores in Spartanland.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Lent and Brown (1996) introduced the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as a behavioral framework that “...attempts to trace some of the complex connections between persons and their career related contexts, between cognitive and interpersonal factors, and between self-directed and externally imposed influences” (p. 374). This is the most prominent framework in the literature that delineates the key factors and processes by which individuals develop and determine which postsecondary goals they will pursue. SCCT emphasizes the intricate ways that people’s thought processes interact with other variables and their environments. This theory helps to explain the complex interactions that can either support or constrain students’ college-going (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). While the name includes “Career”, the theory was intended to, and continues to be applied to, academic development of individuals. SCCT states that behaviors, environmental factors, and personal attributes (both physical characteristics and cognitive states) all affect one another and influence both academic and career development (Lent et al., 1994). The SCCT framework examines how past experiences impact future behavior, what factors result in past learning outcomes, and how

people regulate their behavior. Unlike previous vocational/career choice theories, this framework is rooted in Bandura's (1994) general social-cognitive theory, and the idea of the person-environment interaction. SCCT views the individual as dynamic and ever-changing, positing that behavior is the cause rather than the result of thoughts and future behavior (Lent et al., 1996). The three central cognitive variables at play in the SCCT framework are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Lent et al., 1994, 2002).

Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 1). This set of self-beliefs are both dynamic and domain specific. Educators see this construct's impact on student behavior regularly. Students with high levels of self-efficacy in math may choose more challenging math courses, may participate more in math, and generally feel more confident and comfortable in math classrooms. Outcome expectations are believed consequences of performing specific behaviors or the imagined results a person attaches to a behavior. Finally, personal goals are defined as what a person seeks to do in pursuit of a specific result (Lent, 2005). Students with high levels of self-efficacy in a particular course will set loftier goals for themselves in that course than others might. Successfully attaining those goals continues to enhance math specific self-efficacy as well as future outcome expectations in math. These variables interact in ways that influence choice, interests, and ultimately performance (McWhirter, Crothers, & Rasheed, 2000).

These three variables can be enhanced or constrained by contextual factors. Positive contextual factors are called supports. Support might include academic success, high quality educational experiences, and adequate financial support. While negative contextual factors are called barriers. Academic difficulties, lack of robust curriculum, and financial issues are

examples of barriers that would influence the cognitive components of this framework. These contextual supports and barriers have been cited as some of the most powerful predictors of academic and career development (Lent et al., 2000; Raque-Bodgan & Lucas, 2016).

These cognitive factors are shaped or fostered at school and at home, some in multiple ways and throughout a student's life. Since levels of self-efficacy are a strong predictor of academic success and college-going, that construct will be the focus of this research.

Mainstream educators have recently been exposed to the construct of self-efficacy through John Hattie's (2008) meta-analysis on factors that influence student achievement. Hattie (2008) analyzed over two hundred factors that influence student achievement and have found teacher self-efficacy and collective teacher efficacy to have a substantial impact on students' learning. Having a group of teachers with a high level of collective efficacy will produce the largest effect size reported in Hattie's study of over 200 measures that influence achievement. Similarly, with regard to academic success and college-going students, self-efficacy expectations have consistently been found to directly affect career and educational intentions and performance.

According to Lent et al. (2002), SCCT is an outgrowth of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1994). Social cognitive theory subscribes to a model of interactive agency whereby individuals make causal contributions to their own motivation and behavior within a system of triadic reciprocal causation. In this model, reciprocal causation, action, cognitive, affective and other personal factors, plus environmental conditions or events, all operate as interacting factors that influence an individual (Bandura, 1989a). Bandura described self-efficacy as essentially the belief that one is able to accomplish that which one endeavors to do. Self-efficacy is domain-specific meaning that a student may have high levels of self-efficacy in his English classroom but his level of self-efficacy drops significantly in his math classroom. After having a negative

(or a perceived negative) experience in a particular type of class, student's self-efficacy around this particular content is altered and may result in students not pursuing those types of courses in the future (Olson, 2014). The construct of academic self-efficacy is a strong predictor of a student's academic success. Students who are confident and can relate to their education are more engaged in meaningful learning. While the teachers at Spartanland are helping to create and foster, within their classroom, a student's sense of self-efficacy in/around their subject matter, through specific lessons centered on goal setting, growth mindset, and an asset based approach to learning, no one is taking ownership of building students' college-going self-efficacy. There is no dedicated time or space for growing a child's college going self-efficacy in our system.

### **The Convergence of Two Frameworks**

The social cognitive career theory of Lent et al. (1994) will be applied to the problem of practice during the study. It is hard to dismiss or ignore the culture of rural America, especially economically marginalized rural America, and the influence that culture, family, and history have on both students' academic achievement but also the value they put on education and their post-secondary plans. The effect of teacher practice, teacher perceptions, and curriculum that is not rigorous cannot be ignored as it contributes to student achievement and ultimately student's self-efficacy (Hattie, 2008; Delphit, 1996). Stratification and roadblocks within the school and societal structure are present for economically marginalized rural students. Rural economically marginalized students are often tracked with limited opportunities for advanced placement or dual credit courses. Data shows that nationwide the number of low income students that are enrolled in these types of courses is drastically lower than for non-low income students (Muhammad, 2015). The number of students that are participating in dual credit courses is on

the rise in Illinois, and nationally, but the literature suggests that White, middle and upper-income, and higher achieving students are overrepresented compared to students of color, low income, and low to middle achieving students (Allen, 2010; Taylor, 2013; Witt, Lichtenberger, Blankenberger, & Franklin, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) reported that among 2013 graduates, among students in the lowest band of socioeconomic status 30% earned credit for college credit bearing coursework as opposed to nearly 70% for students living in households in the highest band of socioeconomic status/category. These discrepancies resulted in the lowest SES students earning an average of 2.8 college credits compared to 4.3 college credits for those in the highest SES category (as defined by NCES). Opportunities and expectations for low income students are acutely different than for affluent suburban students throughout the country.

Gorski's (2018) structural barriers for low income students in combination with Lent et al.'s (1994) SCCT framework, paint a picture of the contextual variables, as well as the school and societal structures, that impact students' decisions, achievement and behavior. The cognitive variables (self -efficacy, outcome expectations, and goal setting) are the constructs that are salient and can be influenced directly by experiences in school, specifically curricula designed to enhance these constructs. While the study with seventh graders in Spartanland will focus on the impact of a college curriculum on students' self-efficacy, it is difficult to remove the cultural, structural and ecological factors that contribute to the creation of community values and students who have a collective identity that often does not align with the collective identity of the masses or those in power.



## **Problem of Practice**

Work has been done with the College and Career Counselor as well as the administration to collect data and begin asking questions about course selection, future planning, and college going mindset. The desire is for students at Spartanland, especially those living in poverty, to know the supports that can aid them in their journey as the district wants students and our community to believe that all of the students can go to college and be successful. Educating our students and the communities about earning potential, the future job market, and supports to assist in the college going process is extremely important, as well as building each student's college-going self-efficacy. The data collection would demonstrate the impact of a college curriculum designed to enhance college-going self-efficacy, delivered to seventh grade middle school students that report perceived barriers for going to college and low levels of college-going self-efficacy. In addition to a student intervention, work within the community with regards to education and involvement may be an outgrowth of the research.

## **Research Questions**

1. How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do scores of college-going self-efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?

## **Study Design**

The study will center around the impact of a college curriculum implemented with rural middle school students. Research shows that career choices and long term plans are often made

prior to high school (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Most students make educational decisions between grades 8 and 10. It is recommended that college intervention programs be focused on middle school students in order to help them make informed decisions about their future. The students have a built-in advisory period each day and that is when the curriculum will be delivered. Successful programs seem to start in middle school, include career counseling, involve parents and peers, and provide students with concrete information about college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Based on the literature, the study will involve all 7th grade students within the Spartanland school district (132 students).

Teachers and the team will be involved in training and curriculum design starting in August. All teachers of 7th graders will be invited to attend and meetings will take place within their contractual day/time. Essential to the study is the creation of the customized curriculum that will be utilized with students. Teachers, counselors, and administrators will be working collaboratively to create a college curriculum with the intent of positively impacting the levels of college-going self-efficacy reported by middle school students.

The study will be quantitative and will include analyzing self-reported college going self-efficacy scores prior to the intervention and post intervention. The focus will be on college-going self-efficacy levels of 7th grade middle school students. All students in 7th grade advisory will participate in the study by both taking the survey (pre and post) as well as participating in the curriculum intervention. The intervention will be delivered over a four week period of time within the advisory class period. Net differences from the pre and post administration will be analyzed to inform the impact on various students. Specific analysis will be done to determine if there is a statistical significant difference in net difference scores for low income and non-low income students.

## **Significance of Study**

The topic of rural education, educational aspirations of rural students, and college-going self-efficacy of rural students is relatively absent in the literature. Rural students consistently matriculate less often and have lower completion degree rates than other groups of students. The problem of low educational aspirations was discussed during the researcher's interview at Spartanland. The staff conducting the interview were adamant that the problem of low educational aspirations was significant and that the district (collective we) should be working to address it. While there are numerous factors and variables that influence students and their post-secondary choices, the construct of self-efficacy is salient and can be affected by curriculum delivered at school, as well as by other factors. Rural economically marginalized students are underrepresented in rigorous courses in high schools across the nation and this contributes to their ideas about possibilities for their future (Haller & Virkler, 1993; Reid, 1989). Finding explicit and embedded ways to improve the college-going self-efficacy of rural middle school students could provide rural districts a method to help create the college-going mindset among their students and ultimately the entire rural community.

The reality is that some post-secondary education is needed for students to make a living. No longer are rural communities completely supported by an agricultural base. The study would begin conversations about the essential elements of the SCCT and will provide other rural organizations a roadmap to deliver a specific college curriculum to enhance levels of college-going self-efficacy with the ultimate results being more rural students matriculating to a college or university after graduating from high school.

## **Assumptions**

Assumptions made in relation to this study are as follows:

1. All seventh grade students have similar school experiences with regard to exposure to college-going curriculum and the construct of self-efficacy. The majority of the students are products of the Spartanland community and have been residents of the district or resided in rural communities for multiple years.
2. The collaborative team of teachers delivering the interventions have all been provided professional development and understand the variables influencing college-going self-efficacy.
3. All seventh grade students will be able to participate in the intervention and no one group will be eliminated as a result of schedules or ability to attend/participate in the general education classroom instruction.
4. Rural bias exists within all team members and some qualitative reflections, including teacher dispositions and suggested next steps will be influenced by bias brought to the table from teacher team (based on personal experiences, rural residency, connections to the school district and students involved in study).

### **Limitations**

There are millions of rural students across the nation. The relatively small sample size that will be included in this research makes generalizations of specific data difficult. Additionally, there was limited time to provide training for the staff to ensure a thorough understanding of the framework and the construct of college-going self-efficacy prior to delivering the intervention. Those teachers that chose to take additional time in preparing for the lessons and delivering the intervention will have a great depth of understanding of the study and the purpose of the intervention which may influence results. Additionally, there are inherent limitations with surveys including the option for students to not address questions (item non-

response). Given that these are adolescents, they may or may not honestly answer the survey questions and/or complete the surveys with high levels of interest or fidelity. Finally, the timeline of the intervention could be extended, yet for data collection purposes of this study, the four week timeline was the constraint.

### **Organization of the Study**

Chapter I provides introductory materials and the overarching problem that drives the research elements behind this study. It presents definitions of technical terminology, the conceptual framework, and the research questions as the overarching framework for the study. A brief overview of the methodology is included, as well as the study's significance, assumptions, and limitations. A review of literature relative to rural students' academic achievement, as well as college-going rates and factors influencing college-going self-efficacy, is presented in Chapter II. The methodology and research design is further explained and developed in Chapter III. Chapter IV focuses on presenting findings from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study. In Chapter V, the researcher presents her conclusions, discusses recommendations specific to local context, and details next steps for students and staff involved in the intervention.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study of the impact a college curriculum on self-reported levels of self-efficacy, specifically college going self-efficacy, for middle school students will help to shape future curricula and interventions in the local context as low educational aspirations are evident amongst our students and rural communities. This review of the literature will begin with an overview of the current state of rural education including equity gaps and barriers that exist for rural students. Historically, the academic achievements of rural youth have not been at the levels of their suburban counterparts. Mean reading National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores show rural students lagging behind suburban peers as evidenced by the 2019 results in which suburban students, on average, scored five points higher than rural students (NCES, 2019). Evidence also upholds that low income students lag behind non-low income peers. The most recent Illinois Assessment of Readiness data shows that statewide 54% of non-low income students meet / exceed reading benchmarks compared to 23% of low income students (Illinois State Board of Education [ISBE], 2019). Similarly, the same report reveals that 47% of non-low income students met the 2019 math benchmark as opposed to 17% of low income students. A thorough examination of the construct of self-efficacy and college going self-efficacy will be presented as well as the impact these constructs have on academic achievement and post-secondary goals/matriculation to college. The literature review will provide an overview of college-going self-efficacy and provide examples of ways others (educators, researchers) have influenced the self-efficacy and college going self-efficacy of rural students.

### **The Status of Rural Education in the U.S.**

In 2013, 57% of U.S. public school districts were considered rural which equates to approximately 12.4 million children who attend public school in rural places (Aud et al., 2013).

More than 20% of public K-12 students are enrolled in rural schools (Brown & Schafft, 2011). We know that more rural youth are aspiring to obtain a college degree but are less likely to actually persevere until degree completion even though parental expectations mirror those of more urban locales (Provasnik et al., 2007). Research has consistently shown that students from rural high schools are less likely than their urban or suburban peers to attend post-secondary institutions, especially four year colleges (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012; Gibbs, Swaim, & Teixeira, 1998).

While research conducted in the '80s and '90s suggested that, when compared with urban students, rural students have much lower educational and career aspirations (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999; Hu, 2003), recent research shows that a large number of rural youth do want to further their education beyond high school (Meece et al., 2013; Howley, 2006). Irvin, Byun, Smiley, and Hutchins (2013) found that the overall proportion of youth attending college was higher for rural youth than for urban youth, even though it remained lower compared to that of suburban students. While the rural - urban gap in college attendance is closing, it is due to a greater proportion of rural high school students attending a two year college (Byun, Irvin, & Meece, 2015). Howley (2006) found that rural children are as likely to aspire to a university or an undergraduate education as are non-rural youth. Nearly two-thirds of rural children in her sample indicated a desire to complete at least an undergraduate education (Howley, 2006). The rural/non-rural gap in educational expectations has been narrowing over time.

Whether an individual pursues post-secondary education depends on several factors including the local labor market, social class, gender, and often the encouragement or discouragement received from both parents and teachers (Sherman & Sage, 2011). While the degree of influence these factors have on student post-secondary decision making varies, these

factors have stayed relatively stagnant over time. Quaglia and Perry (1995) identified five contributing factors to the historically lower educational aspirations of rural youth: (a) high poverty rates in rural areas, (b) the relationship of socioeconomic status and educational outcomes, (c) the educational level of parents, (d) less access to knowledge of occupations, and (e) lower educational aspirations because of employment opportunities in the youth's local community.

The literature reveals that youth attending low income rural schools are four times less likely to make adequate progress (Farmer et al., 2006). Additionally, economically marginalized rural youth have the highest dropout rates in the country. While urban youth have high dropout rates, economically marginalized rural youth dropout at more than twice the national average (Provasnik et al., 2007). Studies from the '80s and '90s showed rural students had relatively lower levels of family SES, lower family income, and higher poverty rates than non-rural students (Byun, Irvin & Meece, 2015). The prevailing thought was that the economic disadvantages limited rural students' educational expectations as well as the support they were able to receive (Usher, Ford, Li, & Weidner, 2019). However, Roscigno, Tomaskovic, and Crowley (2006) found that in the '90s and into 2000, the average income of students from inner cities was even lower than that of rural students. Another study showed that urban and rural children experienced similar rates of poverty in 2006 (Churilla, 2008). Low socioeconomic status among rural students is a primary factor depressing postsecondary attainment (Irvin, Byun, Meece, Farmer, & Hutchins, 2012).

Historically, rural economies were built on service careers or agriculture so there were jobs available that did not require post-secondary education. However, rural America has clearly experienced drastic changes over the past century (Johnson, 2006). Out migration of residents to



urban areas followed the loss of agricultural and service oriented jobs (Sherman & Sage, 2011). For many years, there was something to do, a career to be had, with simply a high school diploma, and so attending college or earning a degree wasn't an economic necessity for those residing in rural communities. Kusmin and Cromartie (2005) explain that "previous occupations for rural youth in service, labor, extraction, and agricultural sectors, which have been the mainstay of rural communities for generations, are disappearing."

Geographic isolation of communities and families, combined with social and cultural norms, may also contribute to the low educational aspirations of rural youth (Irvin et al., 2012). It is difficult for some rural youth to access post-secondary education opportunities without moving away from family and many students are unwilling to do that. It is impossible to ignore the social and contextual factors associated with the trends that have been seen with rural students' post-secondary aspirations. For many rural youth, pursuing a college education is associated with leaving their hometowns (Carr & Kefalas, 2009). Some researchers that are looking at rural youth and their educational aspirations have recognized there are unique social interactive processes taking place within rural families and communities. The educational aspirations of these young adults may result from strong emotional attachments to their families and rural communities (Howley, 2006; Kirkpatrick-Johnson, Elder & Stern, 2005). Some rural youth may have higher aspirations /desires to stay at home and to maintain their connection to their family, community and lifestyle than for pursuing more individualistic goals such as obtaining a college degree (Howley, 2006).

The literature does show that parent education levels are lower for rural parents than non-rural parents (Byun et al., 2015; Roscigno et al., 2006). Students who perceive that their parents expect them to attend college and who have more conversations about college have significantly

higher educational aspirations (Byun et al., 2012). Economically marginalized rural youth are often not exposed to a college campus or even to people with a college degree (other than teachers and doctors). Many rural areas are not in close proximity to institutions of higher education, increasing the logistic, fiscal, and psychic opportunity costs for rural students (Schafft, 2016). It is difficult for some of our students to see college in their future as they have never been on a college campus or been exposed to the benefits of post-secondary education, nor do they have parents that can speak to the experience and the benefits, or help them navigate the college preparation process. Rural – non rural differences in family income and parental education explained all of the rural-non rural differences in both college enrollment and degree attainment, highlighting the importance of family SES in post-secondary aspirations and goals (Byun et al., 2012). Low socioeconomic status among rural students is a primary factor depressing postsecondary attainment (Irvin et al., 2012).

In rural areas, there can be a lack of institutional support that can hinder rural youths' aspirations as well. The factors influencing achievement can be individual, peer, family or school level influences. The lack of social services in rural areas, restricted social / peer networks, increased family conflict and poverty, as well as less qualified teachers and narrow curricula, are all risk factors for rural students' academic achievement (Hoffman, Anderson-Butcher, Fuller, & Bates, 2017). Compared to students from metropolitan areas, rural students, especially those from low-income communities, have limited access to career counseling, college preparatory coursework, career academies, etc. (Provasnik et al., 2007). Additionally, fewer economic resources make it extremely difficult to attract and retain highly educated and skilled teachers which limits the quality of education rural youth are receiving (Voke, 2003).

Some rural students don't go to college or see themselves as college material as they often perceive barriers to post-secondary education. Barriers can influence students' thinking about viable options after high school which ultimately will influence their actions and choices. For rural families living in poverty, the obstacles are even more pronounced. Identifying perceived barriers is especially important among youth that may encounter difficulties in reaching their postsecondary goals (Brown & Lent, 1996). Research shows that rural youth experience challenges in reaching their postsecondary goals (Irvin et al., 2012). "Many prospective college students are poorly informed about both the costs and the economic benefits of an investment in higher education" (Perna, 2006, p. 109) because of inadequate information, particularly for underrepresented groups, including rural students. Given the low educational attainment of many rural parents, students are not familiar with the college planning process and are ill equipped to pose questions and navigate the college search and selection process (Schultz, 2004). The advisement approach in rural schools should be comprehensive with regards to financial information and the benefits of college, as well as provide specific tools and supports to aid all students in dispelling perceptions around college-going barriers.

Recommendations from researchers include finding supports and interventions that assist with dispelling the perceived barriers that many rural (and low income) students have regarding their ability to go to college and successfully earn a degree. Hoffman et al. (2017) state that to improve outcomes for rural youth, schools must understand the overall school experience so that school wide interventions can be put into place to combat identified risks.

### **Rural Barriers: Teacher Credentials/Qualifications and Access to Coursework**

Dual Credit and Advanced Placement courses or opportunities enhance the rigor within a high school and can provide students a boost in their confidence or self-efficacy around college

coursework and may influence college-going plans. Students who score well on AP exams typically believe they are more likely to be accepted into college (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Bong (1999) found a wide gap in the self-efficacy perceptions between students in AP classes and students in regular classes. Students that enroll in AP/Dual credit courses show enhanced ACT scores and perform at higher academic levels than students that do not take these rigorous courses (Colgren, 2014). However, in many rural areas, a barrier is the lack of robust coursework due to lack of credentialed teachers. Zamani-Gallaher, North, and Lang's 2015 exploratory study revealed that districts expressed the view that state quality standards on teacher credentials, "...may actually constrain the quality and vitality of dual credit programs...especially underserved student participation" (p. 13). Given that dual credit courses will result in college credit, all dual credit instructors must have a master's degree in content or a master's degree with 18 graduate hours in content. The qualifications for Career Technical Education (CTE) teachers include hours worked within the field. CTE teachers are those that teach agriculture, business, family and consumer science, or technology courses. The teacher qualification requirements were put in place as a quality assurance measure. While the requirement helps to ensure quality of coursework and rigor, it has created challenges for high schools (specifically rural high schools) throughout Illinois that are interested in establishing or expanding the dual credit courses offered to students. As stressed by Zamani-Gallaher, North, and Lang (2015), "It is hard to find teachers with master's degrees in small, rural areas."

Dual enrollment could greatly benefit students in rural areas, which report lower college-going and post-secondary attainment rates than other locations. Unfortunately, rural districts have greater difficulty both in recruiting and retaining teachers with the necessary credentials to teach dual credit courses (Zinth, 2014). Some states have tried to assist in the teacher

credentialing issue by reallocating professional development funds (Minnesota), establishing loan repayment programs to help high school teachers complete the coursework needed (Wyoming), and creating scholarships specifically for high school teachers to enroll in graduate coursework necessary for credentialing (Indiana) (Zinth, 2014). Regardless, ensuring rural students have access to dual credit coursework is a critical equity piece that not only impacts the rigor of the academics studied in high school but also could influence their college plans and self-efficacy.

### **Local Contextual Data: Educational Aspirations**

Recently, the Spartanland students that had demonstrated college readiness (by meeting the College Board defined benchmarks on the PSAT or SAT) were invited to (and encouraged to) sign up for Dual Credit or Advanced Placement courses for next school year. While Spartanland has a large number of AP and Dual Credit offerings, for a rural high school with an enrollment of 500, these courses aren't always filled or even requested by students. The students and their parents were all provided with letters noting which classes they qualified for and which would be beneficial for them to take. Given that it is known that rigorous high school coursework is the number one predictor of college success, one might assume all the students that qualified would in fact select at least one of these rigorous courses. However, the results didn't show that all Spartanland students see value in these courses. While 140 students did qualify for at least one AP or Dual Credit course, only 104 or 75 % of the students actually requested a rigorous course. In fact, counselors report that final course selection results typically end up less than this since when conflicts are resolved and students have to make hard decisions about which courses to stay in, AP and Dual Credit often are discarded first in lieu of other options that are easier or more aligned to student interest.

Additional indirect evidence of low educational aspirations is the fact that many students, in middle and high school, don't take advantage of built-in opportunities to improve their grades, scores, GPA, etc. It is unclear as to whether they see no connection to future learning or educational goals, if they are apathetic with regards to grades, or if there are other issues interfering with their desire, ability, or interest in enhancing their learning and ultimately improving their scores/grades. In the last few years the district has implemented a skills-based approach (or standards-based approach) to reporting progress. The shift not only involved changing the type of reporting (performance levels versus letter grades), but the focus also shifted more toward learning than earning (grades). There is recognition that learning occurs at different rates and in various ways for students. As a result of these philosophical shifts in grading and reporting, students have the opportunity to reassess after an initial assessment if they have continued to expend effort in learning, have responded to feedback from the teacher, etc. However, this is only if a student initiates a re-assessment. For the extremely high achieving students, reassessment occurs almost all the time (unless they earned a four in their first attempt). However, the masses do not respond in this way and often appear to "settle" for whatever grade they initially earned. Baseline data showed that middle school students were only reassessing 10% of the time they had the opportunity to reassess (Lee, 2019). When students were asked to reflect on the number of reassessments that had been completed within a semester, the following results were obtained: 9% had zero reassessments, 53% reported reassessing between 1 - 3 times, 21% reported reassessing 4 - 6 times, 6% reported reassessing 7 - 9 times, and 5.9% reported reassessing 10 or more times (Lee, 2019).

## **Structural Barriers for Students Experiencing Poverty**

It is hard to deny that there are opportunities not afforded to various students - specifically students that are part of a low income or working class family. Gorski (2018) writes about gaps for students that are living in poverty or are part of the working class and cites structural reasons that continually provide societal barriers to students that are from low income families. Barriers such as access to healthcare and affordable housing in addition to school-based barriers are real for many families and ultimately influence a child's sense of self. The structural ideology is the antithesis of the deficit mindset views that focus the locus of control completely within the child/ family. Educators, and even policy makers, are often on one end of the continuum and will readily acknowledge that people experiencing poverty are to blame or are responsible for their own economic conditions (Gorski, 2018). Predominantly, educators believe this and would be categorized as part of the deficit view camp (Prins & Schafft, 2009). For educators, possessing a deficit mindset around a student or a group of students, results in additional conscious or unconscious actions that are limiting to students and create additional barriers. Gorski (2018) expands on this topic:

We must build institutional change efforts first around ideological shifts. If we believe people experiencing poverty are inherently deficient, no amount of instructional strategies will adequately prepare us to see and respond to the conditions that actually underlie educational outcome disparities. As a teacher, can I believe a student's mindset is deficient, that she is lazy, unmotivated, and disinterested in school, and also build a positive, high expectations relationship with her? (p. 61).

Oakes (1985) also says that the learning opportunities teachers are able or willing to create in classrooms are affected in some ways by their perceptions of the characteristics of the groups of students they encounter or have on their roster.

Those on the other end of the continuum would fall into the structural ideology camp as they define differences in educational outcomes as interrelated with the inequities with which people experiencing poverty contend and navigate (Gorski, 2018). Students experiencing poverty are often denied opportunities that are not even viewed as opportunities to other groups, such as availability of rigorous college bound coursework, access to the best teachers, and participation in co-curricular programs (Dudley-Marling, 2015). In schools, educators often talk about addressing the issues they can control and often encourage teachers to avoid focusing on the external factors that might contribute to the performance or academic success of a particular student. While engaging teachers in a conversation about all the societal factors that limit or provide roadblocks for students would be too much (outside many teachers' sphere of influence), it would be appropriate to begin having conversations about how to mitigate those barriers for students experiencing poverty. As Gorski (2018) contends, "We can mitigate even the barriers we cannot eliminate" (p. 64).

The system of public education in this country seems to cultivate educational opportunity gaps for youth experiencing poverty, resulting in gaps and barriers that do not exist for youth from more affluent families (Gorski, 2018). These opportunity gaps help to explain the disparities that are seen in student achievement when comparing students that qualify for free or reduced lunches and those that are paid status. The opportunity gap manifests itself in different ways along the educational continuum starting with access to quality preschool experiences. Studies show that 72% of preschool-age children living in homes with family



income at least twice the federal poverty line attend preschool, compared with only 46% of children whose family income falls below the poverty line (Child Trends, 2014). This is an example of an opportunity gap that will result in kids starting out even more disadvantaged than peers due to no fault of their own. The cost of high quality preschool as well as transportation barriers are reasons why children from working class families may not be afforded this opportunity (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

Funding of schools in an equitable manner has been on the forefront of public education conversations for years. Given so many states have funding formulas that are tied to local property taxes, it is not surprising that there are vast inequities in school funding for students experiencing poverty and those that are not. Ushomirsky and Williams (2015) found that, on average, districts in the U.S. with the highest poverty rates receive \$1200 less in funding per student than districts with the lowest poverty rates. The funding inequities are manifested in multiple ways including the quality of curricular resources schools have access to, as well as the state of the facility in which students are being educated. Students experiencing poverty have less access to books, up to date curricular materials, and high quality teachers, or even enough teachers to adequately staff a building (Gorski, 2018). DeLuca et al. (2016) also reported that students in high poverty schools have less access (or perhaps no access) to college counseling. The research shows that students experiencing poverty attend college at lower rates than wealthier students and many juxtapose that is a result of barriers that exist in schools including access to college counseling conversations (Gorski, 2018).

In the deficit view held by so many, students living in poverty are seen as needing to be “fixed” given the focus on outcome disparities. Acknowledging that there are a multitude of opportunities that are denied to students experiencing poverty caused by current practices is the

first step in understanding that structures (within society and within schools) result in opportunity gaps for those experiencing poverty.

### **Strengths-Based Approach**

Rarely do educators value (or even see) the gifts or strengths students living in poverty are bringing with them to classrooms, schools, or contributing to society. When talking about rural families, schools and even communities, there is often a negative connotation associated with “rural”. Some may associate this term with uneducated students and families, as well as depressed economic conditions. However, the strong familial connections and sense of community that exist in rural areas are examples of the strengths that are prominent within rural areas. Gonzalez et al. (2005) share the concept of funds of knowledge which is based on the simple premise that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (p. ix). A strengths-based approach assumes parents can be effective advocates, take full advantage of support to increase school engagement, and be productive partners in their children’s education (Blitz, Kida, Gresham, & Bronstein, 2013). Research from Blitz et al. (2013) contends, “Supporting families’ strengths helps build the parents’ sense of competence and provides opportunities to demonstrate their skills and motivation to school personnel” (p. 2).

During a study conducted by Moll et al. (1992), the researchers analyzed multiple low income neighborhoods followed by interviews of adults and children from those neighborhoods. One strength cited in the study was that low income rural families have a firm sense of community, care greatly for their children, and have high hopes or expectations for their children’s futures. The knowledge held by families living in poverty may be different than that of affluent families, but it has developed over time based on the needs and characteristics of

community. The term “funds of knowledge” refers to historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge (and skills) essential for household or individual functioning (Moll et al., 1992; Tapia, 1991). Educators often categorize low income families as not having the necessary resources or social capital to be successful. In reality, low income families have diverse knowledge and are typically part of social networks that schools should be utilizing to make relevant classroom connections for students. Theobald & Mills (1995) suggest that focusing on the funds of knowledge students possess inherently diminishes the deficit views that educators have long had about students living in poverty. Leveraging the funds of knowledge students bring with them into the classroom should expand opportunities for students and result in increased feelings of belonging as well as self-efficacy.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory & Self-Efficacy**

Lent et al. (1994) introduced social cognitive career theory (SCCT) as a behavioral framework that “...attempts to trace some of the complex connections between persons and their career related contexts, between cognitive and interpersonal factors, and between self-directed and externally imposed influences...” (p. 374). This is the most prominent framework in the literature that delineates the key factors and processes by which individuals develop and determine which postsecondary goals they will pursue. SCCT was developed to explain “processes through which academic and career interests develop, interests in concert with other variables, promote career relevant choices and people attain varying levels of performance and persistence in their educational and career pursuits” (Brown & Lent, 1996, p. 311).

This theory provides an explanation of the complex interactions that can either support or constrain students’ college going (Lent et al., 1994). While its name includes “career”, the theory was intended to and continues to be applied to academic development of individuals. SCCT

states that behaviors, environmental factors, and personal attributes (both physical characteristics and cognitive states) all affect one another and influence both academic and career development (Lent et al., 1994). The three central cognitive variables at play in the SCCT framework are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals (Lent et al., 1994, 2002). Self-efficacy beliefs are seen as being the most central and impactful mechanism of personal agency (Bandura, 1989a). Given the empirical evidence linking self-efficacy to academic achievement, and ultimately motivation and persistence, this study will focus on that construct as it relates to academic aspirations, specifically college going.

Bandura & Walters (1977) have been writing about the self-efficacy construct and the connection to behavior for decades. In 1983, it was introduced into the career and academic achievement literature (Betz & Hackett, 1983). In the social cognitive view, self-efficacy is not a passive trait but rather a set of beliefs that are specific to various domains and that interact with other person, behavior, and contextual factors (Lent et al., 1994). The masses in K-12 education have not been exposed to the construct of self-efficacy until relatively recently. John Hattie's meta-analysis results, first published in 2008, identified self-efficacy as a characteristic that influenced student achievement. More was included about self-efficacy and collective efficacy in Hattie's 2012 book titled, *Visible learning for teachers; Maximizing the impact on learning*. After that release, the conversations in school districts around the country (and the world) started to change due to Hattie's research. Self-efficacy become a term that teachers and administrators started to use and to research. Bandura (1994) defined self-efficacy as, "...people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (pg. 1). This set of self-beliefs are both dynamic and domain specific. Educators see this construct's impact on student behavior regularly. Students with high levels of

self-efficacy in math may choose more challenging math courses, may participate more in math, and generally feel more confident and comfortable in math classrooms. When self-efficacy measures correspond to the outcomes to which they are being compared (math self-efficacy predictive of math performance), self-efficacy's predictive power is strengthened (Klassen & Usher, 2010). Additionally, students' domain specific beliefs have been found to be positively related to their academic self-efficacy, task goal orientation, and achievement (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

The research has extensively shown the effects of self-efficacy on students' academic accomplishments (Bandura, 1977; Eastin & LaRose, 2000; Merritt & Buboltz, 2015). Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991), through research on 28 studies within a 10 year span (1977 - 1988), found a positive relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievements. Self-efficacy has been proven to be an indicator of motivation and perseverance toward reaching a goal. Therefore, the degree of self-efficacy impacts students' goal orientation, "...which translates into effort and academic performance and serves as a predictor for academic attainment..." (Fuentes-Tauber, 2018). The good news for educators is that academic self-efficacy is a salient construct in that it can be influenced and changed based on classroom experiences. As students encounter challenges with which they are successful, or topics that they master, their levels of self-efficacy strengthen (Cantrell et al., 2013; Fong & Krause, 2014). Self-efficacy levels increase when individuals are successful with task completion, but also when a student observes a relatively similar peer achieving a particular task (Bandura, 1977). Additionally, receiving encouragement from others, including classmates and peers, can also strengthen a person's levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy as a characteristic of student motivation may be shaped and improved with certain interventions (Walker, Greene, & Mansell, 2005)

While experiencing success with tasks (academic or otherwise) will influence self-efficacy, the origination of self-efficacy beliefs in general, comes from experiences in life. The initial efficacy experiences are rooted in family interactions. Parents can influence their child's self-efficacy by creating opportunities (in an enriched environment) for children to take risks and accomplish goals which results in accelerated social and cognitive development (Bandura, 1994). This explains why orphans or other neglected infants exposed to little stimulation have stunted growth and delayed development given there are few opportunities for them to interact with an enriched, stimulating environment in which they interact and take cognitive and physical risks. As youth continue to grow and interact with peers, social comparison and peer influence does impact self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1994).

Within an academic setting, students are exposed to the successes of same age peers on a daily basis. The academic achievement of students within a classroom is known by many. Students have an acute understanding of which of their peers excel in academic settings and which of their peers may need more support or guidance to successfully complete tasks. Those students that are competent serve as model of efficacious styles of thinking and behavior (Bandura, 1994). Same age peers provide students a means or a benchmark to compare themselves to which serves to verify one's own levels or beliefs of their self-efficacy. Students often select friends or peers that have similar interests and typically, friends have similar levels of self-efficacy in areas of mutual interest. Economically marginalized or unhealthy peer relationships can adversely impact the self-efficacy of a student. Adults also tend to socialize with those who are similar to themselves which only solidifies their beliefs about self and world. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explain this further:

If you spend your time with people who remind you of yourself – people from a similar race, the same profession, or the same high school department or elementary grade level – it’s likely that over time, you will all come to think the same way and believe the same things, and that these beliefs will become stable and even stale. (p. 103)

Given the daily interactions and experiences that individuals have in classrooms, the school serves as a primary setting for “...the cultivation and social validation of cognitive competencies” (Bandura, 1994, p. 12). Positive, successful experiences with cognitive tasks will benefit a child’s intellectual self-efficacy. Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy are needed to create learning environments and tasks that result in the creation of classrooms and tasks that enhance the self-efficacy of students (Bandura, 1994). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that for teachers to impact students in this manner, they need to be part of a collaborative culture where failure and uncertainty are part of the daily landscape. Schools with collaborative cultures also have a sense of collective responsibility for student achievement and success.

### **College-Going Self-Efficacy and Middle School Students**

There have been multiple studies examining the fit of the SCCT with middle school students and data has been found to support the model (Fouad, Smith, & Enochs, 2003; Gibbons, 2005; Turner & Lapan, 2002). In one of the first studies, Fouad and Smith (1996) assessed math and science self-efficacy levels. The researchers found that the SCCT model fit well in explaining how self-efficacy beliefs were related to outcome expectations, interests, and intentions. For the purpose of this study, they developed the Middle School Self-efficacy Scale which assessed career decision-making self-efficacy and outcome expectations (including items that were specific to math and science), intentions, and goals. Turner and Lapan (2002) studied career related perceived parental support, self-efficacy, gender stereotyping, and interests of

middle school students using the SCCT as the basis for the study. They found that the elements studied did predict career interests for all types and the results of their study indicate that SCCT is useful in studying career and academic interests and development in middle school students. Gibbons (2005) studied multiple constructs including the mean difference in scores of college going self-efficacy reported by first generation students as compared to non-first-generation students. Gibbons (2005) found that first generation students do have different levels of college going self-efficacy and need different support than non-first generation students: “Self-efficacy and outcome beliefs directly affect the strength of college-going intentions, suggesting that these constructs play a major role in educational and career development” (p. 163).

Even though early adolescents, middle school students, are experiencing so much transition with cognitive and physical developments, this is the time many researchers recommend college-going conversations and interventions need to be occurring. Descriptions of typical adolescent development (12 - 15 years old) include themes such as a movement toward independence, a focus on current/present interests, increased interest in the opposite sex, development of ideals, focus on role models, ability for abstract thought, and experimentation (American School Counselor Association, 2000). This the time that adolescents are trying to determine who they are, where they fit, and what they can contribute to their families, their classrooms, and society in general. Erickson (1963) suggested that if adolescents did not develop a strong sense of self and their role in the world, their decision making about their future (all aspects of their life) would be affected.

As middle school students move through their personal and cognitive developmental stages, they are also starting to think about life after high school. As college-going conversations have been initiated in the past (in local context), there has been a focus on the career exploration



piece for middle school students. Educators have begun to implement explicit lessons and activities designed to expose students to a wide variety of career options. Students at Spartanland do complete a career interest inventory when they are in middle school (7th & 8th grade years) to help them consider their interests, outcome expectations, abilities, and life goals, plus begin to make decisions about careers or jobs that may be a good fit for them. Super (1963) believed that for most people, their job or being a “worker” is a central role in life that dominates how people view themselves. So when students are going through career exploration, they are learning about who they are and how their idea of self aligns to various career or vocational options (Super, Savickas, Super, Brown, & Brooks, 1996). Recent legislation has also recognized the need to begin career exposure and college conversations in middle school.

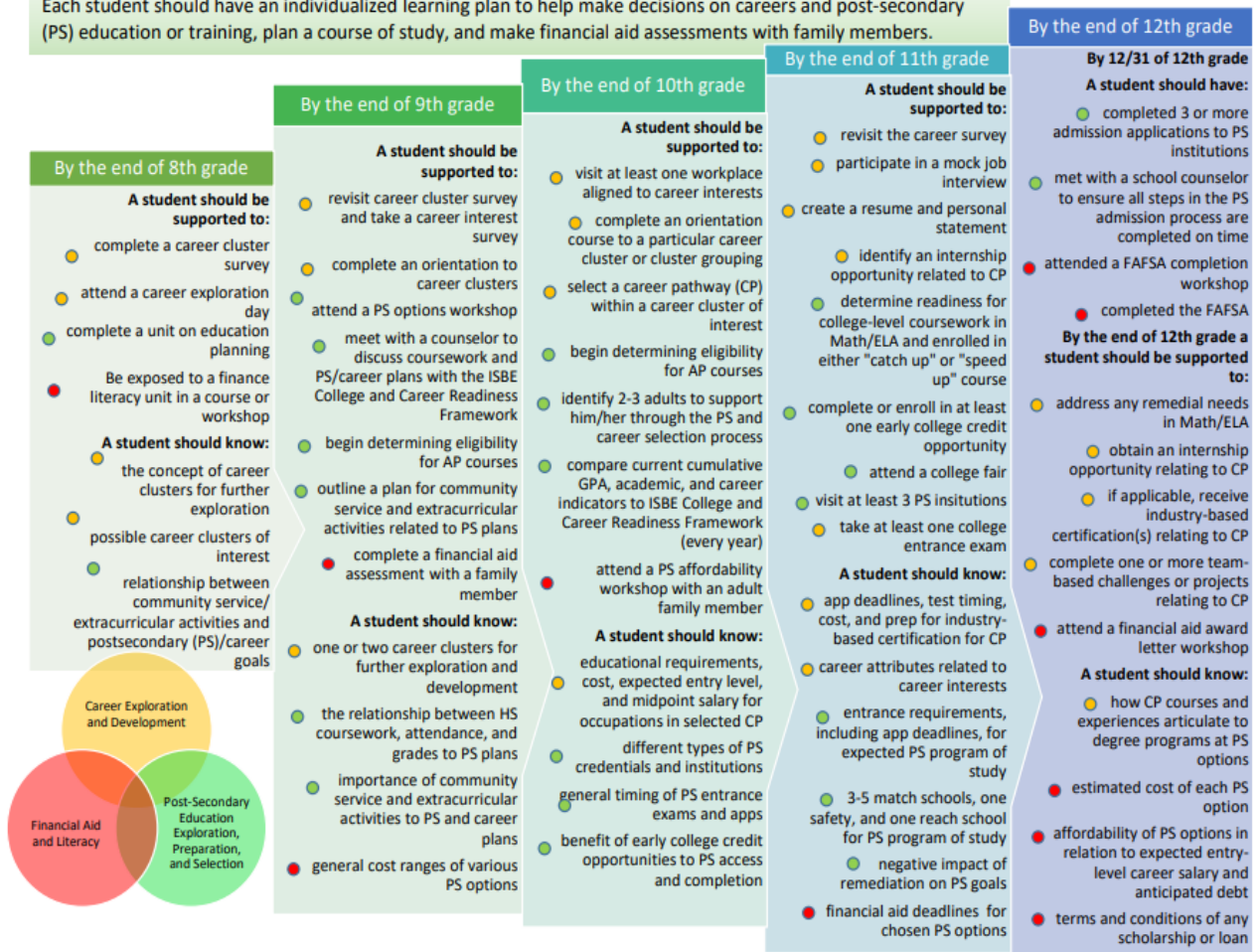
The Illinois Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Act, signed into law in 2016, takes a competency based approach to help students achieve college and career readiness. Lawmakers are interested in ensuring Illinois graduates are equipped to either enter directly into the workforce or matriculate to a post-secondary institution. As part of the act, Postsecondary and Career Expectations (the PaCE) framework was developed. The writers focused on three primary areas of development for high school students: Career Exploration and Development, Financial Aid and Literacy, and Post-Secondary education, exploration, preparation and selection (See figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Illinois PaCE Framework*

**Illinois PaCE: Postsecondary and Career Expectations**

Each student should have an individualized learning plan to help make decisions on careers and post-secondary (PS) education or training, plan a course of study, and make financial aid assessments with family members.



*Note:* Reprinted from Illinois Student Assistance Commission

While specific goals are not outlined for each year in middle school, the outcome expectations are included for middle school students (end of 8th grade). This framework aligns to research showing that career choices are made long before high school and these selections tend to be relatively stable over time (Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Hossler et al. (1999) found that most students make their decision about careers and their future between 8th and 10th grade.

In addition, other researchers have investigated factors that influence career and educational plans of middle school students. Eccles, Vida, and Barber (2004) found that students from higher SES families and those whose mothers had more education were most likely to enroll in college by age 20. The mother's education level was the most powerful demographic variable predicting college plans for middle school students.

### **College-Going Self-Efficacy & SCCT**

There have been numerous studies conducted that support the SCCT model but much of the initial research started with college students. The framework has been found to explain career and educational development of African Americans (Gainor & Lent, 1998), Native Americans (Turner & Lapan, 2002) and Hispanic/Latino (Flores & O'Brien, 2002) as well as Caucasians (Lent et al., 2001, 2003). According to Jensen (2013), "The strongest support for the theory has been the role of self-efficacy in career and educational decision making" (p. 36). There is an abundance of research showing that self-efficacy is a powerful cognitive construct as strong self-efficacy beliefs are significant predictors of not only academic performance but also of educational decision making. Self-efficacy has been tied to interests (Lent, Lopez, & Bieschke, 1993), academic achievement (Hackett, Betz, Casas, & Rocha-Singh, 1992), educational and career choices, and selection of college majors (Betz and Hackett, 1983).

There are some that argue the conversations and interventions around college-going and self-efficacy should start in elementary school. Michelle Jensen (2013) investigated the impact a college curriculum, titled "I'm Going to College", had on the college going self-efficacy beliefs of rural 5th grade students as measured by the College Going Self-efficacy Scale. Jensen found statistically significant positive changes in three of the six items on the scale. There are very limited studies that have been conducted in a rural setting in which the construct at the center of

the research is college-going self-efficacy. While there are studies that have been conducted in other places, the contextual factors around a college mindset and college-going self-efficacy are unique to a rural setting and local beliefs, economic situations, and the overall way of life or culture.

The College Going Self-efficacy scale that will be used to assess 7th grade students' college-going self-efficacy will be the instrument developed in 2009 by Gibbons and Borders (2010) to measure college-going self-efficacy of middle school students. Borders and Gibbons were interested in factors that influenced eventual post-secondary decisions for high school students as they tried to understand or explain the gap between college-going aspirations and college enrollment. The basis for the measure is grounded in self-efficacy theory and focused on the domain specific behavior of college going related to career development (Pajares & Miller, 1995). This instrument will be used because of the direct connection and evolution from the self-efficacy theme but also because it is designed for middle school students. Middle school students will be the subjects given the research supports for early intervention (prior to high school) with a structure built in so that the intervention could fit without disrupting the rest of each student's day or schedule.

### **Chapter Summary**

Data shows that while rural students' academic aspirations are similar to their urban or suburban counterparts, the matriculation rate to a post-secondary institution are much lower. There are multiple factors that influence the value students put on education including environmental as well as school-based factors. The Social Cognitive Career Theory is the framework that is most recognized as being comprehensive in nature and includes multiple cognitive factors that are malleable and can be influenced by both life and school based

experiences. Data and anecdotal reports demonstrate the need for an intervention that will positively impact rural middle school students' levels of college going self-efficacy. There are many parents within the Spartanland rural district who terminated their education after high school; therefore, many of the students don't have college-going expectations imposed upon them and are not engaging in college-going conversations at home.

A recent emphasis on College and Career Readiness via the Workforce Development Act in Illinois imposed some requirements on Illinois middle and high schools to ensure all students have the opportunity to explore and investigate a wide variety of careers and jobs. Activities within the PaCE Framework align to the research with regards to the items that need to be explicitly addressed to positively impact college going self-efficacy including campus visits, detailed conversations about the cost of college and financial aid, and pointed conversations that dispel the myths around college students. Additionally, many rural students have additional barriers (leaving home) that may influence their decisions about attending college. Conversations about virtual coursework, community colleges, and accessing post-secondary programs near home, are all part of a robust college curriculum.

Differences in students' perceptions about college-going self-efficacy are apparent as early as 7th grade (Gibbons, 2005) which indicates interventions need to start no later than middle school. Osterreich (2000) recommended offering a range of approaches that were long term and began no later than 7th grade in order to maximize the effectiveness of college preparation programs in order to affect college-going self-efficacy. Successful college going interventions should help middle schools students make informed decisions about their future and should include counseling, a parent involvement /education program, and concrete information about college (Gibbons, 2005).

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study will investigate the impact that a college-going curriculum, delivered to middle school students, will have on self-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy of rural students. While many external factors contribute to students' educational aspirations and college-going behaviors, the school can also influence aspirations by providing information to students about the benefits of post-secondary education, dispelling perceptions about college access, and exposing students to the types of supports available to access college. As all schools in Illinois are being held to state accountability metrics centered on college and career readiness, this study will inform future practice in local rural districts. Changes in self-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy will impact the efforts and curricula implemented in the Spartanland district.

Spartanland is interested in dispelling myths around college-going for its middle school students, specifically the low income middle school students. The hypothesis is that implementing a post-secondary curriculum in all middle school seventh grade classrooms will positively impact the college-going self-efficacy of all students, with an expected greater gain in reported college-going self-efficacy for low income students. Gibbons and Borders (2010) report that interventions for middle school students should be based on self-efficacy theory and address ways to increase beliefs about ability to attend and persist in college. This chapter will provide a description of the study's setting, participants, and the role of the researcher, in addition to a description of the intervention and data collection sources.

One of the most important aspects of increasing college access for rural students is creating a college-going culture in the building (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). A school (middle or

high school) that adopts or believes in a college-going culture opens access to college prep coursework (AP and dual credit) to all students interested in taking those classes. Some schools even require all kids to enroll in some AP or Dual Credit courses so that they can all see themselves as college-going material. In rural America where many of the students' parents didn't attend college, this college-going mentality or environment at school is essential to increasing not only aspirations but also matriculation rates. College-going curricula exist and can easily be embedded into classroom activities or pre-existing courses. Some research suggests that students talk to teachers as much or even more than to counselors about future plans (Griffin, Hutchins, & Meece, 2011). This study will require the college going curricula to be delivered by teachers to encourage more open dialogue, beyond the length of the intervention that may benefit students' college going self-efficacy. Much of the college going curriculum focuses on students having an accurate concept of self. Lessons should include opportunities for students to grapple with ideas and concepts about their future that help to create or promote student self-efficacy or student agency (Gunter & Thomson, 2007).

### **Study Alignment to CPED Guiding Principles**

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED, 2019) has identified the following guiding principles that should be evident in a CPED research study:

- a. Is framed around questions of equity, ethics and social justice to bring solutions to complex problems of practice.
- b. Prepares leaders that can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities.
- c. Provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate collaboration and communication skills to work with diverse communities and build partnerships.

- d. Provides field based opportunities to analyze problems of practice and use multiple frames to develop meaningful solutions.
- e. Is grounded in and develops a professional knowledge base that integrates both practical and research knowledge, that links theory with systemic and systematic inquiry.
- f. Emphasizes the generation, transformation, and use of professional knowledge and practice.

This study is aligned to the aforementioned CPED principles. All students in this country deserve equal access to a high quality K-12 education that prepares them for post-secondary success, including rural and economically marginalized students. As previously stated, the college-going matriculation and completion rates for low income and rural students are discrepant from other groups. The study will help to determine if this specific college-going intervention will enhance the levels of college-going self-efficacy for the rural students that attend Spartanland Middle School which could lead to additional post-secondary behaviors such as enrollment in more rigorous college coursework and ultimately matriculation to college. The knowledge gained from this study will have implications for college-going curricula for middle school students and a developmentally appropriate version of this curriculum may be expanded to additional grade levels, based on results of the study.

The results will be analyzed holistically as well as by socioeconomic groups. The hypothesis of the researcher is that if seventh grades students are exposed to a college-going intervention, then the pre and post college-going self-efficacy levels will show a statistically significant net difference for all students. Additionally, the researcher hypothesizes that students who qualify for free lunches will have lower college-going self-efficacy rates (than the whole



group) prior to the intervention and will show a smaller net difference than those students in the paid lunch group. The data, sorted by socioeconomic group, will be analyzed through an academic and sociological perspective. While the limitations of this study include school-based /curriculum-based impacts on levels of college going self-efficacy, there may be implications for community outreach and parent education efforts based on socioeconomic group.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a framework that delineates factors influencing students' academic achievement and postsecondary aspirations. This study will focus on one aspect of that theory, college-going self-efficacy, and will determine how salient that construct is based on the college-going intervention that is delivered to seventh grade students at Spartanland. The study links the theoretical framework, SCCT, to the inquiry based approach of surveying students prior to the college-going intervention and post-intervention to determine what, if any, changes result in students' reported levels of college-going self-efficacy.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

I grew up, and still reside, in a small town in central Illinois. My hometown and school were very homogenous with regards to ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Most of my classmates' parents worked in our small town, a neighboring small town, on farms, or in Bloomington. Very few adults that I interacted with on a regular basis, except my teachers, were college graduates. My parents and their friends were blue collar and did the best they could to make ends meet. My mom always said she wanted better for us than she had and she did everything she could to make sure we were well cared for, happy, and focused on school. I never thought that we were poor because I always had meals, a house, and clothes. As I got older, I began to realize that it wasn't normal to use your babysitting money to pay your school registration fees, to buy your own bicycle, or to purchase school clothes when you were 12 years

old. My parents never talked about us being poor so we felt normal and were in the dark with regards to how little money we had. When I was in my twenties my mom shared that we actually had qualified for financial support (free/reduced lunches) at the school for multiple years, but my parents denied the support knowing there were others in greater need.

Additionally, they were too proud to accept the help.

Olympia High School is located in the middle of a corn field in rural Stanford, Il and is comprised of students from eight small towns. While I loved my high school experience at Olympia, the course offerings available were not very rigorous. I knew I was interested in a career in the natural sciences (I thought medicine). I had taken all the science courses that Olympia offered so I did multiple independent studies my senior year. When I arrived at Illinois State University (ISU), I was in awe of the experiences other science majors had been given while in high school. It was the first time in my life that I was surrounded by a diverse population of students. Obviously, every ethnicity that one could imagine was represented, as well as all degrees of wealth. It did not take me very long to feel as if I was starting behind others and had some catching up to do. I had lots of questions about the “haves and have nots” and why I was basically creating opportunities for myself at Olympia while the students from the suburbs were experiencing college like coursework in high school and had arrived at ISU so well prepared. I remember having these conversations with my mom, who because of her upbringing, felt as if I should only be grateful for the life I had been given, and told me to accept it. I can still hear her saying, “Life isn’t fair.” My grandparents had barely finished high school but struggled to make ends meet. My maternal grandfather, an alcoholic, killed himself when my mom was only twelve years old. She has so many stories of their living conditions and the shame she felt as a result of being the daughter of the “town drunk”.

Therefore, my complaint about not being as academically prepared as others was trivial to her and not worthy of discussion.

As I changed my major from pre-medicine to Biology Teacher Education at ISU, I had many doubts about my career choice but felt that the combination of my passion and my upbringing would be beneficial for students. I spent the first eleven years of my career teaching at Normal Community West High School. I had honors students as well as the “low tracked” physical science students. It didn’t really matter who my students were, as I found I could establish relationships with almost all students and make learning engaging for any type of student. I loved them all and grew as an educator, and person, as a result of the life experiences they brought with them to class every day. I would often analyze my students and was struck by the vast differences in their life experiences. It was very clear to me that the class my students landed in (low level or honors level) was dependent on so many variables and often intelligence or academic achievement was not the determinant factor. While I hadn’t come from a privileged background, the stories of some of my students were hard to believe at times. Some of these students had challenges far beyond any that I had encountered. I was slapped in the face with the unlevelled playing field that many of my students were dealing with while trying to navigate just to pass courses and earn enough credit to graduate from high school.

I eventually moved into administration and became the principal at Olympia South Elementary and subsequently at George Evans Junior High School. Both of these schools had 30 - 40% of students that qualified for free/reduced lunches. The population of students feeding into Evans Junior High was comprised of some of the most affluent neighborhoods on the East side of Bloomington as well as students that live on Tracy Drive and in three trailer parks off of South Main Street. Since Evans was a brand new building, I was determined to create a culture

that was comfortable and embraced all students, regardless of which bus they took to school. We spent a lot of time (and the building still does) on recognizing and celebrating the diverse student population. The home visits that I made while at Evans often left me feeling outraged that “my kids” had to live like they did. I was haunted by the fact that they came to school every day in a beautiful new building yet returned home each night to live in squalor. How could I have conversations with these students about goals for their future and paint them a picture of what life could be like when all they saw was unemployed parents/adults, parents collecting disability, or parents working multiple low wage jobs just to buy groceries? It was difficult to show them what life could be like or even talk to them about the importance of doing their homework and being engaged in school when their reality was so vastly different than mine and many of their classmates.

As I moved into district administration, one of my responsibilities was the expansion of our dual credit program. Initially, the equity piece with regards to dual credit wasn't even on the district's radar. We were challenged by our Superintendent to get as many dual credit courses “going” as possible and were asked to implement the program very quickly. I worked closely with Heartland over the span of three years to grow our program. Within the last two years, schools have started looking very closely at the equity gap that exists in dual credit numbers. Underrepresented populations include minorities, as well as students categorized as low income and first generation students. I researched dual credit policy as roadblocks around teacher credentialing and student qualifications continued to get in my way and restrict access for students. It is extremely ironic to me that legislation put in place to ensure quality programming and encourage college access to underrepresented populations by creating an entry point into the college pipeline has actually contributed to the inequity that can be seen

across the state with regards to dual credit access. Hoffman (2003) expressed similar sentiments about the contradictions:

...the movement to diversify the population of young people entering college has indeed made progress. In general, college campuses are more diverse today than they were four decades ago. Nonetheless, access, retention, and graduation rates still correlate strikingly with race, income, and family educational background. (p. 44)

As I returned to my rural district (and roots), questions surrounding access to rigorous coursework are even more relevant. Our population of students that qualify for free and reduced lunches continues to increase. I find myself continuing to look for ways to be innovative and to provide similar experiences to rural students as their suburban peers have. However, I am intrigued by the rural communities and the mindset of some that post-secondary coursework or advanced certifications are unnecessary. I am interested in changing the narrative around the next steps for our students. Given my role in creating and expanding opportunities for all students, and my view that education is the great equalizer, closing the existing equity gaps has become my mission. We have so much work to do, but I am convinced that with the right people on the bus, with continued professional development for staff, with strong high school to college partnerships, and with effective advocates for all students, we can capitalize on the gifts our underrepresented students bring with them and move them in a direction that will lead to post high school credentialing or degree obtainment.

I realized through my work with equity and access in dual credit programming (specifically), I am always rooting for those that have not had an easy or traditional path in life. I tend to be biased towards students, and people in general, that I view as having a privileged life. It is very apparent to me that my experiences have contributed to my views and

what has become my passion and my work. Through additional research into the equity issues for rural students, I hope to identify specific programs/districts or structures that have eliminated equity gaps and gain further insight into why and how the underrepresented students (specifically rural, low income) have gained access to rigorous coursework and have navigated the high school to college pipeline.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do scores of college-going self-efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?

### **Design of the Study**

This research project will be a quantitative study focusing on college-going self-efficacy scores of 7th grade students. Given the scope of this research, a quantitative design showing the impact an intervention has on the college-going self-efficacy construct is the most appropriate. Quantitative research will allow the researcher to test theories by examining relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014). The research questions will address “how” and “to what degree” the intervention impacts the college-going self-efficacy of seventh grade students which are best answered with a quantitative design. Comparison of results by student group also lends itself to the collection of quantitative data. There are multiple phases to this quantitative study given I am working with a group of participants to ensure the intervention can be embedded into the day and that it aligns (and is not repetitive) with other college and career-going activities already

occurring at the school. Prior to delivery of the college curriculum, all students will take a pre-assessment to report their levels of college-going self-efficacy. The instrument being used was developed by Melinda M. Gibbons in 2009 and permission has been obtained to utilize this instrument for this research study.

There are other measures that exist but they were either developed to examine a different type of self-efficacy, or designed for college students. The College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (CGSES) was created for use with students prior to going to college. A further review of the literature revealed two aspects related to college-going: attendance and persistence (Horn & Nunez, 2000). For students, it appeared that beliefs about being able to attend college and beliefs about being able to stay in college were related yet unique. Therefore, CGSES was created to measure self-efficacy beliefs related to both parts of the college-going experience (Gibbons, 2005).

The CGSES (Appendix A) will be administered prior to the intervention and post intervention to determine what net difference exists between scores for the whole group as well as subgroups of students. The instrument consists of 14 items related to college attendance and 16 items related to college persistence. Each survey prompt requires students to report how sure they are about the particular item. Students respond to the prompt “How sure are you about being able to do the following” using a four point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all sure, 2 = somewhat sure, 3 = sure, 4 = very sure). The college-going / attendance items include topics on financial issues, family, academic ability, and decision making. The college persistence items center around financial questions, plus family and life skills. To ensure the scale was appropriate for middle school students, initial reliability, readability, and clarity of the items were tested with a sample of 22 sixth and eighth graders who were involved in Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts. All

planned to graduate from high school and 91% indicated they planned to enter a 2 or 4-year college. Scores for the attendance subscale had a possible range of 15 to 60; the mean was 45.77 and had a standard deviation of 5.81. Overall, the mean scores of the respondents were fairly high in college-going self-efficacy belief, and respondents also indicated clarity of questions and directions and adequate readability. It took participants approximately 5 minutes to complete the 31 questions. Gibbons and Borders (2010) reported good internal consistency as the Cronbach's alpha for the attendance subscale was 0.81; furthermore, for the persistence subscale it was 0.92. The overall alpha coefficient was 0.92. The internal consistency will be measured with the use of the CGSES in this research study as well.

### **Participants**

The entire 7th grade class will be invited to participate in the research study. These students attend Spartanland, a rural consolidated school district with three elementary buildings, one middle and one high school. There are 128 students in this seventh grade class which includes 60 females and 68 males. There are 57 students that qualify for free lunches, four that qualify for reduced lunches, and 57 that do not qualify for financial support. As a result of the large number of students that qualify for free or reduced lunches (48%), this middle school is designated as a Title I school. The majority of students in this 7th grade class are white (123) with a small number being multi-racial. Many of the staff have taught at Spartanland for multiple years and know the families of the students very well. There is minimal mobility in this rural area as there are numerous families that have sent kids to these schools for decades. Approximately 12% of students in the 7th grade class have an Individualized Education Plan and receive special education support.



Given that the intervention and surveys will be conducted during an advisory period dedicated to college and career readiness activities, there will be no loss of instructional time for these students as a result of the study. In fact, the activities involved in the study (intervention and survey) are not unlike activities that are regularly embedded into this time.

### **Phases of the Study**

#### **Phase I: Designing the Intervention**

Beginning in 2017, students at Spartanland Middle School started interacting with the Naviance platform. Naviance is a college and career readiness package that has multiple components. One of the components included, which has been underutilized in our organization, is the college-going curriculum. According to Naviance (Hobsons, 2014), the curriculum addresses the college readiness standards outlined by the U.S. Department of Education including knowledge of the college process, reaching out to adult supporters, academic preparedness, the financial aid process, and guidance through the college application process. It is also aligned to the American School Counselor Association's National Standards for Students. Each lesson corresponds to one or more of ASCA's National Model Domain of Academic, Career, and Personal/Social Development (Hobsons, 2014).

Prior to delivery of the college curriculum, all students will take a pre- assessment to report their levels of college-going self-efficacy. The instrument being used was developed by Melinda M. Gibbons in 2009 and permission has been obtained to utilize this instrument for this research study. The College Going Self-efficacy Scale (Appendix A) will be administered prior to the intervention and post intervention to determine what net difference exists between scores.

The building administrator, the College Career Counselor, and myself determined which lessons would be included in the intervention that will be applied to all seventh grade students

during their advisory time. Basing our decisions on what research shows is necessary, we identified twenty lessons to be delivered over a four week period of time. The lessons fall under the following themes (as identified by Naviance): myself, my success skills, my career plan, college planning, and finances. The 7<sup>th</sup> grade advisory teachers will deliver these lessons within the advisory period. The College and Career Counselor and the researcher will provide professional development to teachers prior to the lessons being taught. See Appendix B for the complete list of lessons that will be administered to students. In addition to the lessons, all students in 7<sup>th</sup> grade will be taking a field trip to visit a local community college campus. While on campus, they will tour the facilities and speak to admission staff so that they can hear about the application process as well as financial options to support attending college. While all of the selected Naviance lessons are not directly tied to college-going, we felt as if they were needed for the student to think holistically about themselves, their interests, and then viable post-secondary options based on the information shared.

The first set of lessons fall under the “myself” theme and include topics about how current actions and thoughts may influence future decision making and planning, self-confidence relates to future planning and taking risks to find their passions, exploring options to find a passionate pursuit, and understanding differences between college, community college, technical school, military or work. These lessons allow students to further understand themselves. Gunter and Thomson (2007) reported that students need to grapple with ideas and concepts about their future as that will help to create or promote student self-efficacy or student agency.

The next set of lessons fall under the theme of “my success skills”. These lessons require students to reflect on their academic challenges and make a plan for improving their performance in that course/area. An additional lesson provides students with habits for success including

planning and using organizational tools. There is a lesson that previews learning preferences that will follow the students' completion of a learning style inventory. Finally, these lessons conclude with a section on that requires students to craft their own definition of success.

After moving students through the exploration of self and exposing them to habits of success, the lesson focus will shift to career planning. Students will have data from their interest inventory that can be used as a basis for discussion for the career planning unit. These lessons will include explicit connection between the interests that surfaced and the careers that may align with them. This is the area, based on experience, in which students need extensive exposure. There is simply very little understanding or experience with a wide variety of careers/vocations beyond what they see among their parents and close family. The second lesson in this unit focuses on getting ready for college which includes detailed information on what students can do now and what needs to occur as they move through middle school and ultimately high school. Finally, this unit concludes with students taking what has been discussed about careers and college-going behaviors and trying to visualize and determine what their road into the future (or into college) might look like.

The next set of lessons all have a college planning theme and provide even more details for students to help them to gather additional information about college and dispel any myths or barriers that they perceive to exist. The lessons begin with a more detailed description of college as well as the end result of college, type of degrees, and the college application process. Students then go through a lesson in which common college-going myths are dispelled, an important step as these myths focus on affording college, getting accepted to college, and understanding the realities of college life. The next lesson addresses common fears that students may have about attending college and will provide students the opportunity to talk through the fears. Finally,

students will have a discussion with their teacher about what colleges require and how to navigate the application process. Students will undergo a mock application process and have the opportunity to complete a mock application.

One of the biggest perceived barriers to college going is the ability to afford college. The last set of lessons may be the most needed for some students, especially those students living in poverty. The unit starts with a discussion around income and expenses and introduces students to the idea of budgeting. Students will participate in a mock budget activity that provides each group with an income amount and then forces students to make choices about what they will be able to purchase each month. The next lesson in this sequence will expose students to the costs associated with college and also the types of financial assistance that are available to students (loans, scholarships, and grants). The last lessons incorporates prompts and conversation starters that students can utilize with their families to begin the discussion about planning and paying for college.

## **Phase II: Teacher Recruitment and Preparation**

The College and Career Counselor and I will meet with all 7th grade advisory teachers. The teachers will hear about the intervention and they will be asked for their participation. The researcher will utilize a script and will then follow up with an email to each individual teacher (Appendix C). After participants have indicated their willingness to take part in the study, the teachers will be asked to sign the informed consent form (Appendix D). A subsequent meeting will be scheduled so that the research team can present information to the teachers about the study and spend time discussing the construct at the center of the research – college-going self-efficacy (Appendix E). Teachers will also be provided with an overview of the literature and be given the opportunity to ask questions. Additionally, the research team will share the College-Going Self-

Efficacy Scale (Appendix A) with the teachers as well. During this session, teachers will be shown the survey as it looks in Qualtrics and be given the information the students will need to access the survey.

Teachers will also see the parent permission form (Appendix F), as well as the student assent form (Appendix G). Teachers will be reminded that if a student's parent returns the permission form indicating they do not want their child to participate, there are to be no repercussions. Students that do not participate will be asked to complete homework or read as they would do on a normal day in advisory. If a student reads the assent form on the day of the pre-assessment and chooses not to participate, the teacher is to indicate that on their roster and encourage the student to read or work on homework.

In addition to this initial training session, the principal, college and career counselor, and the researcher will meet each Monday morning with the teacher participants (during the four week intervention) and go through each lesson that is coming up for the week. Teachers will be provided the lessons at the initial meeting but the thorough discussion for the individual lessons will happen each Monday morning prior to the week in which the intervention will be delivered.

### **Phase III: The Intervention**

Each teacher will have envelopes with student names on the front and the student identification number inside the envelope. The student identification number will be needed to track lunch code status of students. Only the researcher will know which student has been assigned which number. Teachers will begin the four week intervention with the administration of the College Going Self-efficacy Survey within Qualtrics. The student assent form is the first item the students will see on the survey. If they are not interested in participating they will indicate that immediately by notifying their advisory teacher. After the survey is completed,

teachers will speak to the students about the research and explain that there will be targeted lessons delivered over the next four weeks and then the students will complete the same survey at the conclusion of the intervention.

Teachers will be given the PDF plan for each lesson as it appears within Naviance. Due to the simplicity of the lessons and the lack of interaction between students and teachers with the lessons, supplements have been added. Teachers will be given whole class discussion prompts, as well as some closure activities, to enhance each of the Naviance lessons. These lessons will take place each day during advisory period for a four-week period of time. At the completion of each lesson, students submit their answers, thoughts, or comments. Therefore, at the conclusion of the intervention, I will be able to determine if all the lessons have been completed for each child. Advisory happens each day from 2:55 - 3:20 p.m. Most of the lessons can be completed independently on the computer through the Naviance platform. Students that are absent will be encouraged to complete the missed lessons on their own.

### **Analysis of the Data**

As was previously mentioned, the pre and post survey data will be collected from students using Qualtrics. The survey asks students to respond to each statement in one of the following ways: Not at all sure, somewhat sure, sure, very sure (Appendix A). After the scores are collected from the first administration (pre-intervention) and the second administration (post-intervention) the net difference in scores will be determined for both the whole group and then for the identified low income student group. The intervention will span four weeks. Data will be entered into IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 as this is provided by Illinois State University. Data will be cleaned by taking out any entries that only had one test administration resulting in no net difference of scores.

Initial data analysis will simply involve reporting measures of central tendency for the groups of scores (mean, median, and mode), plus the variance and standard deviation of scores. Since the researcher is interested in the differences, and whether or not the differences are significant, between students with paid lunch code status and those that qualify for free or reduced lunches, a t-test was conducted to determine if the differences in the mean group scores were significant. A t-test is a type of inferential statistic that is used to determine if there is a significant difference between the mean of two groups. Researchers would use a t-test to demonstrate how an intervention or variable may impact two different groups of students sorted by a multitude of factors that may include race or income status, etc. (Minium, Clarke, & Coladarci, 1999). After t-scores are determined, the associated p-value will be compared with the alpha level of 0.05 to determine statistical significant changes in perceptions of self-efficacy from the pre to the post-test survey scores.

### **Feasibility for Further Study**

Based on the results of the data analysis, additional studies may include utilizing the intervention with 6th or 8th graders to determine at which grade level gains in college-going self-efficacy are maximized. Collecting additional demographic/individualized data on students such as parent level of education and present academic performance would make the study more robust and provide additional information to educators so that targeted college-going interventions could begin in elementary schools via exposure to colleges and careers that require college.

## CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a college-going intervention significantly impacted the self-reported levels of seventh grade students' college-going self-efficacy. The second purpose was to determine if socio-economic status (indicated by lunch code) influenced the difference in pre and post-intervention college-going self-efficacy scores. The results of this study are quantitative in nature as they represent the student college-going self-efficacy scores prior to the intervention and after the intervention. The results will address the following two research questions:

1. How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do scores of college-going self-efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?

There are 132 students in this seventh grade class. In the class, there are 63 (48%) females and 69 (52%) males. This seventh grade class has 61 (46%) students that qualify for free or reduced lunches and 71 (54%) that are in the paid lunch category. Even though the size of the class is 132 students, not all students participated in the surveys. Student absences resulted in a smaller number of participants (See Table 1). Additionally, there was a relatively large number of students that did not enter a valid participant number which eliminated those cases from further analysis using the paired t-test. The non-identified participants could not be assigned a gender or lunch code category but were included in the overall mean scores for the survey analysis. Table 1



below shows the actual number of identified participants and the number of non-identified participants, as well as the variables considered in the study.

Table 1

*Student Demographics: Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Survey*

Demographics	Pre-Intervention		Post Intervention	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender</b>				
Males	47	38	49	44
Females	40	32	42	38
<b>Lunch Code Status</b>				
F/R Lunch	39	31	43	39
Paid Lunch	48	38	48	43
Non-Identified Participants	38	30	20	18

How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college going self-efficacy?

**Pre-Intervention College Going Self-Efficacy Analysis**

The pre-intervention survey was completed by 125 students. Table 2 shows the mean scores and standard deviations, by question, for all respondents. Each survey question required students to report how sure they were about the particular item. Student responses ranged across a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all sure, 2 = somewhat sure, 3 = sure, 4 = very sure). The survey contained only college-going attendance items and included specific questions around financial issues, family, academic ability, and decision making.

The results from the whole group pre-intervention survey showed that the question with the highest mean score was question 3, which stated “I can have family support for going to college” (M=3.48). This indicates that at some level there are conversations about college and education after high school occurring in many of our households. The second highest mean score was for question 7, worded “I can make my family proud with choices after high school” (M=3.25). Question 8, “I can choose college courses that best fit my interests” (M=3.19), question 14, “I can go to college after high school” (M=3.11) and question 4, “I can choose a good college” (M= 3.10), all showed that students were sure or very sure about family support, decision making ability, and their ability to go to college.

Question 9, labeled “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me” (M=1.91), had the lowest overall mean score. Question 5, “I can get a scholarship/grant for college” (M=2.31), was the question with the second lowest mean score. Question 1, which asked “I can find a way to pay for college” (M=2.60), was also one of the lowest mean scores. On these three questions, students reported they were not at all sure or somewhat sure about paying for college. Given that the students in this sample are 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, showing uncertainty about their ability to pay for college or to earn scholarships is to be expected. The limited understanding many 7<sup>th</sup> graders have about financing college is represented by the low mean scores.

Students responded to questions about ability and decision making by indicating they were somewhat sure to sure about their academic ability in high school, as well as their decision making skills around coursework and selecting colleges. Question 2, “I can get accepted into college” (M=2.77), question 10, “I can get good grades in my high school math classes” (M=2.40), question 11, “I can get good grades in my high school science classes” (M=2.72), question 12, “I can choose the high school courses needed to get into a good college” (M=2.82)

and question 13, “I can know enough about computers to get into college” (M=2.50) were close in mean scores for the sample and showed students were sure to somewhat sure about being able to make decisions and to have the ability to be academically successful.

Table 2

*Pre-Intervention Data: College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale (N = 125)*

Question	M	SD
Q1. I can find a way to pay for college.	2.60	0.92
Q2. I can get accepted to college.	2.77	0.85
Q3. I have family support to go to college.	3.48	0.79
Q4. I can choose a good college.	3.10	0.82
Q5. I can get scholarship/grant for college.	2.31	0.87
Q6. I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college.	2.60	0.92
Q7. I can make my family proud with choices after high school.	3.25	0.88
Q8. I can choose college courses that best fit my interests.	3.19	0.78
Q9. I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me.	1.91	0.76
Q10. I can get good grades in my high school math class.	2.40	0.88
Q11. I can get good grade in my high school science class.	2.72	0.88
Q12. I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college.	2.82	0.85
Q13. I can know enough about computers to get into college.	2.50	0.92
Q14. I can go to college after high school.	3.11	0.87

*Note.* M=Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

The pre-intervention data was then disaggregated by student socioeconomic status and includes the mean difference by question (see Table 3). There were multiple questions that the paid group reported they were sure or very sure of their answers. Question 3, stated “I can have

family support to go to college” (M=3.57), was the highest mean score for the students in the paid lunch category. The other questions that the majority of students answered in the “sure” to “very sure” manner were question 7, “I can make my family proud with choices after high school” (M=3.45), question 4, “I can choose a good college” (M=3.18), question 8, “I can choose college courses that best fit my interests” (M=3.14), and question 14, “I can go to college after high school” (M=3.14). Students reported they were somewhat sure to sure about the remaining questions. The questions with the lowest scores for the paid lunch group include question 9, “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me” (M=2.10), and question 13, “I can know enough about computers to get into college” (M=2.41). The students answered the remaining questions that they were somewhat sure to sure about their ability, decision making, and financial aspects regarding paying for college.

The students in the free/reduced lunch category reported they were sure to very sure for question 3, “I can have family support to go to college” (M=3.38), question 7, “I can make my family proud with choices after high school” (M=3.2), and question 8, “I can choose college courses that best fit my interests” (M=3.26). The questions in which the mean scores were the lowest for the students in the free/reduced lunch group all related to the financial aspects of college, as seen in question 1, “I can find a way to pay for college” (M=2.28), question 5, “I can get a scholarship / grant for college” (M=2.15), and question 9, “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me” (M=1.67). Students responses to these questions ranged from not at all sure to somewhat sure. The remaining questions about ability and decision making showed that students were sure to somewhat sure about their ability to earn grades good enough to get into college, select courses that will prepare them for college, and create an educational plan.

Of the 125 students who responded to the pre-survey, only 87 (70%) provided a valid participant number. From those with valid participant numbers, 39 (32%) were students that qualified for free/reduced lunches while 48 (38%) were in the paid lunch category. To better understand the differences in the two groups (paid lunch as compared to free/reduced), the mean difference was determined (see Table 3). Some of the questions had rather large mean differences (MD) such as question 10, “I can get good grades in high school math” (MD=0.73), question 11, “I can get good grades in my high school science classes” (MD = 0.57) and question 2, “I can get accepted to college” (MD=0.46). These questions, which were all related to ability, showed the largest mean difference in scores for the two groups.

With regards to questions that had the smallest mean difference, question 13, “I know enough about computers to go to college” (MD=0.09), showed the smallest difference with the free/reduced lunch code group producing a higher mean score than the paid lunch category. Question 12, “I can choose the high school classes I need to get into a good college” (MD=0.01), resulted in a small mean difference as well. Finally, question 8, “I can choose high school courses that best fit my interests” (MD=0.12) showed little difference in mean scores for the two groups. The questions with the smallest mean differences included one that was ability related and two that centered on decision making.

Table 3

*Means and Mean Differences by Lunch Code Status (N = 125)*

Question	M Paid	M F/R	MD
Q1. I can find a way to pay for college.	2.67	2.28	0.39
Q2. I can get accepted to college.	2.96	2.50	0.46
Q3. I have family support to go to college.	3.57	3.38	0.19
Q4. I can choose a good college.	3.18	2.85	0.33
Q5. I can get scholarship/grant for college.	2.5	2.15	0.35
Q6. I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college.	2.82	2.46	0.36
Q7. I can make my family proud with choices after high school.	3.45	3.20	0.25
Q8. I can choose college courses that best fit my interests.	3.14	3.26	-0.12
Q9. I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me.	2.10	1.67	0.43
Q10. I can get good grades in my high school math class.	2.78	2.05	0.73
Q11. I can get good grade in my high school science class.	2.90	2.33	0.57
Q12. I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college.	2.86	2.76	0.10
Q13. I can know enough about computers to get into college.	2.41	2.50	-0.09
Q14. I can go to college after high school.	3.14	2.90	0.24

*Note.* M=Mean; F/R=Free/Reduced; MD=Mean Difference.

An independent t-test was conducted to determine if the overall pre-survey mean score for students in free/reduced lunch code status was significantly different than the overall mean score for those in the paid lunch status. The test was significant,  $t(85) = 3.09$ ,  $p = 0.003$ , aligning to the research hypothesis. In all but two questions, the mean scores for the students in

the paid lunch status were higher than the mean scores for those in the free/reduced lunch category.

### **Post-Intervention College Going Self-Efficacy Analysis**

The post-intervention survey was completed by 111 students and Table 4 shows the mean scores and standard deviations on the items. Again, each survey item required students to report how sure they were about the particular item. Similar to the pre-intervention survey, student responses were on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all sure, 2 = somewhat sure, 3 = sure, 4 = very sure). The college-going attendance items included topics on financial issues, family, academic ability, and decision making.

Question 3, “I can have family support for going to college” (M=3.50) and question 7, “I can make my family proud with my choices after high school” (M=3.30), were the two items with the highest mean scores. Similarly, the pre-intervention highest mean scores were these two questions as well (M=3.48, M=3.25). This result indicates that students generally feel supported by their family whether they choose college or another post-secondary option. Results showed students were sure or very sure about these questions related to family support and pride in both survey administrations. The high mean scores may indicate that there have been conversations in families about postsecondary plans and families have provided post-secondary options for students. Students who then understand there are many ways to make families proud. Question 8, “I can choose college course that best fit my interests” (M= 3.22), question 4, “I can choose a good college” (M=3.20), question 12, “I can choose high school courses needed to get into a good college” (M=3.0), and question 14, “I can go to college after high school” (M=3.12), show students are sure or very sure about their decision making ability with regards to courses and interest. The pre-intervention scores for these same questions had very similar mean scores.

Even though mean scores were higher for the post-intervention, similar patterns of responses occurred in both the pre and post-intervention surveys with the same questions revealing the highest and lowest mean scores. Table 4 results showed that students were somewhat sure to sure about the financial aspects of college. Questions about paying for college had some of the lowest mean scores on both the pre and post survey. Question 1 (M=2.99), question 5 (M=2.44), and question 9 (M=2.29) all fall within the finance theme and mean scores ranged from 2.29 to 2.99. The pre-intervention mean score for question 4 did not change. However, the pre-intervention scores for questions 1 and 9 were quite a bit lower than the post scores for these questions. Question 1, “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me”, had the lowest pre and post-survey score. Students first formal (school-based) exposure to conversations about paying for college occurred during this intervention and the change in scores for these questions reflect that. The post-survey scores showed that many students were somewhat sure about their ability to find scholarships and/or find a way to pay for college.

Questions about decision making and ability fell into the somewhat sure to sure category. Question 13, “I know enough about computers to get into college” (M=2.55), question 6, “I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college” (M=2.78), question 12, “I can choose the high school classes needed to get into college” (M=3.0), and question 11, “I can get good grades in my high school science class” (M=2.91), followed similar response patterns as in the pre-intervention survey.



Table 4

*Post-Intervention Data: College Going Self-Efficacy Scale (N = 111)*

Question	M	SD
Q1. I can find a way to pay for college.	2.99	0.90
Q2. I can get accepted to college.	2.85	0.92
Q3. I have family support to go to college.	3.50	0.71
Q4. I can choose a good college.	3.20	0.88
Q5. I can get scholarship/grant for college.	2.44	0.87
Q6. I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college.	2.78	0.92
Q7. I can make my family proud with choices after high school.	3.30	0.83
Q8. I can choose college courses that best fit my interests.	3.22	0.77
Q9. I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me.	2.29	0.83
Q10. I can get good grades in my high school math class.	2.64	0.80
Q11. I can get good grades in my high school science class.	2.91	0.88
Q12. I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college.	3.00	0.83
Q13. I can know enough about computers to get into college.	2.55	0.93
Q14. I can go to college after high school.	3.12	0.91

*Note.* M=Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

Again, the students' mean scores on the post-intervention survey data were compared based on the SES/lunch status (i.e. free / reduced lunch or paid category). See Table 5 for the means and mean difference (MD) on each question. For the paid lunch group, the highest mean scores were for question 3, "I have family support to go to college" (M=3.68), question 14, "I can go to college after high school" (M=3.59), and question 7, "I can make my family proud with choices after high school" (M=3.50). These same questions had the highest mean scores on the

pre-intervention survey as well. The paid lunch students had the lowest mean post-intervention scores for question 9, “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me” (M=2.57), question 13, “I know enough about computers to get into college” (M=2.64), and question 5, “I can get a scholarship or grant for college” (M=2.75). The same questions had the lowest mean scores, for this group, in the pre-survey responses. Pre and post-survey responses followed the same pattern for the paid lunch group

The free/reduced student responses followed a similar trend with question 3, “I have family support to go to college” (M=3.37), and question 7, “I can make my family proud with choices after high school” (M=3.21), showing the highest mean which aligns to the students coded “paid lunch” as well. These questions landed high mean scores in the pre-intervention results as well. For the students in the free/reduced category, question 8, “I can choose college courses that best fit my interests” (M=3.21), also had a high mean score which was close to the pre-intervention mean score. Questions about ability, finance, and decision making resulted in some of the lowest post-intervention mean scores for this group. The mean scores for question 5, “I can get a scholarship or grant for college” (M=1.97), question 9, “I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me” (M=2.11), question 6, “I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college” (M=2.39), and question 2, “I can get accepted to college” (M=2.45), all fell into the somewhat sure range with many free/reduced students in the not at all sure range for the questions related to the ability to pay for college (questions 5 and 9). Both questions 5 and 9 were also among the lowest pre-intervention mean scores for the free and reduced category of students. Again, while scores fluctuate between pre and post-survey, trends and patterns were consistent across both groups.

The highest difference in mean scores came from question 14, “I can go to college after high school” (MD=0.85). The second highest mean difference was for question 2, “I can get accepted to college” (MD=0.82). The paid lunch students were sure or very sure about their ability to be accepted and to go to college after high school, while the free/reduced students were somewhat sure to sure. Question 1, “I can find a way to pay for college” (MD=0.81), also showed a significant mean difference.

There were multiple prompts in which mean scores were quite similar (Table 5). Questions 13, “I can know enough about computers to get into college” (MD=0.01), question 8, “I can choose college courses that best fit my interests” (MD=0.13), and question 7, “I can make my family proud with choices after high school” (MD=0.29), resulted in very similar post-survey results for these two groups.

Table 5

*Means and Mean Differences by Lunch Code Status (N= 111)*

Question	M Paid	M F/R	MD
Q1. I can find a way to pay for college.	3.41	2.60	0.81
Q2. I can get accepted to college.	3.27	2.45	0.82
Q3. I have family support to go to college.	3.68	3.37	0.31
Q4. I can choose a good college.	3.45	2.97	0.48
Q5. I can get scholarship/grant for college.	2.75	1.97	0.78
Q6. I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college.	3.15	2.39	0.76
Q7. I can make my family proud with choices after high school.	3.50	3.21	0.29
Q8. I can choose college courses that best fit my interests.	3.34	3.21	0.13
Q9. I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me.	2.57	2.11	0.46
Q10. I can get good grades in my high school math class.	2.95	2.32	0.63
Q11. I can get good grades in my high school science class.	3.16	2.71	0.45
Q12. I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college.	3.20	2.71	0.49
Q13. I can know enough about computers to get into college.	2.64	2.63	0.01
Q14. I can go to college after high school.	3.59	2.74	0.85

*Note.* M=Mean; F/R=Free/Reduced; MD=Mean Difference.

An independent t-test was conducted to determine if the overall post-survey mean score for students with free/reduced lunch code status was significantly different than the overall mean score for those in the paid lunch status. The test was significant,  $t(67) = 3.77$ ,  $p = 0.00$ , which aligns to the research hypothesis: To what extent do scores of college going self-efficacy

reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?

A paired sample T-test was then conducted to determine whether the targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impacted student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy. Table 6 includes overall mean information on the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys for students. As previously stated, the number of paired samples is substantially less than the number of students that participated in the surveys. This is a result of missing data (either pre-intervention or post-intervention surveys) as well as students inputting invalid participant numbers/identifiers.

Table 6

*Overall Means and SDs on Pre-Intervention and Post-Intervention Survey*

Condition	M	SD
Pre-Intervention	2.86	0.511
Post-Intervention	2.99	0.539

*Note.* M=Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

The findings of the t-test indicate the mean difference between the pre-intervention and post-intervention scores was statistically significant for the students. The results showed that the mean post-intervention survey mean score ( $M = 2.99$ ;  $SD = .539$ ) was significantly greater than the mean pre-intervention survey mean score ( $M = 2.86$ ;  $SD = .511$ ),  $t(69) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $p = 0.008$ .

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact that socioeconomic status, as indicated by lunch code status, had on the mean difference in pre-intervention and post-intervention survey scores. The findings revealed that the test was not significant,  $t(67) = 1.88$ ,  $p$

= 0.065. The information displayed in Table 7 shows the mean difference in scores for students in each lunch code category. The mean difference in pre and post-survey scores for students in the paid lunch category ( $MD = 0.194, SD = 0.441$ ) was not statistically different than the mean difference in the post-intervention scores for students with free/reduced lunch ( $MD = 0.029, SD = 0.287$ ). It is important to note that while the p value does not meet the threshold of 0.05 to indicate statistical significance, there is a change in the mean scores from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention for the two groups. Additionally, the largest variance in mean scores was for the students in the paid lunch category ( $MD=0.23$ ) as compared to those in the free/reduced category ( $MD=0.11$ )

Table 7

*Overall Means and SDs for F/R and Paid Lunch Students (N=69)*

Status	Pre-Intervention		Post-Intervention	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
F/R Lunch	2.61	0.496	2.72	0.500
Paid Lunch	2.94	0.494	3.17	0.489

*Note.* M=Mean; SD = Standard Deviation.

### **Analysis by College Going Self-Efficacy Themes**

For each prompt on the survey, a paired samples t-test was conducted to look more critically at the responses (pre / post) of the paired sample to determine which of the following lessons or themes were most impactful: Finance, ability, family, decision making, and general.

Table 8 shows the means, standard deviations, and paired samples t-test results for each theme. There were two themes, finance and ability, in which the paired analysis uncovered statistically significant results in the differences between the pre-intervention and post-intervention mean scores. Within the finance theme, which included three questions related to

paying for college, the results indicated that the mean post-survey score ( $M=2.65$ ) was significantly greater than the mean pre-survey score ( $M=2.29$ ),  $t(85) = 5.13$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . And for the ability theme, which consisted of three questions about getting accepted into college, ability to earn good high school grades, and the ability to make good future choices about coursework and college, the paired samples t-test results showed that the mean post-survey score ( $M=2.81$ ) was significantly greater than the pre-survey score ( $M= 2.67$ ),  $t(85) = 2.16$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Students for these themes were somewhat sure to sure about their general abilities and their ability to find a way to finance college.

The other themes' paired samples t-test showed that changes in mean scores were not statistically significant (see Table 8). The theme with the highest mean scores was the family theme as students reported they were sure or very sure regarding their family support for going to college. The students were less sure about the decision making theme as most answered that they were somewhat sure to sure about making informed decisions about coursework, educational planning, and choosing a college. The general theme only consisted of one question, I can go to college after high school. While the post-intervention survey mean was higher, students were generally somewhat sure to sure about whether or not they could go to college on both the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys.

**Table 8**

*Pre-Interventions Mean Scores, Post-Interventions Mean Scores, and Paired t-test Results by Theme (N=86)*

Theme	Pre-Intervention M	Post-Intervention M	t	p
Family	3.40	3.46	0.80	0.424
Finance	2.29	2.65	5.13	0.00
Ability	2.67	2.81	2.16	0.034
Decision-Making	3.00	3.11	1.63	0.107
General	3.14	3.23	1.00	0.320

Table 9 shows the theme data broken down by lunch code status to determine if there were any patterns or major differences with how the students in each of these groups responded to each of the themes. Table 9 shows the means, standard deviations, and paired samples t-test results for each theme by lunch code status. The two themes that showed the highest mean scores (pre and post-intervention) were the family theme and the general theme. Table 9 depicts that while students in the paid lunch group had higher mean scores for these themes, the pattern was similar for both groups. The theme with the lowest mean scores for the paid lunch group was finance which was the same for the free/reduced lunch code groups. Post-survey results point out that students in both groups were somewhat sure to sure that they could find a way to finance college. The mean scores for the ability and decision making themes fell right in the middle for both groups of students. Results revealed there was a greater change in scores from pre to post-survey for the ability related questions. While the students in the paid lunch category had higher college going self-efficacy scores, patterns and trends for each group were very similar.



Table 9

*Pre-Interventions Mean Scores, Post-Interventions Mean Scores, and Paired t-test results by Theme and Lunch Code Status (N=86)*

Theme	Pre-	Pre-	Post-	Post-	t	p
	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention	Intervention		
	M (Paid)	M (F/R)	M (Paid)	M (F/R)		
Family	3.55	3.29	3.54	3.27	0.804	0.424
Finance	2.46	2.03	2.88	2.31	5.13	0.00
Ability	2.80	2.38	3.01	2.57	2.156	0.034
Decision-Making	3.05	2.85	3.28	2.92	1.629	0.107
General	3.27	2.92	3.53	2.80	1.00	0.320

### Summary

Chapter 4 presented and discussed the findings of the research study based on data from the initial administration (pre-intervention) of the College Going Self-Efficacy Scale and the post-intervention administration of the scale. The results showed that there was an increase in College-Going Self-Efficacy scores as the pre-intervention mean score was 2.86 while the post-intervention mean was 2.99. Student responses did follow similar trends in both the pre and post administrations as questions with high mean scores on the pre-intervention survey also had high mean scores on the post-intervention survey. Some of the highest pre-intervention scores fell into the family theme and the decision making theme. The questions with the lowest mean scores, prior to the intervention, were those that dealt with finding ways to pay for college and ability questions. The post-survey scores were similar in that the highest mean scores were on the family related questions as well as the general question, “I can go to college”. The lowest mean

post-intervention scores centered around paying for college and ability to perform well enough academically in high school to be prepared for college. The data from the paired t-test indicated that the difference in mean scores from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention survey was statistically significant.

As hypothesized in chapter 3, college-going self-efficacy for the students in the free and reduced category started out lower than for the students in the paid category. While both groups had an increase in their mean scores or their levels of college-going self-efficacy, the mean difference in scores for the students in the free and reduced group was not as high as the mean difference in scores for the paid lunch group. When comparing gains made in college-going self-efficacy between lunch code status / socioeconomic groups, while the mean scores from the pre-intervention to the post-intervention mostly increased, there was not a statistically significant difference in the results. While the data was not statistically significant, the variance in scores for the two different groups should be considered in future planning around college-going efficacy interventions.

Analyzing student responses by themes allowed the researcher to look for trends within and among groups of questions. The family theme and the general theme had the two highest results in both the pre and post-survey responses. Students reported they were sure to very sure about their family support, making their family proud, and going to college. Students in the paid lunch category scored higher in both of these themes than the students in the free/reduced lunch category. The finance and ability themes showed the lowest mean scores on both pre and post-surveys. Students were somewhat sure to sure about having the ability to go college as well as finding ways to pay for college. The decision making theme fell right in the middle of the mean

scores and revealed that students were somewhat sure to sure about the decisions they were making tied to coursework and planning.

This data will provide a foundation that will be used as a springboard for the next steps for continued improvement in enhancing the college-going self-efficacy of students. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the results, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommended future action steps.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presents a summary of the study, review of the results, and connection of conclusions with findings and frameworks from past research literature. This chapter is divided into four sections. Section I provides a summary of the study and a discussion of the findings. Section II consists of recommendations for practice in Spartanland based on the outcomes of the research. In section III, limitations of the study are presented and section IV concludes with the recommendations for future research.

### **Summary and Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a college-going intervention on the college-going self-efficacy of rural 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. The students were involved in an intervention that was delivered during their advisory course every day for four weeks. Prior to the intervention students completed the College Going Self-Efficacy Scale which was completed again post-intervention. The study answered the following research questions:

1. How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy?
2. To what extent do scores of college-going self-efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?

### **Findings**

Findings for the study were presented by research questions. The results to research question one, “How does a targeted college-going intervention, designed to enhance the college-going self-efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college-going

self-efficacy?”, revealed several conclusions about how students’ levels of college-going self-efficacy were affected by the intervention. Measures of student College Going Self-Efficacy were mostly higher on the post-survey than on the pre-survey, indicating gains with the use of the college-going intervention. The impact was greatest on college finance items. As previously stated, detailed conversations about paying for college had not occurred at Spartanland for seventh grade students prior to implementing the intervention. When looking at perceptions and misconceptions, which may equate to barriers for college attendance, paying for college or post-secondary education is one topic that rises to the top in all conversations. Researchers report that socioeconomic status and financial considerations are directly related to postsecondary decisions (Bui, 2002; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). It is difficult to know how many students dismiss the idea of college due to the unknowns of paying for college, but it is clear that students who are disadvantaged can identify barriers (in seventh grade) that may keep them from furthering their education beyond high school (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). Irvin et al. (2012) found that family economic hardship was associated with perceived educational and college-going barriers. These results affirm the idea that dedicated space and dialogue, which helps to dispel myths and perceived barriers to college-going, can impact a student’s ideas about the feasibility of attending college (Hossler et al., 1999).

The intervention consisted of multiple lessons (See Appendix A) tied to the finance theme. Scholarships, grants, and all types of financial aid were covered. One instructor reported having detailed conversations with students about the University of Illinois announcement regarding full tuition payments for students that are accepted to the university whose families earn less than \$61,000 annually (Sfondeles, 2020). Based on the results for these seventh grade students, exposure to and participation in these financial-based conversations proved to be

impactful. As was previously stated, students in Spartanland have not been exposed to detailed conversations about paying for college until this intervention occurred. Even though families may have general conversations about going to college, many are not having detailed discussions about paying for college prior to their child being in high school. Parents and teachers have questioned the introduction to the career clusters and college and career pathways information at this “early age” so the assumption is that college financing information is new to most seventh grade students, as are most detailed college conversations. Additionally, the Illinois PaCE framework simply recommends that before a student leaves 8<sup>th</sup> grade they have been exposed to a financial literacy unit in a course or workshop but nothing more detailed than that is recommended (ISAC, 2020).

The second area in which the intervention positively impacted results was on the ability related questions. Interestingly, there were no targeted intervention lessons that were centered on academic ability. However, findings from the data analysis surprisingly revealed a difference in the pre- and post-intervention scores. One conclusion may be the relative academic success many middle schools students have in science. Additionally, students may have been involved in a science unit, in which there was blanket success that coincided with this intervention. Interestingly, the responses to a math-related item showed a significantly lower difference from the pre- to the post-intervention.

Regarding college preparation, findings from the pre- and post-intervention surveys reflected the discussions students had about college and career pathways, the conversations regarding their interests, and the exposure to high school coursework. Additionally, students may have had some previous exposure (during their sixth grade year) to career clusters via the College and Career Counselor. These discussions, along with the explicit intervention, resulted

in a sizeable increase in scores from the pre-intervention survey to the post-intervention survey. While some middle school teachers have questioned the need to introduce students to various career clusters and pathways to college during middle school, it is apparent that exposing students to a framework for planning is impactful. Explicitly relaying college-going information to students and presenting various pathways to college, make it more tangible and real for middle school students. Students who form specific college degree aspirations as early as the eighth grade are predisposed to engage in behaviors that lead to postsecondary enrollment and matriculation (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005).

Part of the intervention centered on types of colleges and best fits for a variety of students. This in combination with conversations and tips that will aid students in identifying areas of interest and using supports that are available such as teachers and counselors, resulted in more students feeling more sure about their ability to get accepted to college after the intervention. While the intervention was explicit and targeted, seventh grade students were also taken on a campus visit to a local community college. The exposure to a college campus and college students as a result of this visit may have also played a role in changes in students' college-going self-efficacy scores. Bloom (2008) posits that all college access programs or college-going curricula include multiple campus visits as a mechanism for students to see a college campus and have their questions answered by college staff.

The area that was least impacted by the intervention related to the knowledge about the use of computers to get into college. Again, it is important to note that the intervention did not focus on specific skills but rather was more general regarding college-going efficacy. It is apparent that students in Spartanland are comfortable with technology and do not see their technology skills as a barrier to their post-secondary options. The Spartanland district has

worked hard to have technology available to support students in their learning and based on the results, it appears as if those efforts have paid off for all students. The infusion of personal technology and the reliance middle school students have on their personal devices may also explain the results for this question.

Another important point to note is that the intervention presented students with information of various types of colleges but did not really discuss “good” vs. “bad” schools. The emphasis was more on finding the right fit for each student. Given that focus, it was not surprising that the difference between the pre- and post-intervention scores for such items were low and not significantly varied. Generally, it appears as if those students that thought they could go to college prior to the intervention, were only a slightly bit “more sure” about their ability to go post-intervention.

When looking at results by theme, the family themed questions showed the smallest mean difference in pre and post-intervention scores, followed by the general themed question (“I can go to college”), then the decision making themed questions, and lastly the ability themed questions. Again, the largest impact was on the finance themed questions.

Findings for the second research question, “To what extent do scores of college-going self-efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students differ with the implementation of the intervention?”, revealed the intervention had mostly a larger impact on the students in the paid lunch category compared to students with free/reduced lunch. The effect was greatest on ability and getting good math grades at the high school level. Given that Spartanland, like many schools, experiences an achievement gap in math, this is not surprising that there was a marked difference in students’ perceptions of their ability based on their lunch code status. Students’ academic identity and ability result from their own classroom



experiences and messages (explicit or implicit) they have received throughout their formal education (Brinthaupt & Lipka, Eds., 2002). Misconceptions about college, lower college-going rates for low income students and the likelihood that rural low income students do not have parents that have experienced college, are some reasons why a rather large difference in college going self-efficacy existed between the student groups in this area.

It is important to point out that there were two questions on the pre-intervention survey for which the students in the free/reduced category had higher mean scores compared to those in the paid lunch category. These questions were regarding choice of college courses that best fit student interests, and knowledge about computers. It is possible that these results were due to the fact that Spartanland has built in some interest inventory activities into the 6<sup>th</sup> grade advisory curriculum. However, that does not explain why free/reduced students would report being more sure than paid lunch students about choosing college courses aligned to their interests. The technology question is one that counters what many would assume. People assume that technology access is a barrier to students in the free/reduced lunch category yet they reported they were more sure about their computer knowledge than their peers in the paid lunch category. Experiences in Spartanland indicate that students in the free and reduced lunch category need technology devices issued from the school and more frequently check out supportive technology to access internet services at home. As previously mentioned, students do have access to technology rather early in the district, but outscoring the paid lunch category in this question is perplexing and unexplainable. Up until this point, all students have experienced the same formal educational opportunities. Outside experiences that may have contributed to this result could be earlier exposure to personal technology devices given parent work schedules or responsibilities with being the designated care givers for younger siblings. Li, Snow, and White (2015) report

that low income middle school students they studied reported having multiple technology devices at home that they used to access multiple social media platforms and applications. Students reported having more technology access at home than at school.

The aforementioned questions in which the free/reduced category students scored higher than the paid lunch students resulted in some of the smallest mean differences in scores for pre-intervention data. The difference was especially low for the question related to the choice of high school classes needed to get into a good college. The infusion of high school counselors into advisory discussions throughout middle school may be the reason for this finding. Given the high school and middle school are on the same campus, there is an opportunity to expose middle school students to high school counselors and to share what they do with students. Additionally, many of Spartanland middle school students have siblings that have gone through high school and have been exposed to the extensive course planning that happens with counselors.

Questions about family, “I have family support to go to college” and “I can make my family proud with choices after high school”, were not answered much differently for students in each lunch code category. These results align with the literature that clearly contends low income families do have post-secondary aspirations or college expectations for their children that are similar to others. Dyce, Albold, and Long (2013) found that the majority of parents held very high aspirations for college attendance even though 75% of the families stated they were not confident that they could support their student financially in attending college. Clearly, many Spartanland families have had conversations about post-secondary choices and college options with their children. Even though the results of the independent samples t-test showed that the mean difference for the two lunch code groups was not significant, the results indicate practical significance. The post-intervention questions that showed the largest mean difference by lunch

code included questions centered on the ability to go to college, getting accepted to college, paying for college, and planning for college. The mean differences were greater in the post-intervention results than in the pre-intervention results with the students in the paid lunch category showing larger gains in college-going self-efficacy than the free/reduced students. The intervention was more impactful for the students in the paid lunch category even though there was more opportunity for growth with the free/reduced students given their baseline scores.

The scores of the paid lunch students were more influenced, and more salient, than the scores of the students in the free/reduced lunch category. Perceived barriers to college-going are tied to reported levels of college-going self-efficacy. The intervention was designed to dispel myths and perceived barriers. Irvin et al. (2012) demonstrated that there are more perceived barriers for students whose parents did not attend college and for students that report family economic hardship. The economic hardship factor was the one variable that most strongly predicated perceived barriers. This backdrop helps to explain why, even after the intervention, the growth in college-going self-efficacy scores were not as great for students in the free and reduced lunch category. While the intervention impacted college-going self-efficacy scores in a positive manner for both groups of students, four weeks of time could not completely eliminate the perceived barriers for students whose parents did not attend college and for those students in the economic hardship / free and reduced lunch category. In all reality, the students falling in the free/reduced lunch category are typically the ones whose parents did not attend college. Both of these factors influence students' perceived barriers which ultimately impacts their levels of college-going self-efficacy.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

The recommendations for practice are based on the results of the research and local context / local needs, as well as additional research that has produced significant results in positively influencing students' college-going self-efficacy or factors related to the college-going self-efficacy construct. These recommendations include system-wide discussions around equity literacy, college-going experiences, and curricular changes, in addition to professional development for staff that should influence mindset and ultimately practices of educators that could increase college-going self-efficacy for all students.

### **Equity Literacy Work**

While the reported levels of college-going self-efficacy from the two different groups of students (paid lunch and free/reduced lunch) aligned with results obtained in earlier research (Gibbons, 2005; Irvin et al., 2012), the findings from the pre-intervention differences were concerning. Again, while not surprising, the results validated that the Spartanland system is not generating similar outcomes for various groups of students. It is essential to point out here that in the Spartanland region, the deficit mindset of stakeholders regarding students living in poverty is apparent to anyone that is paying attention or chooses to see it or hear it. When staff and community members view Spartanland students with a deficit mindset, all aspects of their education as well as their learner identity is affected. Tackling the deficit mindset of educators, board members, and all employees is one recommendation for Spartanland. Exposing staff to a strengths-based approach is essential in moving forward with regards to providing equitable experiences for students. This is a barrier to having an equitable system in which there are no outcome variances based on groupings. The deficit mindset barrier perpetuates and exacerbates the opportunity gaps that exist in the system. Gorski (2018) expands on this idea:

What we believe about students experiencing poverty and how we relate to them is just as important as the mechanics of how we teach them; in fact, it plays a considerable role in determining both how we teach them and how we engage with their families. (p. 143)

Gorski (2018) advocates for systems to work towards achieving equity-informed relationships with all students and families. This has to start with confronting bias, as well as eliminating the deficit mindset and blame many have with regards to families living in poverty. Working with staff and providing professional development and discussion around Gorski's relational commitments could positively impact students and families in a multitude of ways. The commitments include the following:

1. Embrace a structural view rather than a deficit view of families.
2. Demonstrate respect and compassion in relationships with all families.
3. Cultivate trusting relationships with students grounded in ethics of equity and humility.
4. Broaden notions of family engagement.
5. Ensure that at-school opportunities for family engagement are accessible.
6. Avoid making students or parents "perform" their poverty at school.
7. Become inequity-responsive by finding ways to mitigate barriers they experience.
8. Elicit input from families experiencing poverty.

Regardless of the other curricular-based, explicit work being done in order to build a college-going culture that will positively impact college-going self-efficacy, educators have to tackle the structural problems within our system and community that directly impact all things related to youth living in poverty, including but not limited to their academic opportunities and success, learner identity, and college and career aspirations.

## **Explicit College-Going Experiences**

The college and career readiness push, along with the release of the PaCE framework in Illinois, has resulted in many schools embedding more college and career readiness activities into their curriculum. While the PaCE framework starts with middle school expectations for Illinois students, there are college and career exposure events that can happen in elementary school. One recommendation for Spartanland is to establish a college and career readiness team that will create a framework for elementary experiences that will expose all students to various career opportunities, as well as the value of college or post-secondary education. Brenda Cortez (2008), a practicing school administrator in Los Angeles, claims that exposure events at the elementary level can impact student decision making around college going. Recommendations include creating an elementary vision around college and career exposure, having teachers highlight and talk about their college-going experiences, using names of local colleges to highlight various places in your building / classroom, connecting goal setting and academic achievement to college going, promoting and fostering relationships with local students currently in college, establishing relationships with local colleges, and planning a college visit for upper elementary students. One elementary school in Spartanland has held career fairs which have been a great way to expose students to options and opportunities after high school. There are also formal curricula available to utilize with elementary students. Michelle Jensen (2013) reported positive results when using the *I'm Going to College* curriculum with rural fifth grade students.

As students move into middle school, the research shows explicit conversations and lessons that help to dispel college going myths and provide relevant and accurate information about college-going have positively impacted college-going self-efficacy for students (Gibbons, 2005). A recommendation for the middle school would be to work alongside the College and

Career Counselor to design an explicit curriculum (similar to the one used in this research) to present lessons during 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade that will build college-going self-efficacy and dispel myths. In addition, continuing the practice of college campus visits for all grade levels and highlighting teacher college-going experiences should continue. Subtle efforts such as posting a college flag or banner of each teacher's alma mater outside classroom doors, having college t-shirt days for staff, and inviting college students in to talk about their experiences will enhance the college-going culture and positively impact levels of college-going self-efficacy.

Radcliffe and Bos (2013) conducted a study to find effective strategies in preparing middle school and high school students for college. The goals of their framework included (a) understand the nature of college, (b) recognize that a college education may be important to his/her future success, (c) gain positive perceptions and aspirations about college, (d) prepare academically for college admissions, and (e) set short and long-term goals that support becoming college ready. The researchers were purposeful and explicit in the opportunities and academic interventions they recommended for the students in the study. Opportunities included visiting college campuses, participating in academic tutoring and enrichment, attending presentations by college students and college representatives, creating school related goals that were tied to college readiness, and being assigned a college mentor that helped them through college entrance tasks.

Given Spartanland's close proximity to multiple college and universities, I would encourage the district to expand partnership opportunities and find ways to incorporate college students in a college mentoring capacity. Even if a model as described above could not happen for all students, providing college mentors for first generation students, as well as students living in poverty, could greatly enhance their levels of college-going self-efficacy and significantly

influence the rate of college-going for these students. These activities can (and should) begin while students are in middle school. Given the disparities this research study showed with discrepant levels of college-going self-efficacy for students in the free and reduced category compared to those in the paid lunch category, a differentiated approach to building college-going self-efficacy is recommended. This may include small group conversations and varied experiences for those students that need more support or exposure to college experiences.

### **Limitations**

Despite the controls and methods used to establish reliability and validity, this study did present some limitations. One limitation was that the intervention was delivered by eight different advisory instructors. While all instructors had the same curricular materials (lessons) and the same amount of time and access to the Principal and the College and Career Counselor, some instructors added to the discussion and found additional ways to enhance the lessons. Other instructors did the bare minimum with regards to delivering the lesson. This resulted in not all students having the same intervention experience which could have impacted scores. If staffing and time would have allowed, the ideal scenario would have been that all lessons were delivered by the College and Career Counselor. Another threat to the internal validity of the study is simply the background and the varied experiences of the seventh grade students. While all of these students were able to visit a college campus early in the fall of 2019, others may have siblings in college and therefore have additional exposure to college conversations and college experiences. Parent education levels and the frequency with which college conversations occur, or don't occur, in households, may influence the college going knowledge of the student. In this study design, there was no way to control for the various levels of college going knowledge of the students.



Additionally, even though the students were told their responses were part of a research study and all students were provided with participant numbers, there were a large number that entered in an invalid participant number. There were also multiple students that did not take either the pre or post-survey. This proved to be challenging when analyzing paired responses. If students were absent on the pre or post-survey day, there were no attempts to find those students and have them complete the survey. Another limitation involved the students as subjects. While there was an attempt to get students to take the activities seriously and for students to answer in an accurate manner, there is the risk that any subjects (especially adolescents) provide inaccurate information. One last limitation was the omission of the teacher reactions, responses, and overall involvement in the study. Including teacher perceptions of the lessons, the process and anecdotal changes they observed with student questions, level of engagement, etc., would have enhanced the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Given that mean college going self-efficacy scores improved for all student groups, it is clear that additional research around explicit lessons should occur. The study could be expanded to additional grade levels to provide an incremental / scaffolded approach to these college-going conversations. In addition to expanding the study to additional grade levels, looking at different groups of student performance could also inform educators as to groups that need additional support or dialogue around college-going. The research could be expanded to look at gender, special education status, and parent education level. The experiences of students in each of these groups vary and it would be interesting and informative to know how levels of college-going self-efficacy have been impacted as result of being in any of the aforementioned groups.

As mentioned in the limitations section, conducting additional research on teachers' perceptions as they move students through a college-going intervention would help paint a much more robust picture of all that occurs during the research. Asking teachers to journal after each lesson, or respond to open-ended prompts, would provide some insight into teacher specific factors that may influence lesson delivery and ultimately impact student-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy. Teacher interviews, as well as student interviews, could also help uncover why certain students answered the survey in the manner in which they did. The story element would be beneficial in using the research with staff to enact future change in curriculum as well as mindset towards certain groups of students.

Another opportunity for additional research would be diving into various components of the social cognitive career theory. While this study focused on college-going self-efficacy, the goal setting and outcome expectations could also be studied with middle school students. Given the advisory structure that exists in Spartanland, students could easily be divided into experimental and control groups. Interventions around goal setting and students defining outcomes and outcome expectations could be added to the lessons delivered in this research. In a similar manner as in this study, students would take a pre-intervention survey and a post-intervention survey to determine how student responses differ. This research, along with results presented here, could be analyzed to determine which variable most impacts levels of college-going self-efficacy.

An additional outgrowth of this study and recommendation for future research involves experimental research with the intent of changing educator views of students living in poverty within the local Spartanland context. Teachers would be placed into two different groups and the research groups would be exposed to on-going professional development based on Gorski's

(2018) equity literacy framework. Then, all staff would engage in delivering the college-going lessons presented in this study and students would engage in the pre and post college-going self-efficacy survey. The results would be analyzed to see if there were any changes in pre or post-intervention scores for students in the control versus the experimental classroom to determine if teachers with an understanding of the equity literacy framework approach students or the intervention differently.

Future research could also include determining the impact that a college-going intervention or campaign could have on rural families. Educating families and community members about college-going opportunities and earning potential, plus dispelling myths about college-going, could positively influence student perceptions and student reported levels of college-going self-efficacy. A mixed methods study, in which a community or family intervention was delivered while family stories were captured, could help systems determine the most impactful ways to reach families and build the capital they need to navigate the college process with their children. Levels of college-going self-efficacy could be analyzed for students in the intervention families or students that were not involved in a family intervention.

### **Conclusion**

This study provided the opportunity for rural seventh grade middle school students to report their levels of college-going self-efficacy before and after an explicit college-going intervention was delivered. The goals of the research included determining whether or not an explicit intervention did impact levels of college-going self-efficacy and whether or not students in the free/reduced lunch category were impacted differently than those in the paid lunch category. Findings indicated that an explicit college-going curriculum did significantly impact the reported levels of college-going self-efficacy of these middle school students. While the

college-going self-efficacy scores were different for students in the various lunch categories, both groups showed very similar patterns and trends. The results showed the scores of students in the paid lunch category were higher initially, and these students grew more as a result of the intervention than those of the students in the free/reduced lunch group. Results showed that regardless of groupings, students feel positively about family support when it comes to choices after high school / going to college, as well as their ability to be accepted into college. The areas in which students were most unsure involved questions centered on financing college and having the ability needed in various contexts to attend college. Again, scores for students in the paid lunch category were always higher than those in the free/reduced lunch category, but the exact same patterns emerged between the two groups.

The findings of this study support other components of research in this area (French, 2015; Gibbons, 2005; Irvin et al., 2012), in that dispelling myths around college-going, and providing students with facts about college, would positively impact levels of college-going self-efficacy as well as rates of college application. This research aligns with previous studies in that students demonstrating economic hardship (qualifying for free/reduced lunches) have lower levels of college-going self-efficacy than those in the paid lunch group (Jensen, 2013). This suggests tiered supports or additional interventions may be necessary for students that demonstrate economic hardship. This research will inform future practice in Spartanland.

Considerations for further study were also provided. One consideration would be to expand the intervention to various grade levels to determine if impact varies based on when the intervention is delivered. Analyzing data by additional sub-groups (special education, first generation students) would provide information to inform practice as well. Future research could include providing professional development to teachers prior to the intervention to see how

changes in mindset/various approaches to different students may impact the delivery of the intervention. Expanding the intervention to include other components of the Social Cognitive Career Theory would allow researchers to determine which component had the largest impact on student-reported levels of college-going self-efficacy. Finally, creating an intervention for families that provided more information about college-going and then determining the impact that had on student levels of college-going self-efficacy would be another option for future research.

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APPENDIX A: COLLEGE-GOING SELF-EFFICACY SCALE

**College-Going Self-Efficacy Scale**  
**Melinda M. Gibbons, Ph.D., NCC**  
**University of Tennessee**  
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**Directions:** Please read each of the following questions and answer them as honestly as possible. Circle the response that best describes how sure you feel about each question. There are no right or wrong answers. When answering these questions, remember that college means any type of schooling after high school (community college, four-year university).

*How sure are you about being able to do the following?*

1. I can find a way to pay for college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
2. I can get accepted to a college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
3. I can have family support for going to college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
4. I can choose a good college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
5. I can get a scholarship or grant for college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
6. I can make an educational plan that will prepare me for college  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
7. I can make my family proud with my choices after high school  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
8. I can choose college courses that best fit my interests  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
9. I can pay for college even if my family cannot help me  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
10. I can get good grades in my high school math classes  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure
11. I can get good grades in my high school science classes  
Not at all Sure    Somewhat Sure    Sure    Very Sure



12. I can choose the high school classes needed to get into a good college

Not at all Sure   Somewhat Sure   Sure   Very Sure

13. I can know enough about computers to get into college

Not at all Sure   Somewhat Sure   Sure   Very Sure

14. I can go to college after high school

Not at all Sure   Somewhat Sure   Sure   Very Sure

## APPENDIX B: INTERVENTION LESSONS

### Naviance Lesson Sequence

#### Theme: Myself

1. My Present My Future
2. Self Confidence
3. Exploring My Options
4. My Future Plans

#### Theme: My Success Skills

7. My Academic Challenges & Lesson #8 Together
8. Habits for Success
9. How I Learn
10. My Definition of Success

#### Theme: Career Plan

11. Connecting Interests and Careers
13. Getting Ready for College
14. What's Your Road

#### Theme: College Planning

15. What's College
16. College Myths
17. Facing the Fears of College
18. What Colleges Require

#### Theme: Finances

19. Income & Expenses
20. What College Costs
21. My Financial Aid Options

# Lesson 1

9/5/2019

Naviance



[Naviance Curriculum: District](#) / [Lesson Plans](#) / [My Present vs. My Future](#)

## My Present vs. My Future

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

6

**Theme**

Self Discovery

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn that what they do today has an impact on their future.

### Start Here

What you do now impacts your future. Trying hard in school now sets a habit for success.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about how their present impacts their future.
- 2 Students answer questions about their present and their future.
- 3 Students create questions that they have about their future and make a plan to get them answered.

### Additional Activities

- 1 Invite a high school student to talk about developing successful habits early in school.
- 2 Allow students to discuss their questions for the future.
- 3 Allow students to review their report cards to see where they may have room for improvement.

### Additional Essay

- 1 How can you start good habits today to help you find success in high school?

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<https://static.naviance.com/succeed/curriculum-rosters/#dc20929c-0fdd-1bce-7401-1acd4abe34df/individual-lesson-plan/my-present-vs-my-future>

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: My Present My Future (6.4)

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

Will your middle school choices, attitude, academic success, impact your future? Explain your answer to a partner /whole class.

Do you have conversations with family or teachers about your future? Who would you be most comfortable talking with about your future?

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

Have students share out their plan /actions for improvement in their goal areas (courses).

## Self-Confidence

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

6

**Theme**

Self Discovery

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn the benefits of building self-confidence.

### Start Here

Self-confidence helps students to succeed in school, activities, and at home. Being aware of where self-confidence needs to be improved helps the student grow their skills.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students view a video on self-confidence.
- 2 Students read about hints on increasing confidence, including:
  - Practice
  - Listen to Yourself
  - Talk to Others
- 3 Students list what they would like to be more confident in.
- 4 Students make a plan to increase their confidence in one area.

---

### Additional Activities

- 1 Talk with students about the benefits and signs of having self-confidence.
- 2 Discuss the video with students.
- 3 Have students give examples of how they can improve confidence using the three skills displayed.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 Describe something in which you are very confident.

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: Self Confidence (6.2)

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

What is something you have a lot of self-confidence with? (home, school, sports)

Name someone that you know that is a very self-confident. How do you know this?

Watch video as a whole class.

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

Have students answer online questions independently.

Ask students to share one thing they would like to be more confident in and one thing they are already confident in/ with.

Review the elements in video recommended for becoming more confident with something:  
Practice, Listen to Yourself, Talk to Others

## Exploring My Options

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

Self Discovery

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn to step outside their comfort zone and try something new.

### Start Here

It is easy to get stuck in a place where you are comfortable. But by exploring options and stepping out of your comfort zone, you can open a world of possibilities.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students watch a video on exploring their options.
- 2 Students read about exploring their options.
- 3 Students reflect on a time they've stepped outside their comfort zone.
- 4 Students make a plan to step outside their comfort zone.

---

### Additional Activities

- 1 Tell of a time that you stepped outside of your own comfort zone.
- 2 In pairs, allow students to share their story of getting out of their comfort zone.
- 3 Discuss the stories of the leaders in the video.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 Why is it important to step outside of your comfort zone and explore the options available to you?

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: Exploring My Options (7.13)

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

Where do you feel most comfortable?  
How would you define a ‘comfort zone’?  
What times/places/activities do you feel most comfortable?

Watch video together.

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

How can getting outside your comfort zone help you determine what you want to do in life?  
With a partner, talk about a time you stepped outside your comfort zone and describe the result.  
Talk with a partner about something you would like to do in school, home life, sports but you are nervous about it so therefore, you haven’t tried it.



## My Future Plans

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

Self Discovery

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn about paths to take in and after high school.

### Start Here

Sometimes it is hard to think ahead. But being prepared and having your thoughts together before high school makes the transition easier.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about planning for the future, including:
  - College or University
  - Community or Technical College
  - Military
  - Work
- 2 Students read how to get ready for the future, including:
  - Explore
  - Study
  - Be aware
  - Discuss
- 3 Students answer questions related to planning their future.

---

## Additional Activities

- 1 Invite a high school student to talk about the transition from middle- to high school.
- 2 Discuss concerns that students have about going to high school.
- 3 Invite the school counselor to discuss more about post-high school planning.

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Lesson Name: My Future Plans (7.12)

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Talk through the typical paths screen / page with your students.

Ask questions about what they know about each of those options or what sounds appealing about the options.

Students complete the questions independently and turn in their work.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Share-out; Discuss path selected; have each pair of students talk about things they are currently doing (academics, extracurricular activities) that will help them be successful in the path they have chosen.

## My Academic Challenges

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**  
6

**Theme**  
Success Skills

**Duration**  
15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students recognize and address their academic hurdles.

### Start Here

It is easy to know and concentrate on the subjects that you are good at, but recognizing the areas that need improvement is when the true success begins.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about how to improve academic challenges, including:
  - Talk with your teacher
  - Find connections with subjects you like
  - Play games
  - Change your thinking
  - Practice
- 2 Students list the subjects that challenge them most in school.
- 3 Students make a plan to challenge themselves to succeed in a subject.

## Additional Activities

- 1 Create a discussion on why certain subjects are challenging.
- 2 Share your own story about your academic challenges.
- 3 Find a date to follow up on progress of students addressing these challenges.

## Additional Essay

- 1 Discuss your favorite subject. What do you like best about it? Why do you feel you succeed in this subject?

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: My Academic Challenges (6.10)

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Have students read over the first screen - discuss together before students continue.

What academic challenges do you have?

Which of these might you try?

Have students complete the online module and turn in work.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Share-out - Which academic subjects did you find most challenging? Why?

What is your favorite subject and why is it your favorite subject?

How will you try to improve your performance in your most challenging subject?

## Habits for Success

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

Success Skills

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn strategies for succeeding academically in school and at home.

### Start Here

Having the skills to succeed in school is essential to success. Learn how to make simple strategies into habits for academic success.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students watch a video on school success.
- 2 Students read about school success strategies, including:
  - Talk to your teachers
  - Use a calendar or planner
  - Talk with your classmates
  - Use your time wisely
  - Schedule time in your day for homework
- 3 Students reflect on their success habits, including:
  - Which habits do you do well?
  - Which habits still need to be developed?
  - Choose a habit to begin working on developing. What steps will you take?

---

## Additional Activities

- 1 Talk about your own experience in school related to the success habits.
  - 2 Allow members of the class to present research or other thoughts on each of the success habits.
  - 3 Allow students to share the success habit they chose to develop. Follow up with this in the future.
-

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Lesson Name: My Academic Challenges (6.10)

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Think of someone that you would consider very successful in school. Why do you think they are so successful? What are some things they do that makes them so successful?

Have students complete the module & turn in their work.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Teacher should talk about what makes them successful (habits) in life/or while they were in school.

Have students share some success habits that help them to stay organized, and be successful with their academics.

Ask each student to reflect on one habit they could change that would positively impact their academic success.

## How I Learn

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

Success Skills

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn about various learning preferences and styles.

### Start Here

When students know how they learn best, they are more alert in class and effective at homework. This lesson will cover various learning preferences in which students may identify.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about various learning preferences and hints for working with them, including:
  - Listening
  - Seeing
  - Doing
- 2 Students make a list of ways they learn best (taking notes, listening, etc).
- 3 Students make a plan to improve one of their learning methods.

## Additional Activities

- 1 Share your own experience with students in your class effectively using learning preferences.
- 2 Allow students to act out various learning preference situations.
- 3 Have students keep a learning diary in which they utilize their learning style.

## Additional Essay

- 1 Describe a time where you felt very confident preparing for and doing homework for a class.

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: How I Learn (7.4)

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

How do you learn best? Where do you study that results in you learning best?

Have students complete the module and turn in their work.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Teacher discuss learning preferences and what works for you.

Students - share out with a partner their learning preferences and how they adjust when a teacher's style doesn't match their preferred method of learning.



## My Definition of Success

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

Success Skills

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students determine what true success means to them.

### Start Here

Success can mean different things to different people. Students need to determine what is important to them and build their success around that.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students watch a video about redefining success.
- 2 Students read about what success means and what determines it.
- 3 Students make a list of what factors that would contribute to their definition of success.
- 4 Students make a plan to work toward their version of success and discuss why this is important to them.

### Additional Activities

- 1 Talk about how your definition of success has evolved.
- 2 Create a discussion of showing success with material items vs. intrinsic success.
- 3 Discuss the points of the students in the video.

### Additional Essay

- 1 Create your own definition of success.

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: My Definition of Success (7.8)

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Ask students to think about the most successful student they know and describe what makes that student successful? Ask students to think about the most successful person they know. What makes them successful?

Ask students to go through the lesson on Naviance and submit their work.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Share out:

- After completing the module, what will define success for you as an adult?
- Are these success factors material items or intrinsic?
- What sorts of things will have to happen in order for you to reach this level of success?

## Connecting Interests and Careers



[Preview this lesson](#)

The Basics	Objective	Start Here
<p><b>Grade</b> 8</p> <p><b>Theme</b> Self Discovery</p> <p><b>Duration</b> 15-20 minutes</p>	<p>Students brainstorm interests and connect them to career options.</p>	<p>When students know their interests, and see how they may connect with their future options, they will be better prepared to make decisions about their courses, college major, and future career.</p>

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about interests.
- 2 Students create a list of their interests.
- 3 Students pick a favorite interest.
- 4 Students read about how interests connect to careers.
- 5 Students identify three careers to research where their favorite interest would be used.

---

### Additional Activities

- 1 Allow students to share their interest list.
- 2 Group students together by interest and allow them to brainstorm a list of possible careers related to that interest.
- 3 Share how your own, or a well-known figure's, interests connect to a career.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 What is one of your primary interests? How have others used that interest in their careers? How does that interest weave throughout your life?

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7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: Connecting Interests and Careers

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Take a moment and think of what activity brings you the most joy in life.

What makes a career enjoyable?

Brainstorm careers that would be fun or interesting to have.

During the Lesson: N/A

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Share with a partner your favorite interest from the lesson.

What qualities does that interest have?

What are some careers that relate to your interest?

How might you find more examples of careers that relate to your interests?

## Getting Ready for College

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

7

**Theme**

College Planning

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn what they can do now to prepare to be college-ready.

### Start Here

There are things that students can begin to do to be ready for college when the time comes. Creating a plan helps keep students on track for success.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about preparing for college, including:
  - Study
  - Explore colleges
  - Talk with your family
  - Start saving
- 2 Students create a plan to begin to prepare for college by answering related reflection questions.

---

## Additional Activities

- 1 Allow students to explore college websites.
- 2 Invite a high school senior to talk about how they prepared for the college process.
- 3 Brainstorm a list of questions students have about college.

---

## Additional Essay

- 1 Where do you see yourself in six years? How will your preparations have helped you for this?

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**Lesson Name:** Getting Ready for College

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**  
Brainstorm as a group a list of questions students have about college

**During the Lesson:** N/A

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**  
Get with a partner, share where you see yourself in 6 years when you are graduating from high school. What do you need to do to prepare for this?

Students can share out to the class a goal they wrote during the lesson.

- Study Habits
- Talking to family about college
- Savings Plan Ideas

Write an email to Mrs. Steve, College and Career Counselor, including any additional questions students would like answered about college.

## What's Your Road?

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**  
8

**Theme**  
Career Planning

**Duration**  
20-30 mins

### Objective

Students will begin to combine their different interests in order to identify potential careers that fall within the overlap; thus, broadening their scope of what is possible for their futures.

### Start Here

We all have varying interests. Many times the interests we have can be combined to lead to a meaningful, fun career. See how other people with the same interests have built a lifelong career that they love.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about the What's Your Road Activity.
- 2 Students complete What's Your Road.
- 3 Students list the interests that they chose through the activity.
- 4 Students reflect on the video they enjoyed most.

### Additional Activities

- 1 Allow students to volunteer individual interests they have.
- 2 Collaboration: Have students mash interests with each other, and brainstorm together potential career options.
- 3 Go through What's Your Road? application a second time, this time incorporating different interest categories. Have student compare/contrast their results.

### Additional Essay

- 1 How have you seen your interests connect with your daily activities - the classes you choose, the activities you enjoy, etc.?

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

**Lesson Name:** What's Your Road?

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

Provide examples of interests to students and have them guess a career that might match.

- Taking photos with friends
- Helping build something in the garage with your dad
- Playing a sport
- Helping with tech crew for the school musical

What other interests can you think of that can be used in a specific career?

**During the Lesson:**

Students will need headphones for this lesson to watch Roadtrip Nation Videos

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Get with a partner and run through the What's Your Road program again. Have each partner contribute an interest this time. What careers can you find from mashing your interests with a friend?

Share out what careers you learned about today. Were there any that you didn't think about as a career until now?



## What is College?

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

6

**Theme**

College Planning

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn the basics of college.

### Start Here

Even though college seems far away, it is never too early to begin to explore. By learning what colleges have to offer, you can build your future toward attending college.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students watch a video about college.
- 2 Students read facts about college.
- 3 Students reflect on why they are excited about college and what makes them nervous.
- 4 Students make a plan to begin exploring college.

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### Additional Activities

- 1 Allow students to explore a college profile through the college lookup.
- 2 Tell about your own college experience.
- 3 Invite a college representative to talk about the benefits of college.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 What do you know about college? Where have you learned these things?
-

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: What's College?

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

What do you already know about college?

What is the benefit of going to college?

What levels of college degrees can you obtain?

During the Lesson:

Watch the video together

Go through the facts sheet about college together as a group

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

Teacher - Share your personal college selection experience. What made you decide to attend where you went? Did you have help with the selection process?

What does being admitted to college mean? What do you need to apply?

## College Myths

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**  
6

**Theme**  
College Planning

**Duration**  
10-15 minutes

### Objective

Students learn to bust common college myths.

### Start Here

Sometimes wrong information regarding college is passed on through friends and family. Learn about some of these myths and make a plan to right them.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about common college myths.
- 2 Students reflect on a rumor they have heard and make a plan to research the truth.
- 3 Students take a quick quiz on college myths.

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### Additional Activities

- 1 Create a discussion on rumors students have heard about college.
- 2 Invite a college representative to your class to conduct a Q & A session.
- 3 In pairs, have students investigate rumors they have heard about college.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 Discuss what you are most nervous about when it comes to attending college.

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: College Myths

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

What is a myth?

Discuss with a partner a myth they have heard in their life.

As a class, does anyone know any myths about college?

**During the Lesson:**

Read through the college myths list together

Students should take quiz individually

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Discuss with a partner one college myth you have heard.

Discuss as a class how to determine if a college myth is true or false.

Talk about the people that students can go to in order to determine if something is a myth or a fact: teacher, school counselor, college admissions representative, college website, etc.

## Facing Fears About College

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**  
8

**Theme**  
College Planning

**Duration**  
15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students address rumors and myths concerning college attendance.

### Start Here

Sometimes wrong information circulates about college. By busting these myths, we can begin the path to college with confidence.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about college fears, including:
  - I can't pay for college
  - If my family hasn't gone to college, I can't go to college
  - I will have to leave home to go to college
  - College is hard work
- 2 Students reflect on college myths, including:
  - Choose one myth. How might that have stopped you from applying to college?
  - How will you bust through college myths in the future?

### Additional Activities

- 1 Brainstorm a list of fears that students have about college.
- 2 Tell students about fears you had before attending college.
- 3 In groups, allow students to make a list of pros and cons of attending college.

### Additional Essay

- 1 What is your biggest fear about attending college?

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: Facing the fears of college

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

What are some things that make college fearful?

Share about a time when you were fearful of something, but you did it anyway and were thankful you did.

How are college myths similar to fears?

**During the Lesson:**

Talk through the list of fears together as a group.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Teacher - Tell students about fears you had about attending college.

Based on what we learned today, what are some common fears about college.

Work in small groups to make a list of pros and cons about college. (Why would someone want to go to college? Why might someone decide not to go to college?)

## What do Colleges Require?

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

8

**Theme**

College Planning

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students are made aware of items required on college applications.

### Start Here

Colleges require quite a bit of information on their applications. By knowing what's ahead, students can prepare for success.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about what colleges want to know about students, including:
  - What is your background?
  - How have you done in school?
  - How did you do on standardized tests?
  - Have you been involved in school and your community?
  - What is your writing style?
  - What do your teachers and counselors think?
- 2 Students complete commonly asked questions on a college application.

---

## Additional Activities

- 1 Share your experience applying for college.
- 2 Show students a real college application.
- 3 Discuss the surprises that students saw on the application. What items did they not expect?

---

## Additional Essay

- 1 Why do you feel colleges ask so many questions on an application? What are they trying to gather from students?

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: What Colleges Require

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

What are some things that admissions representatives consider when admitting a student to college?

What are the most important variables to getting admitted to college?

Discuss as a group what GPA is (out of 4.0, cumulative average number based on grades in classes 4=A 3=B C=2 D=1)

Discuss how different colleges require different GPA to get in.

**During the Lesson:** N/A

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Why do colleges want to see you involved in extracurricular activities?

We know colleges do not look at middle school grades. Why might they still be important?

How might this knowledge about college admissions impact you and your experience in high school?

If time allows, walk through the college application process for ISU:

<https://illinoisstate.edu/admissions/freshman-requirements/>

What aspects of this application did you not expect to see?



## Income and Expenses

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

6

**Theme**

Financial Planning

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students understand the value of budgeting.

### Start Here

Spending money is easy, but saving money is not so simple. Learning the value of budgeting will help in both small and large purchases.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about making a budget.
- 2 Students practice budgeting for a sample student.
- 3 Students practice creating a savings budget for a sample student.
- 4 Students make a plan on how to budget in the future.

### Additional Activities

- 1 Play a budget game such as Monopoly or The Game of Life.
- 2 Create a discussion around techniques to save money.
- 3 Share your own story of learning to save money.

### Additional Essay

- 1 What kind of techniques have you seen others use to save money or create a budget?

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: Income and Expenses

**Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):**

What is a budget?

What are the benefits of having a budget?

**During the Lesson:**

Do Not Use the Naviance lesson for this activity. In place of that, work through a Claim Your Future career wheel as a class. Discuss as a group how much should go in each category and why. Then, calculate on a budget sheet as you go to see if you can afford everything.

**Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):**

Pass out the career budget wheels to each student. Use the wheel to fill out the budget sheet depending on the job you selected.

How did your choices end up working out in the end? Did you need to adjust your budget to afford everything?

## What College Costs

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**  
7

**Theme**  
Financial Planning

**Duration**  
15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students understand the fees associated with college.

### Start Here

Going to college costs more than just tuition. Creating a plan to pay for college early in school eases the burden.

### Required Activities

- 1 Students read about the costs associated with college.
- 2 Students read about the resources available to help pay for college.
- 3 Students make a plan to seek out responses to questions they have regarding paying for college.
- 4 Students take a multiple-choice quiz related to college costs.

---

### Additional Activities

- 1 Invite a college representative to speak about college costs.
- 2 Allow students to view college costs in the college look up tool.
- 3 Provide your own experience on paying for college.

---

### Additional Essay

- 1 Describe stories that you have heard of others who have had to pay for college.

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: What College Costs

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

What kind of things do you have to pay for in college?

Share out (teacher) how you paid for your college.

What items outside of tuition might you need to pay for college?

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

Look up Western Illinois University's school tuition and fees:

<http://www.wiu.edu/catalog/2019 - 2020/admission/tuition.php>

Discuss what kinds of things students get out of some of the fees.

Why is it important to investigate college costs early?

What are some ways to plan ahead for covering these costs?

## My Financial Aid Options

[Preview this lesson](#)



### The Basics

**Grade**

8

**Theme**

Financial Planning

**Duration**

15-20 minutes

### Objective

Students learn about how the options to pay for college.

### Start Here

College is expensive, but there are ways to help students pay.

## Required Activities

- 1 Students read about methods to pay for college, including:
  - Federal financial aid
  - Scholarships
  - Other contributions
- 2 Students read about ways they can begin to prepare to save for college:
  - Talk with your family
  - Get involved
  - Study hard
  - Save money
- 3 Students reflect on how they will begin to pay for college.
- 4 Students make a list of questions they would like to ask their family.

---

## Additional Activities

- 1 Invite a college representative to speak about paying for college.
- 2 Allow students to view college profiles to investigate average aid.
- 3 In groups, have students research each of the three types of ways to pay for college.

Naviance Lesson Supplement  
7th Grade College Going Self-efficacy Intervention

Lesson Name: My Financial Aid Options

Prior to the Naviance Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions):

What is financial aid?

Which one of these do you need to pay back? Grant, Loan, Scholarship (Correct answer: Loan)

Has anyone's family discussed paying for college with you?

Post Lesson (Prompts, discussion questions, share-out):

Prompt students to go home and talk to their parents about making a financial plan for college.

- Brainstorm questions that students can ask at home tonight.

Break into groups of three: Each member research about one of these things: Grants, Scholarships, Loans. Share out what they learned

Where is the most common place that students gain financial aid from? (Answer: College/University through athletic or academic success)

## APPENDIX C: TEACHER RECRUITMENT EMAIL / SCRIPT

Dear Teachers,

I am completing a research study investigating how a college curriculum/intervention impacts students' college going self- efficacy as reported via a survey. Participation will involve delivering specific aligned Naviance lessons to your advisory students over a period of four weeks. Additionally, teachers will be asked to meet before school on four occasions to preview the lessons and be provided with background on the study. The lessons are all from Naviance so the platform should be familiar to you and to the students. In addition to teaching or delivering the lessons, teachers will administer a pre and post survey to students that will measure their college going self-efficacy. The survey will be electronic in nature and will only require the teachers to disseminate randomly generated participant numbers to the students and to provide a link to the survey.

Your participation is voluntary. You will not be treated differently based on whether you choose to participate or choose not to participate. If you would like to be a part of this research study, please respond to this email.

Thank you very much for your time and interest in this study. Your participation will be invaluable to the success of this research study.

Sincerely,

Laura O'Donnell

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Dear Teacher:

You are being invited to participate in a research study I am conducting along with Dr. Neil Sappington of the Education Foundations and Administration (EAF) Department at Illinois State University. The study is designed to investigate the impact that a college curriculum has on self-reported student levels of college going self-efficacy. You have been selected based on the response to my initial recruitment letter and because you have a seventh grade student in your advisory. I am inviting your participation, which will involve four meetings to prepare you for the college going intervention and then the delivery of twenty college going lessons that will be delivered over a four week period of time.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty of any kind. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your treatment by school personnel in any way. The results of the study will be used in a written report and oral presentation and may later be used for a dissertation study, but your name will never be used. I will take all precautions to maintain your confidentiality.

There is minimal physical, psychological or social risks to this research study. The possible benefit of your participation would be to help shape future advisory lessons specifically those connected to college going. Your data, even if deidentified, will not be used in other research projects.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (309) 379-6011 ext. 1113. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Sincerely,

Laura O'Donnell

I give consent to participate in the above study.

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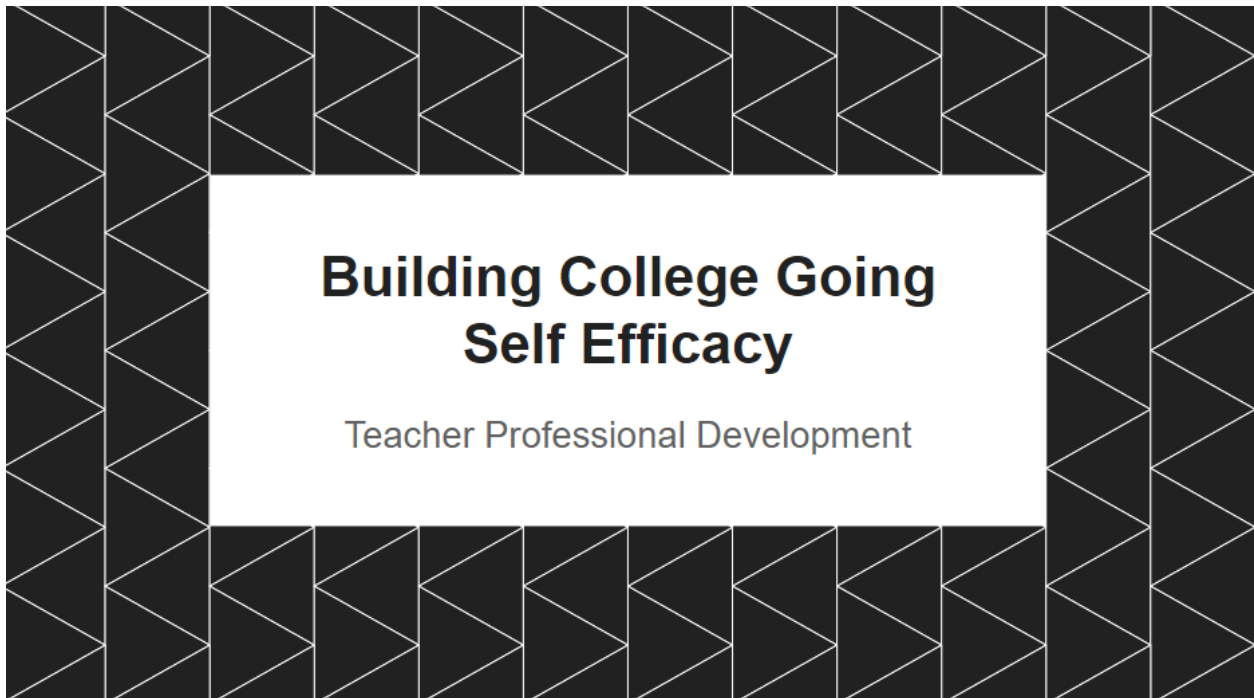
Signature

---

Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-5527.





## Research Questions

- Is there a statistically significant mean difference in scores of college going self efficacy reported by low income rural students and non-low income rural students?
- How does a targeted college going intervention, designed to enhance the college going self efficacy of middle school students, impact student reported levels of college going self efficacy?

# What is College Going Self Efficacy?

*College going self efficacy* - construct derived from a combination of perceived ability to complete the tasks needed to arrive at college and the ability to be successful at college (Gibbons & Borders, 2010).

## We know....

- Students from low income households & those with low parent education tend to have lower college going attendance rates.
- The literature recommends interventions are based in self efficacy to increase the student beliefs about their ability to attend college.
- The intervention should include access to opportunities for success, role models and concrete information about college.
- / The intervention should include information about how to pay for college, and how to select colleges that are feasible and work for the student.

Gibbons & Borders, 2010. *A measure of college going self efficacy for middle school students.*

## What is the Study Design?

- Quantitative study with all current OMS 7th grade students.
- Students will take a pre survey (prior to intervention) and a post survey to gauge their college going self efficacy (self reported).
- The intervention will last approximately four weeks.
- Part of the intervention will also be a whole class visit to Heartland Community College.
- Lessons were selected based on the research indicating what elements contribute to students developing college going self efficacy.
- Lessons are from Naviance with some additional supplemental activities.

## The College Going Self Efficacy Scale

- Consists of 14 items related to college attendance and 16 items related to college persistence.
- These are different but related concepts.
- Subscale scores for attendance and for persistence, as well as a total score, provide an indication of strength of college going self efficacy beliefs.
- Higher scores indicate higher self efficacy perceptions.

## The Intervention Lessons

### Theme: Myself

- My Present My Future
- Self Confidence
- Exploring My Options
- My Future Plans



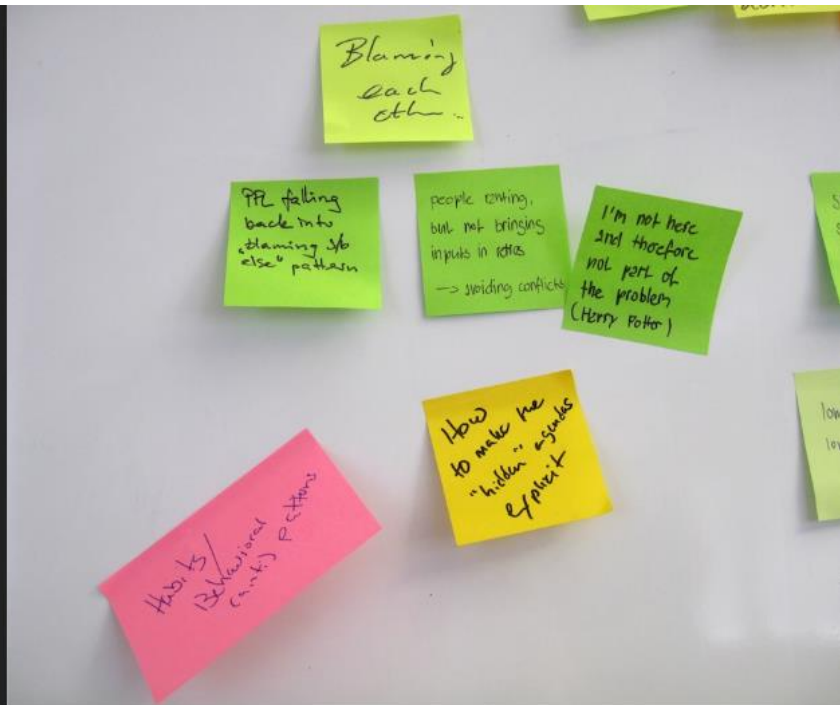
## Theme: My Success Skills

My Academic Challenges & Habits for Success

Together

How I Learn

My Definition of Success



## Theme: Career Planning

- Interest Inventory Administered to Students
- Connecting Interests and Careers
- Getting Ready for College
- What's Your Road?



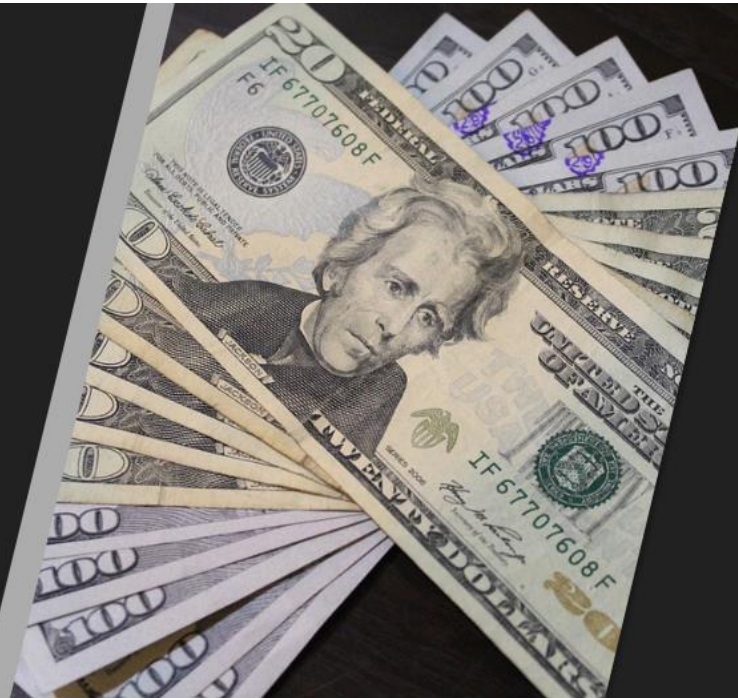
## Theme: College Planning

- What's College?
- College Myths
- Facing the Fears of College
- What Colleges Require



## Theme: Finances

- Income & Expenses
- What College Costs
- My Financial Aid Options
- [Claim Your Future](#)
  - [Budget Worksheet](#)



## APPENDIX F: PARENT PERMISSION FORM

Dear Parent:

You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study I am conducting along with Dr. Neil Sappington of the Education Foundations and Administration (EAF) Department at Illinois State University. I will be investigating the impact that college going lessons have on student's college going self-efficacy. These lessons aligned to college and career readiness and therefore will occur during your child's advisory period. Your child has been asked to participate because she/he is a 7<sup>th</sup> grade student at Olympia Middle School.

Their participation in this study is voluntary. Neither you nor your child will be penalized if he/she chooses to skip parts of the study, not participate, or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, he/she will complete an online survey before the lessons are taught and approximately four weeks later after the lessons are complete. Your child will include their student identification number to begin the survey. This is so that the survey results can be analyzed according to lunch code. The data included in results will be deidentified. The deidentified data will not be used for any other research projects.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The results of the study will be used as part of a dissertation study to determine the impact targeted lessons have on the college going self-efficacy of students. Your child's name will never be used.

The possible benefit of your child's participation would be to reflect on interests, future planning and to gather concrete information about attending college. We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (309) 379-6011.

Sincerely,

Laura O'Donnell  
Assistant Superintendent

**If you choose to allow your child to participate in this study, no further action is needed. If you do not wish for your child to participate in the study, sign and return this form [within three weeks of receiving this form]. Only sign below if you do NOT wish for your child to participate in the study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Research Ethics & Compliance Office at Illinois State University at (309) 438-5527 or [IRB@ilstu.edu](mailto:IRB@ilstu.edu).



## APPENDIX G: STUDENT ASSENT

[The following will be included on a cover page before students begin the survey]

Dear Student/Participant--

You are being asked to take a short survey to determine how college going lessons influence your concept of college going self-efficacy. This survey is being used as part of a research study done by Mrs. O'Donnell and Dr. Neil Sappington, Associate Professor at Illinois State University (ISU). Doing this survey is voluntary. You will not be in trouble if you choose not to participate. Your answers will be secret. The survey will take about 10 minutes to finish. By taking the survey you will help improve the college and career readiness lessons that occur during advisory.

We do not anticipate any risks beyond those that would occur in everyday life.

Your data, even if deidentified, will not be used in other research projects.

Please click this box to begin the survey. [link must be clicked to begin survey]