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# Factors That Affect Developmental Education In Rural Appalachia

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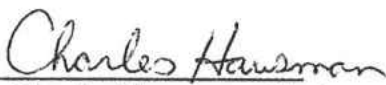
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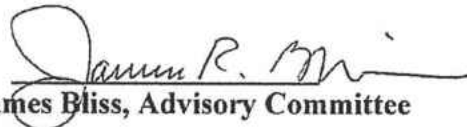
**Factors that Affect Developmental Education in Rural Appalachia**

By

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FACTORS THAT AFFECT DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION IN RURAL  
APPALACHIA

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all of my family. Especially to my husband Joe, my parents Odell and Joann and my brother Jared for their unwavering support, uplifting faith and guidance throughout this educational process.

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I would like to thank and recognize my husband, Joe. I have been a student since we got married. Thank you for being understanding and providing moral support and encouragement that I would finish. Thank you for supporting me when I would get down--you always lift me up and make me smile—the Lord has truly blessed us. I would like to thank my parents Odell and Joann Wilson who have served as excellent role models and have always encouraged me to further my education all of my life. You have always offered encouraging support; I could not ask nor want for better parents. I love you very much! I would like to thank my brother, Jared, who has never once doubted my capabilities and provided encouragement; you're the best big brother a little sister could have and have always supported me. I would like to thank my besties: Robin, Elana, Tessa, Jen, who listen to me gripe, have mini meltdowns and just for being there. I also want to thank Sandy, I'm glad we were able to vent, compare e-mails and finish together!

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation depicts the lives of ten students who are enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural community college in Appalachian Mountains. They share their home life, life experiences and struggles faced; however, they want to better themselves and that motivation keeps them going. This study is important study due to the fact little qualitative research has been conducted in the past reflecting the lives of the Appalachian student. Also, this dissertation provides a historical background of developmental education and how it plays an essential role in community colleges. The problem is that students are coming to college unprepared for college level courses. Also, there has been an increase in the number of students who must take a developmental education course. The staggering fact is these students are traditional students who recently graduated from high school. This study will shed light on factors that affect student's college readiness at the community college level in the rural Appalachian Mountains. Moreover, the purpose of this study will articulate the students' beliefs of what issues affected their academic pathway.



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This is a qualitative study about factors which have affected ten students in a rural area in the Appalachian Mountains. I listened and recorded the students' stories of their home lives and challenges that they experienced in primary and secondary school. The students interviewed provide an image of a representative psample of their fellow classmates in this rural Appalachian area. "Appalachia is defined by the federal Appalachian Regional Commission as a mountain range that extends 13 states and 200,000 square miles, running from northeast Mississippi to southwest New York" (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000, p. 3). In addition, this study sheds light on how students perceive developmental classes and illustrates data on retention.

Education has always been viewed as a crucial component of our country. No more than 200 years ago, obtaining a formal collegiate education was for the privileged and higher class. Due to industry and the workforce, most students had to withdraw from school once they reached the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade in order to support the family and contribute in order survive. During the post-Civil War era, urbanization, industry and emancipation from slavery created a greater concentration of families that had the realization that a college education was actually possible (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). However, over the years, some students have required extra assistance in developing their skills in certain core areas such as reading, writing and math in order to further their education. For students who need remediation, the curriculum can appear daunting; however, incorporating different teaching pedagogies in developmental education courses

can provide the extra academic boost students require to be successful in general education courses at community colleges and universities.

Sixty percent of all community college students are enrolled in at least one developmental education course (Bailey, 2009). Developmental education courses usually consist of mathematics, reading and writing (Zeidenberg, 2008). Underprepared students have failed to meet the mandatory placement standards and therefore before being admitted to general education courses are required to complete a sequence of developmental education courses which is based on their placement needs.

Developmental education is a barrier that many of today's college students must overcome while attending a postsecondary institution. Over the past 200 years, developmental education has been referred to by many names, ranging from preparatory, remedial, transitional, or developmental courses; regardless, the purpose is the same-- which is to prepare students for credit bearing courses in college. However, students enrolling at postsecondary institutions who have weak academic skills may encounter significant obstacles initially in their college career (Bailey, 2009). Developmental education is a pathway designed to enhance a student's skills in areas where improvement is needed. The purpose of developmental education is to address and prepare students for material that was overlooked or missed while in high school or secondary schools (Education Commission of the states, 2012; Boatman & Long, 2013). The courses are designed to help prepare students in their core classes and then be able to work in the workforce (Long & Boatman, 2013).

Despite all of the potential benefits of developmental education, there are several negative connotations associated with developmental education. For example one

myth is the presence of developmental education lowers the standards of the institution (Boylan & Bonham, 1994). However, the opposite actually occurs in that the sole purpose of developmental education courses is to raise the academic standards by enhancing the quality of the student's education (Keimig, 1983). Incorporating the developmental education curriculum is a controversial topic many community colleges and universities face and as a result is a decision that impacts the students needing remedial coursework. Even though the percentage of students enrolled in developmental education courses continues to increase, many states are discouraging or not providing developmental coursework. Levin and Calcagno (2008) reported that many states are discouraging public four-year institutions from providing developmental coursework, which leaves the burden on two-year colleges for remediation. Moreover, community colleges continue to have developmental education programs to assist students develop the necessary skills necessary to succeed in their education.

Zeidenberg (2008) indicated that the community college's mission statement is focused on meeting the needs of the student; however, he particularly focused on the challenges facing underprepared students such as placement tests, costs, and outcomes. For example, due to changes in legislation, community colleges and universities in the state of Florida have done away with the requirements of remediation (Ordway, 2013). Moreover, these state's community colleges do not even require placement testing to enroll in courses; students can begin taking credit bearing courses immediately (Ordway, 2013). Due to these types of policy changes, students continue to arrive at institutions underprepared. Society places a negative stigma on developmental education and believes that it lowers the standards of the institution (Boylan & Bonham, 1994). The

stigma of students taking developmental courses was created by academics who looked down or ignored the field of developmental education (Smith, 2015). The association of developmental education with a decline in academic standards is untrue (Arendale, 2011). However, the reverse is actually true; the sole purpose of developmental education courses is to improve the quality of the student's learning. As states adopt policies to eliminate the need for remediation, students continue to graduate from high school underprepared; therefore, community colleges are faced with the daunting task of teaching students what was lacking in high school (Longman & Boatman, 2013).

Due to factors beyond the control of community colleges, there is an increase of students placed into developmental courses, and the numbers continue to rise. In 1995, developmental education involved “almost three million students and over 100,000 faculty and staff” (Boylan, 1995, p. 7). It is estimated that 40 percent of first year college students are enrolled in some form of developmental or remedial coursework; moreover, statistics can be as high as six out of ten students at some institutions being enrolled in remedial coursework (NCES, 2003; Bettinger & Long, 2009b; Bailey, 2009; Long & Boatman, 2013). Educators across the nation are facing similar challenges with college readiness, and an emphasis in the field of developmental education continues to increase (Long & Boatman, 2013).

In Kentucky, students continue to graduate from secondary schools underprepared and are placed into developmental courses as a result of low ACT scores, COMPASS or ACCUPLACER scores. A rural community college in the Appalachian region serves a tri-county area in mountainous eastern Kentucky: Harlan, Letcher, and Bell. Data provided by the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) profile



2008-2010 reveals that in terms of college readiness, 71.1 percent of Harlan County students, 74.3 percent of Letcher County students, and 71 percent of Bell County students are underprepared in one or more academic subjects when they apply to college. Underprepared students are those who must complete developmental education classes before enrolling in college level classes that generate credits. For example, if a student is underprepared in math, he/ she must complete the appropriate levels of developmental math coursework before enrolling in college level Algebra. Compared to the state percentage of 48.2 percent of students underprepared in math, it is easy to see that students in Eastern Kentucky are ill prepared to be successful in college. According to the CPE, the average ACT score in Kentucky is 20.6. The average ACT score is 19.8 in Bell County, 18.2 in Harlan County and 19.2 in Letcher County.

### **Appalachian Region and Life**

In order to fully understand this study, one must first become acquainted with the Appalachian people and the culture. The outside media portrays the people who live in the Appalachia region as uneducated, lazy and racist. On the surface, an outsider may not be familiar with the terminology such as “holler”, “kin folk” or “gettin above yur raisin,” but those terms make the Appalachian culture unique. Just like a quilt which is coveted and prized in the Appalachian area, there are many pieces of material which are closely stitched together to make a beautiful possession. The families of the Appalachian region are very close knit. The heritage and roots of Appalachia are made up of a diverse population who migrated to the region to find work—mostly in the coalfields. Since the area is monetarily poor, the people have learned to utilize the wealth from the land in order to survive. The immigrants migrated to the area from 38 nationalities, the most

prominent of which were Italian, Spanish, Czech, Polish, English, Welsh, Irish and Scottish (History, n.d.). As a result of these diverse cultures, the mountains are filled with people with different educational backgrounds, religions and superstitions for daily living. As a result of working to support the family, many students did not even go to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, much less obtain a high school diploma. Once the children were able to work, they were put in the mines to help support the family. The term “gettin above yur raisin” in the Appalachian region is a negative term which implies an individual is seeking more than what their parents and grandparents possesses. The Appalachian people are proud of their heritage and for what they have worked for throughout their life; moreover, the statement “getting above yur raisin” reflects that what the family or culture has worked for to be the norm is not sufficient enough for a fellow family member to be happy and content with life. In fact, family is an important component to an Appalachian child; moreover, the cultural values and assumptions of the parent or caregiver are normally transferred indirectly to the child (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000; Harris & Liebert, 1987).

The Appalachian region is best known for its economic hardship (Mather, 2004). In the Appalachian region, the history of placement into developmental education courses can trace back to a lack of emphasis on school attendance, inadequate funding in schools, and low completion rates (Branscome, 1972; Mulkey & Henry, 1988). Another factor in the Appalachian region is poverty. Income is highly correlated with school quality; moreover, lower income students are more likely to attend schools with less rigor in college preparatory courses (Long & Boatman, 2013). Students are affected by several factors; however, poverty is the most common (Roueche & Roueche, 1999). According to the U.S. Census 2008-2012, only 18.6% of the population in Kentucky are below the

poverty level. However, 32.5% of citizens in Harlan, 33.5% of citizens in Bell and 25.7% in Letcher County are below the poverty level. According to McCabe (2000), children who grow up in poverty face life challenges such as poor medical care and malnutrition. In addition, as a part of their daily lives, children in rural Appalachia see violence, abuse, drugs, and sexual assault (McCabe, 2000). Children that are already deemed poor, start life at a disadvantage: lack of early education, poor health care, poor home environment and lack of parental care (McCabe, 2000).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate the factors or barriers which have played an essential role in hindering students who are placed into developmental education courses at the community college level. Is there a common theme or element among students in the Appalachian region that is not being met by secondary schools? This study will investigate national and state trends in developmental education and what transformations are being undertaken at the postsecondary level to increase retention. Moreover, this study will determine what factors are central to the students in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky.

Due to my positionality as a developmental education instructor and Director of Developmental Education at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College, it is my mission to help prepare students for a career and degree once they enroll in the institution. Many of the students enrolling are deficient in math, reading and writing. It is my mission to identify the common factors of why students are coming to college underprepared. Once those factors have been identified, I can assist the secondary schools in methods to alleviate the large number of students who would be placed in

developmental courses. A community college cannot reteach all the skills which were not obtained in elementary and secondary schools; however, we as educators, can enhance the skills lacking through developmental education classes and help the student accomplish and pursue their goal of obtaining a degree. Researchers of the developmental education realm have written articles concerning developmental education as a whole yet, there is not a study solely focusing on factors contributing to under-preparedness in the Appalachian Mountains.

### **Significance of the Study**

Students are continuing to enroll at postsecondary institutions underprepared. The significance of this study is to determine what the common factors are among students who are being placed, based on placement scores, into developmental education courses. This is not an issue that is solely based in the rural Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky but an issues that is colleges and universities nationwide are facing. In addition, this study will investigate national and state trends in developmental education to determine what methods and strategies have been implemented to increase student success based on retention or increased grade point average.

### **Delimitations**

This study is limited to students who are enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural, community college in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky. A majority of prior research focuses on how institutions can assist developmental students or what measures can be taken to increase retention. This study investigates the factors that contribute to students and college readiness which impacts their academic track at the community college level. This study focuses on ten community college students

currently enrolled. These students were interviewed and provided a narrative of their story and background—including factors of why they believe they were placed into and are taking remedial courses. In addition, developmental education courses at a rural community college in Appalachia are evaluated based on student GPA in the courses and retention from fall 2014 to fall 2015. The size of the study limits the study's generalizability.

### **Research Questions**

1. What factors are affecting students who are underprepared when entering community college?
2. To what extent do developmental education courses prepare students to be successful at community college?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following defined terms are found throughout the study and will assist the reader in clarity:

*Appalachian or Appalachia:* This term describes an area or the people living in an area which is defined by the “federal Appalachian Regional Commission as a mountain range that extends 13 states and 200,000 square miles, running from northeast Mississippi to southwest New York” (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000, p. 3). These states include parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and the entire state of West Virginia.

*College readiness:* This term is defined as “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution” (Conley, 2008, p.4).

*Developmental Education:* “A continuum of courses and services ranging from tutoring and advising to remedial coursework on college and university campuses” (Boylan, Bonham, Clark-Keefe, Drewes, & Saxon, 2004, p.7).

*First- generation student:* This term means that neither parent has graduated from college. In most cases, it implies that neither parent has enrolled in colleges courses. (Hand & Payne, 2008; Harrell & Forney, 2003).

*Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE):* The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is a state level agency authorized to oversee the administration and operations of both public and private colleges and universities throughout the state of Kentucky.

*Remedial courses:* This term is a synonym for developmental courses. These are “instructional courses designed for students deficient in the general competencies necessary for a regular postsecondary curriculum and educational setting” (IPEDS, n.d.a, section R, para. 20).

*Retention:* This term is defined as a process in which a student maintains consistent, continuous enrollment in course work at an educational institution from one academic year to the next. Moreover, the student is continuing to earn satisfactory academic progress toward their collegiate degree.

*Traditional student:* A student between the age of 17-24 and/ or who is enrolled in college directly from high school (“Family Resources | First Year Programs | Eastern Kentucky University,” n.d.).

*Under-prepared student:* “Any student who needs to develop their cognitive or affective abilities in order to succeed in post-secondary education experience” (Boylan, 2002, p.3).

## **Conclusion**

Students are continuing to be placed into developmental courses in colleges across the United States. Developmental education is crucial to a student's academic career when one is underprepared in core classes. It is imperative to determine the common denominator which is affecting today's students. In order to assist colleges with efforts of restructuring and transforming the mode of developmental education courses, one needs to understand the cause of the problem. This dissertation study investigates various factors that are contributing to the increase in the number of developmental students at a community college in the Appalachian area of Eastern Kentucky. These factors were determined and established by first year community college students who are currently enrolled in developmental education courses. The study sought to determine if common factors exert an influence on placement of students in developmental education courses resulting from under-preparedness upon completion of the secondary school system.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this review is to provide a background for developmental education, how it plays an essential role in community colleges, and what national and state trends currently play a role in molding developmental education. In addition, the literature will highlight common factors in secondary education that prevent college readiness. College educators are asking, why there is an increase in developmental students? Developmental education is an area where little departmental emphasis was once placed; however, now educators and administrators are seeing the importance of remediating a student once enrolled in college and have taken initiative to create beneficial courses.

### **History of Developmental Education**

Remediating students is not a new concept in American colleges. In fact, the process dates back over 200 years and has been established at some of the most prestigious institutes in our nation (Canfield, 1889). For example, developmental education courses can be traced back to Yale and other America's founding universities, as early as 1828 (Wyatt, 1992). Developmental education was established and deemed necessary due to the creation of the admission requirements at the postsecondary institutions (Arendale, 2011). Over the years, there has been a constant bridge between higher education and preparatory schools involving the academic preparation of students (Brier, 1984; Arendale, 2011). Moreover, a majority of students seeking admission were deficient in their foreign language requirement which involved Greek and Latin. By the late 1800s, in addition to Greek and Latin, institutions such as Harvard and Yale had added mathematics, history, geography and English as subject areas for assessment



(Broome, 1903). Faculty at Harvard were complaining that students lacked competency in formal writing; therefore, in 1874, Harvard established the first remedial English course (Arendale, 2011). The introduction of remedial courses into the formerly fixed curriculum was possible due to permitting students the choice of elective courses (Arendale, 2011).

By 1889, 80 percent of the nation's colleges and universities had established preparatory programs to assist underprepared students (Canfield, 1889). Universities would spend time remediating and tutoring students, and focusing on the student's deficiency in order to prepare them for college level courses. For nearly 200 years, colleges have been accepting underprepared students who have not met mandatory placement standards; however, the institutions developed methods to meet the needs of underprepared learners (Casazza, 1999). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, formal secondary schools were not established in the United States; therefore, students had to work with private tutors to prepare for college (Wyatt, 1992). In the 1800s, almost all students at Harvard University were underprepared; moreover, these were students who came from privileged backgrounds (Garrison, 1892; Goodwin, 1896; Hill 1885). In the 1830s, New York University in New York City implemented an early model of an academic preparatory academy. This academic strategy provided instruction in math, physical science, philosophy, and English literature (Dempsey, 1985). In 1865, at the University of Wisconsin, 331 students enrolled at the institution; 41 of those students attended regular classes, and the remaining 290 or 88 percent had to attend classes in the preparatory department (Wyatt, 1992; Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). In 1876, at Vassar

College, more than 45 percent of college students were enrolled in one or more developmental courses (Arendale, 2011; Roberts, 1986).

Few members in American society attended postsecondary education due to the lack of occupations that required formal training; most individuals worked within the family working a trade or on the family farm (Arendale, 2011). Due to the post-Civil War era, immigrants knew the importance of education and wanted to obtain a better life for their family in America. Between 1881 and 1925, 25 million immigrants needed assistance and education to overcome language barriers and poor education backgrounds in order to obtain jobs in America which was fast paced and focused on industry (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). In 1894, 40 percent of all first year students were enrolled in college preparatory courses (Ignash, 1997). By the late 1800s, nearly all the students attending Harvard University were underprepared; this included students who came from privileged backgrounds (Goodwin, 1895).

In 1862, the Morrill Act was signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862. Officially titled "An Act Donating Public Lands to the Several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the Benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts," the Morrill Act provided each state with 30,000 acres of federal land for each member in their Congressional delegation. The land was then sold by the states and the proceeds used to fund public colleges that focused on agriculture and the mechanical arts. Sixty-nine colleges were funded by these land grants, including Cornell University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

Table 2.1 illustrates the different phases of developmental education in the United States and the students served. The time period covered spans from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to present.

Table 2.1: Phases of Developmental Education

<b>Time Period</b>	<b>Forms of Developmental Education</b>	<b>Students Predominately Served during This Time Period</b>
Mid 1600s to 1820s	Tutoring	Privileged White males
1820s to 1860s	Pre-collegiate preparatory academy and tutoring	Privileged White males
1860s to Mid-1940s	Remedial education classes within college preparatory programs and tutoring	Mostly White males
Mid 1940s to Early 1970s	Remedial education classes integrated within the institution, tutoring, and compensatory education	Traditional White male students, nontraditional males and females, and federal legislative priority groups: first-generation college, economically-disadvantaged, and students of color
Early 1970s to Mid-1990s	Developmental education, learning assistance, tutoring, and supplemental instruction	Previous groups listed above and an increase in older student who are returning to education or attending postsecondary education for first time.
Mid 1990s to Present	Developmental education with expansion into enrichment activities, classes and programs	Previous groups listed above and an increase in number of general students who want to deepen mastery of academic content material

(Arendale, 2011)

### **The Traditional Student**

Today's students have grown up in an era where rapid change and expansiveness in information and technology have occurred (Newton, 2000). To critique and create a profile of the traditional aged new student can be difficult. According to Eastern

Kentucky University, traditional undergraduate students are classified as students between the ages of 17-24 and/ or who are enrolled in college directly from high school (Eastern Kentucky University, n.d.). Taylor, who is a nationally recognized expert on education practice and workplace management, has coined the term “Generation NeXt” for this generation of students. Taylor (2010) describes today’s traditional student as one who needs to understand the benefit and outcome of what is in it for them in order to participate in an activity. Newton (2000) describes the millennial student as “ambitious, precocious, stressed, indifferent, wayward, techno-nerd, heterogeneous, politically conservative and sexually active” (p.8).

This generation of student also is much closer and dependent upon their parents to interfere and intervene in any academic problem; Taylor has coined parents as helicopter parents due to their “hovering and swooping in for rescue” (Taylor, 2006). In addition, students are wired differently than in previous generations. However, even though these students are more dependent on their parents, they have had a greater opportunity and exposure to adult activity and experimentation than other generations (Newton, 2000). This generation is part of the latch key kids or home alone generation, where they spent hours on the internet or in front of a television (Newton, 2000).

Students viewed as digital natives have been exposed to a constant plethora of media, social networking, and text messaging to the extent that they no longer see the importance of communicating face-to-face; instead they utilize text messaging (Taylor, 2010). Faculty must realize that these students have different attitudes and behavioral traits as a result of the social and technology revolution (Newton, 2000). This generation of student is more ambitious in terms of career aspirations; however, they have unrealistic

expectations of how to achieve their goals (Newton, 2000). Tapscott (1997) explains these students are slackers who have a false sense of entitlement. As this generation enters the workforce or the classroom, they have unrealistic demands from the employers and the instructors.

Although these students may be tech savvy, Tapscott, author of *Grown Up Digital*, describes negative characteristics of this generation. He explains below the top ten of these characteristics in his book:

1. They're dumber than we were at their age.
2. They're screenagers, net addicted, losing their social skills, and they have no time for sports or healthy activities.
3. They have no shame.
4. Because their parents have coddled them, they are adrift in the world and afraid to choose a path.
5. They steal—in terms of property rights such as downloading music.
6. They're bullying friends online.
7. They're violent. (In terms of school violence and shootings)
8. They have no work ethic and will be bad employees.
9. This is the latest narcissistic “me” generation.
10. They don't give a damn. (No morals or values—do not care about others).

### **Appalachian Region**

Appalachian's sociological characteristics trace back to poor funding, low levels of education completion and lack of emphasis on school attendance (Mulkey & Henry, 1988; Branscome, 1972). The students in the Appalachian region are already stigmatized

due to their culture and upbringing (Cole, 1995). Due to the remote and isolated region, Appalachia suffered from the lack of established schools and need for quality instructors (Whisnant, 1983). It has been a challenge to secure long term, well-educated and qualified instructors to the rural areas, whereas larger urban areas are able to entice the instructors with more attractive benefits and bonuses (Herzog & Pittman, 1999; Profitt, Sale, Alexander, & Andrews, 2004).

Howard & Solberg (2006) illustrate that negative messages and ideas, particularly in schools and society, can have a negative impact on a student's self-esteem, behavioral and academic development. A large difference between rural Appalachia and the United States is the culture gap and the obvious dialect; students from Appalachia are put down due to their speech patterns and feel disempowered. A normal student in urban America already faces peer-pressure, being bullied and lack of family support; however, in Appalachia, the results are compounded, and poverty is a daily issue many students must face (Cole, 1995). According to Lohmann (1990), "poverty is as closely associated with the Appalachian region as coal mining and the hammer dulcimer" (p.76). The Appalachian culture is a region that stresses the uniqueness of beliefs, folkways and attitudes of the region. In an article by Cole (1995), the author begins with a quote from a freshman student attending a university in the Appalachian Mountains in Southwest Virginia.

Mom graduated high school, but Dad, he just made it to the third grade; he skipped school a lot because he had to work in the fields so they would have food to eat. I think he was fifteen and in the third grade, and he just quit. And I see how it's affected him. He's never read a book before, and I can't imagine that, and I just

want to do so much better than him. He always led me to believe that I was smart, and that I could do anything that I wanted to do. I want him to be proud of me.

Since the country was founded, family, church and school have been the heart of the rural communities (Stern, 1994). The Appalachian people have worked hard over the years mining coal, working with timber or agriculture, and that replaced the value of education with a strong work ethic and supportive family (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000). Moreover, students in rural areas struggle with peer identify resulting in securitizing their educational identify and opportunity as inadequate when compared to other areas (Cole, 1995). Often times, students may hide their Appalachian identify if they are in an urban setting to keep from being stereotyped and scrutinized. The educational commitment in the Appalachian region is lacking; in fact, “no institution of American society is more divorced from Appalachia than the higher education system which resides within it” (Wallace & Diekroger, 2000, p. 138; Ergood & Kuhre, 1991, p. 3).

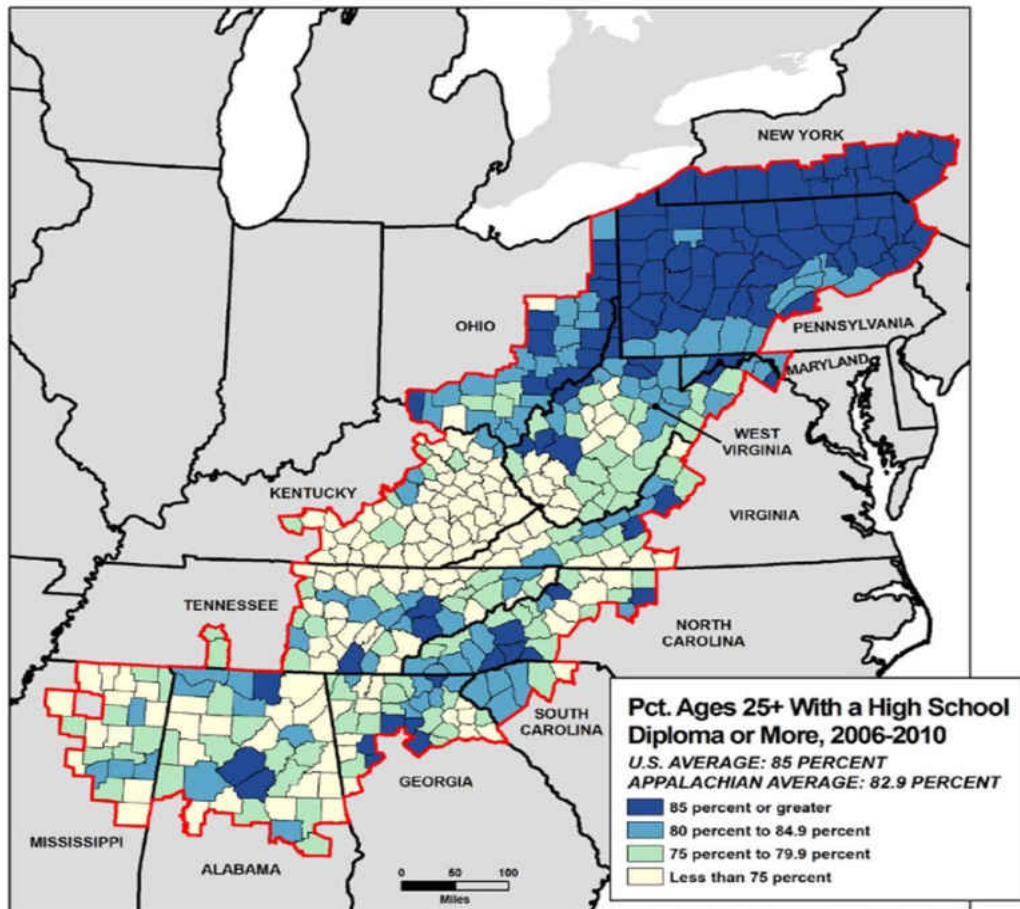
Education (Highest Level Attained)	Total Population Ages 25 and Over, 2006-2010	Percent of Population Ages 25 and Over				
		Less than High School Diploma	High School Diploma or More			
			Total	H.S. Grad, No Postsecondary Degree	Associate's Degree	Bachelor's Degree or More
<b>United States</b>	<b>199,726,659</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>85.0</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>7.5</b>	<b>27.9</b>
<b>Appalachian Region</b>	<b>16,911,530</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>54.8</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>20.7</b>
<b>Subregions</b>						
Northern Appalachia	5,763,871	12.3	87.7	57.9	8.3	21.6
North Central Appalachia	1,642,078	17.1	82.9	59.5	6.2	17.3
Central Appalachia	1,314,972	28.0	72.0	54.2	5.6	12.1
South Central Appalachia	3,193,421	18.5	81.5	52.9	7.2	21.3
Southern Appalachia	4,997,188	18.9	81.1	51.2	7.1	22.8
<b>County Types</b>						
Large Metros (pop. 1 million +)	3,821,085	12.5	87.5	51.8	7.9	27.8
Small Metros (pop. <1 million)	6,780,281	15.9	84.1	54.3	7.4	22.3
Nonmetro, Adjacent to Large Metros	1,133,096	17.7	82.3	59.0	7.4	15.8
Nonmetro, Adjacent to Small Metros	3,450,597	20.4	79.6	57.7	7.1	14.9
Rural (nonmetro, not adj. to a metro)	1,726,471	24.9	75.1	55.0	6.2	13.9
<b>Alabama</b>	<b>3,108,132</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>81.4</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>21.7</b>
Appalachian Alabama	2,011,642	18.5	81.5	52.4	6.8	22.3
Non-Appalachian Alabama	1,096,490	18.8	81.2	53.5	7.0	20.7
<b>Georgia</b>	<b>6,052,410</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>83.5</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>27.2</b>
Appalachian Georgia	1,826,511	18.3	81.7	50.4	6.8	24.6
Non-Appalachian Georgia	4,225,899	15.8	84.2	49.4	6.5	28.4
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>2,856,001</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>81.0</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>20.3</b>
Appalachian Kentucky	800,625	28.2	71.8	53.3	5.6	12.8
Non-Appalachian Kentucky	2,055,376	15.5	84.5	54.3	7.0	23.3
<b>Maryland</b>	<b>3,789,931</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>87.8</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>35.7</b>
Appalachian Maryland	172,450	16.0	84.0	58.5	7.8	17.7
Non-Appalachian Maryland	3,617,481	12.1	87.9	45.1	6.2	36.6
<b>Mississippi</b>	<b>1,876,719</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>79.6</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>19.5</b>
Appalachian Mississippi	402,824	24.1	75.9	52.8	7.1	16.1
Non-Appalachian Mississippi	1,473,895	19.4	80.6	52.5	7.8	20.4
<b>New York</b>	<b>12,914,436</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>44.1</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>32.1</b>
Appalachian New York	701,701	12.1	87.9	53.0	11.3	23.7
Non-Appalachian New York	12,212,735	15.8	84.2	43.6	8.0	32.6
<b>North Carolina</b>	<b>6,121,611</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>83.6</b>	<b>49.1</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>26.1</b>
Appalachian North Carolina	1,156,711	17.9	82.1	51.1	8.4	22.6
Non-Appalachian North Carolina	4,964,900	16.1	83.9	48.7	8.3	26.9
<b>Ohio</b>	<b>7,655,994</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>87.4</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>24.1</b>
Appalachian Ohio	1,383,846	15.7	84.3	62.1	6.9	15.3
Non-Appalachian Ohio	6,272,148	11.9	88.1	54.6	7.4	26.1
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	<b>8,558,693</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>87.4</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>26.4</b>
Appalachian Pennsylvania	4,005,859	11.6	88.4	57.5	8.1	22.8
Non-Appalachian Pennsylvania	4,552,734	13.4	86.6	50.4	6.6	29.6
<b>South Carolina</b>	<b>2,981,382</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>83.0</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>8.3</b>	<b>24.0</b>
Appalachian South Carolina	756,211	18.4	81.6	49.5	8.6	23.5
Non-Appalachian South Carolina	2,225,171	16.5	83.5	51.2	8.2	24.1
<b>Tennessee</b>	<b>4,156,132</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>6.0</b>	<b>22.7</b>
Appalachian Tennessee	1,884,903	19.5	80.5	54.7	6.0	19.8
Non-Appalachian Tennessee	2,271,229	15.9	84.1	53.1	5.9	25.1
<b>Virginia</b>	<b>5,208,536</b>	<b>13.9</b>	<b>86.1</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>33.8</b>
Appalachian Virginia	525,526	22.9	77.1	52.2	7.9	17.1
Non-Appalachian Virginia	4,683,010	12.9	87.1	44.9	6.5	35.7
<b>West Virginia (entire state)</b>	<b>1,282,621</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>81.9</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>17.3</b>

Figure 2.1: The Educational Attainment of Persons Ages 25 and over in the Appalachian region, 2006-2010. (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2012; Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 - 2010 American Community Survey).

Figures 2.1 and 2.2 depict the percentage of individuals ages 25 and older with a high school diploma in the years 2006-2010. The northern counties of the United States have a higher percentage of completion rates; the counties in Southwest Virginia,



Northeast Tennessee and Eastern Kentucky have less than 75% completion rates. Moreover, Appalachia continues to lag behind the United States in attainment of college degrees.



*Figure 2.2: Percentage of Individuals Ages 25 and Older with a High School Diploma* (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2012; Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 -2010 American Community Survey).

## **College Readiness and Retention**

Students are entering college underprepared, and it is the mission of the community college or universities to prepare the students for a career in the workplace. Moreover, students who are classified as first-generation students are at risk for underachievement (Hand & Payne, 2008). Tinto (1987) recognized several factors that hinder students and result in withdrawing from coursework; these factors include academic variables, inability to set academic goals, and lack of commitment.

According to Taylor, as a result of out-of-date college course preparation for the workplace, students are entering the workplace ill prepared, which results in poor outcomes and constant examination (Taylor, 2010; Grossman 2005; Hersch & Merrow 2005; Levine 2005; Taylor 2007). Moreover, if the traditional methods of instruction are not yielding adequate results from students, then a better approach to instruction needs to be considered and implemented in the classroom (Taylor 2010). Astin (1984) discovered that the quantity and quality of peer interaction as well as campus personnel influenced the persistence of students. Rendon (1995) identified the successful transition from high school to college as a critical factor that affects a student's decision to enroll consecutively until degree attainment; moreover, this is due to advising programs and student orientation programs that allow students to make connections with peers and college personnel. Upcraft (2003) contends that in order for students to be more prepared and understand the services offered, institutions need to offer active engagement of students and implement and utilize technology to help prepare the 21<sup>st</sup> century student for success.

College readiness is still a frightening concern in the nation. Nationally, only 26% of high school graduates met all four of ACT's college readiness benchmarks; moreover, an even more astounding statistics is that 31% of high school graduates did not meet any of the benchmarks (ACT, 2014). In Kentucky, only 31% of high school graduates met the math benchmark; 37% met the reading benchmark, and 59% met the English benchmark (ACT, 2014). Revisiting past statistics, a startling 16% of Kentucky high school graduates met all four of ACT's college readiness benchmarks, and an incredible 40% met no benchmarks (ACT, 2012). In essence what may be the most frightening is a report by the Appalachian Regional Commission (2012) stating that from 2006-2010 only 12.8% of Kentuckians in the Appalachian region age 25 and older possessed a bachelor's degree (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2012). This is a drastic contrast to the 19.8% national average of citizens age 25 and older with bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census, 2013).

### **Contributing Factors to Remediation**

#### **Placement Testing in Colleges and Universities**

The ACT is a national test used to determine placement for entering college students and determines college readiness. According to the ACT profile report for the graduating class of 2013, out of 1,799,243 students, only 26 percent met all four ACT benchmark scores. A benchmark score is defined as a minimum score required in a subject area. In 2013, the ACT benchmark scores were as follows: English 18, Math 22, Reading 22, Science 23 (ACT, 2013). Nationally in 2014, only 26% of high school graduates met all four of ACT's college readiness benchmarks. In Kentucky, only 31% of students were deemed college ready; moreover, even more astoundingly, 31% of high

school graduates did not meet any of the benchmarks (ACT, 2014). In Kentucky, only 31% of high school graduates met the math benchmark; 37% met the Reading benchmark and 59% met the English benchmark (ACT, 2014).

As illustrated in Table 2.2, College and Career Readiness Model (Floyd & Hargis, 2013; KDE, 2011), the chart depicts the college readiness scores as set forth in Kentucky by CPE. If a student does not meet the ACT benchmarks set forth by the state, then the student must test via COMPASS or KYOTE. If a student fails to meet those cut scores, then the student is placed into developmental education courses at either a community college or university.

Table 2.2: College and Career Readiness Model

College Ready: Must meet benchmarks on one of the following (1 point)	Career Ready: Must meet benchmarks for one requirement in career academic area and must meet one requirement in career technical area (1 Point)		College <u>AND</u> Career Ready: Must meet at least one from college ready academic area <u>AND</u> career ready technical area <b>BONUS</b> (1.5 point)	
College Ready	Career Ready Academic	Career Ready Technical	College Ready Academic	Career Ready Technical
<b>ACT</b> English—18 Math—19 Reading—20  <b>COMPASS</b> English-Writing—74 Math—36 Reading—85  <b>KYOTE</b> Reading—20 Writing—6 Mathematics—22 Algebra—14 Calculus—TBA	<b>ASVAB</b> 50 or better  or <b>WorkKeys</b> ❖ Applied Math ❖ Locating Information ❖ Reading for Information (Silver or better is required on each of the above)	<b>KOSSA</b>  <b>Or Industry Certification</b>  Only Career and Technical Education students who are preparatory status (enrolled in 3 <sup>rd</sup> course credit in one CTE area) are eligible for career readiness status.	<b>ACT or COMPASS or KYOTE</b>  NOTES: (1) By meeting the College Ready Academic definition, the student does not have to take the additional tests of ASVAB or Work Keys for the bonus area.  (2) For accountability purposes, the bonus shall now allow the readiness percentage to exceed 100%.	<b>KOSSA</b>  or  <b>Industry Certification</b>

For most students at Harvard and Yale in the 1800s, private tutors assisted the students in preparation for college entrance examinations (Arendale, 2011).

In 1642 Harvard required its freshman students to be able to understand and read at sight some Latin author of the difficulty of Cicero, be able to speak Latin in prose and poetry, and be able to decline Greek nouns and conjugate Greek verbs (Butts & Cremin, 1953, p. 122).

Harvard established the first college freshman developmental English course by 1874 due to the faculty's complaints of the students writing competency (Arendale, 2011). By implementing strict placement policy standards at Harvard, in the late 1800s, nearly all students were underprepared, even students who were from privileged educational backgrounds (Arendale, 2011; Garrison, 1892; Goodwin, 1896; Hill, 1885). Moreover, due to half of the students failing the minimum composite college entrance exam and faculty expectations continuing to rise, the student preparation was lacking, Harvard offered a remedial reading course to assist students (Arendale, 2011; Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 244; Levine, 1996).

Currently, students are placed into developmental courses based on their placement test scores, such as ACT, SAT, COMPASS or ACCUPLACER (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). The purpose of assessment at colleges and universities is to sort students into courses based on the varying difficulty of material (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Based on placement scores, students are enrolled into developmental education courses in math, writing, or reading based on their initial assessment upon arrival at the college (Boatman & Long, 2010). According to Boylan (2002), "in order to serve underprepared students, it is first necessary to identify them and determine their skill levels" (p.35). Both mandatory assessment and placement contribute to student success (Boylan, Bliss, & Bonham, 1997; Boylan & Saxon, 1998; McCabe, 2003;

Roueche & Rouche, 1993; Rouche & Roueche, 1999). Placement testing is not a new concept; moreover, placement tests date back to the 1800s. In an advertisement in the New York Times News, the article encourages all interested students to register for placement testing and informs students of the number of successful applicants (New York Times, 1870).

Placement tests are designed to target the level of knowledge a student has in a particular subject. If the testing diagnosis is remediation, then the student must enroll in remedial or developmental education courses prior to enrolling in credit bearing courses. Several colleges in Florida have done away with placement testing and remedial courses. The colleges allow students to enroll and begin coursework without diagnosing if the students are placed properly. Even though the state has expressed that this method will result in an output of employees for the workforce, students may not have the required skills to successfully complete a course without remediation. Thus, McCabe (2003) notes that “an effective assessment and placement program, however, requires flexibility” (p.144). McCabe provides an example of Santa Fe Community College in Florida which allows students to be reassessed on the first day of classes to ensure proper placement, and students who were improperly misplaced are reassigned to their appropriate courses. Boylan (2002) claims that it is essential to allow students an opportunity to challenge their placement because students will feel that they have a “fair chance to demonstrate their abilities” (p.38).

However, in an article reported by Inside Higher Ed, recent data have been released that indicate “administrators are seeing that traditional students who decided not

to take developmental or remedial courses, after being advised to do so, were more likely to fail college-level or gateway courses” (Smith, 2015). Even though Florida legislators thought this would be an action which would help students save money and encourage the students to remain in college (Ordway, 2013), students are in fact failing gateway courses due to unpreparedness (Smith, 2015). Boylan, who is the director of the National Center of Developmental Education, stated in the article,

This isn't rocket science. If students don't have the skills to complete a college course and you let them take the course, there's a likelihood they'll fail the course. What did they [legislation] expect? (Smith, 2015)

### **Other Factors Contributing to Remediation**

The rate of developmental education continues to rise in community colleges around the nation (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). According to Roueche and Roueche (1999), several characteristics put a student at risk for placement into developmental courses. These characteristics are as follows: first generation student/ no support, unknown college pathway, poor self-image, not left hometown, self-defeatism, work schedule, non-traditional student, women as returning students, minority students, economic insecurity, desperation, academically weak, and poor or low test scores (Roueche & Roueche, 1999; Roueche & Roueche 1993). A majority of students placed into developmental courses do not complete the required sequence of courses, much less persist and obtain a diploma or a certificate (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

In 2002, a national survey from the Education Commission of the States Center for Community College Policy estimated that 79% of entering community college

students need remediation (Jenkins & Boswell, 2002). Many community colleges around the United States are implementing the goals of the Achieving the Dream initiative. Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit corporation that helps community college students, especially low income students, stay in college and earn a degree (Achieving the Dream, 2012). Currently, thirty-four states have participated in the Achieving the Dream policy work. Those states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, New Jersey, New Mexico, Nevada, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin (Achieving the Dream, 2014). In 2008, there were 256,672 students in the Achieving the Dream database (Bailey, 2009). In a longitudinal study following 250,000 Achieving the Dream first-time students over a three year period, 59% of the students enrolled in at least one developmental course. In rural areas with limited resources, the percentage of students placed in developmental courses is higher. In Kentucky, the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) profile 2008-2010 reveals that in terms of college readiness, 71.1 percent of Harlan County students, 74.3 percent of Letcher County students, and 71 percent of Bell County students are underprepared in one or more academic subject(s) when applying to college (Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education, 2006).

These statistics confirm that a large number of students are underprepared upon graduation from high school and placed in developmental courses upon enrolling in college. Consistent with these data, a majority of rural Eastern Kentucky students



entering colleges are placed into developmental courses either by ACT or COMPASS scores (Kentucky Council of Postsecondary Education, 2006). Underprepared students are not substandard; moreover, students warrant the opportunity to have a quality education (Boylan, n.d.). Students are graduating high school underprepared for college coursework. The Appalachian region is still underprepared in completion of postsecondary education. According to McCabe, “poverty has the highest correlation with educational under preparation at every level, from preschool to graduate school” (p.13). According to an account from the book *Night Comes to the Cumberlands*, Caudill retells a story where an Appalachian man worked to provide his children with a good education from the public school system. Once the child graduated high school, he went to California to obtain employment. The employer of the factory stated that the boy’s diploma was from Kentucky and was not recognized as an education higher than 10 years of schooling. In fact, a diploma from Kentucky, Arkansas and Mississippi was not equal to a high school diploma from another state high school. The father who had worked hard for his children stated,

I reckon they jist ain’t no future fer people like us. Me and my wife ain’t got nothin’ and don’t know nothin’ hardly. We’ve spent everything we’ve got to try to learn our young-uns something so they would have a better chance in the world, and now they don’t know nothin’ either! (Caudill, 2001, p. 338)

### **Socioeconomic Factors**

Based on research in higher education and adult learning, Levin & Calcagno (2008) found that the following factors are essential for implementing successful

intervention for underprepared students: motivation, substance, inquiry, independence, multiple approaches, high standards, problem solving, connectiveness and supportive context. In a study conducted by Chenoweth & Galliher (2004), the researcher found that several factors affect college aspirations in rural West Virginia. Initially, the researcher believed that socioeconomic factors such as culture, family influences, economic climate, and low self-esteem would be major contributing factors. However, the study found that parental education attainment was a major factor for a student to aspire and obtain an education. In fact, the study contended if a father obtained a degree and was working in a professional field, then the student would be more likely to aspire and obtain an education.

According to Schafft and Jackson (2010), students attending rural schools felt that students from larger urban schools were better and more prepared in academics. In addition, students attending a rural school “in Nebraska perceive their academic ability and their self-confidence to be significantly lower than their peers at similar institutions across the country” (p. 28). Children of rural areas are far less likely to obtain a quality education due to the lack of qualified instructors. There is a stigma which extends to instructors who possess low expectations for the students in the Appalachian region and see the students as unfit for higher education, consequently offering less support for success (Auwarter & Arguete, 2008). According to accounts of from Caudill’s book *Night Comes to the Cumberland*, during the Depression era, educational resources were limited (Caudill, 2001). The teachers were severely underpaid and averaged a salary of sixty to seventy-five dollars a month for an instructor with a college education. The Appalachian region plateau did not have a county library for public use; moreover, the

collection of books at the public school library was rudimentary (Caudill, 2001). According to Hendrickson (2012), students who resist school or obtain an education are rarely considered a positive attribute to society and rarely believe they can help make a difference. Thus, these students feel disconnected from school and do not understand the purpose of obtaining an education. These students react and express their feelings through acts of resistance; however, school administrators and instructors perceive these acts as misbehaviors. Therefore students who resist often obtain a negative educational experience and continue to express the thoughts and behavior traits that cause them to resist (Hendrickson, 2012; Kohl, 1991; Willis, 1977).

### **Policy, State and National Trends in Developmental Education**

Legislators have argued the case of the effectiveness of remedial and developmental education and that the courses are needed to academically prepare students who are underprepared for collegiate coursework (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). Throughout history, developmental education has played a central role in higher education. Harvard recognized the need for remedial education and that the country's secondary education system was not standardized across the curriculum; thus, certain skills were not taught to all students (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). Even though policymakers attempted to limit developmental education courses at institutions of higher education, ultimately, institutions needed developmental education courses to provide access and maintain enrollment numbers for their colleges (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). States have differed in the structure and delivery mode of developmental courses; some states such as Florida have eliminated developmental courses, while others have

adopted new delivery systems. In essence, the problem boils down to cost—is remediation worth the cost to the institution? (Bettinger, Boatman & Long, 2013). The City University of New York (CUNY) has terminated developmental education courses in its four year institutions. Following suit, other states such as Tennessee are passing laws where developmental education courses will only be taught at the community colleges; this trend is spreading across the country (Parker, Bustillos, & Behringer, 2010). The Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) noted that developmental education courses were costing students \$1,300 for two developmental education courses for a term to \$4,100 for a full year of developmental courses (Berryman & Short, 2010). The TBR recognized the financial burden being passed to the student and chose to redesign remedial courses. Moreover, the annual cost of developmental education in the United States is estimated at \$1.13 billion of a \$234.8 billion higher education budget. This amounts to .048%, or less than half of one percent, of the postsecondary budget (Pretlow & Wathington, 2011).

Nationally, programs such as bridge and boot camps are becoming more common at colleges to help boost student skills. To change the delivery method of teaching, many colleges are focusing on modularizing developmental education courses to meet the tech savvy generation of student (Edgecombe, Cormier, Bickerstaff, & Barragan, 2013). Utilizing a computer, students work through content based modules and continue at their own pace throughout the course (Hondara, 2013). Colleges in Tennessee such as Cleveland State Community College, Jackson State Community College Austin Peay State University, and Northeast State Community College conducted pilots and redesigned a portion of developmental classes using modularization and received awards

for their achievements (Berryman & Short, 2010). Moreover the pilots resulted in a savings of 19-51% and significant improvements in student retention. Due to the success achieved by the pilot, this led to other colleges considering modularization and redesign.

Developmental education varies across states. Each state tailors developmental education to fit the needs of their legislation. In 2010, Kentucky Community & Technical College System (KCTCS), which is composed of 16 community colleges in the state of Kentucky, created a strategic plan to be completed by 2016. Developmental education was a part of the strategic plan. The goal was to increase the “percent of students referred to developmental courses by subject who complete a developmental course in that subject or re-test at a college level by the end of the second year” (KCTCS, 2010). Moreover, the target was to ensure that 100% of developmental students enrolled in developmental courses achieve the following pass rates: English 74.7%; Math 65.8%; Reading 74.7%. To ensure success, the sixteen community colleges that are part of the KCTCS system were to implement various strategies in the classroom.

Due to the changing environment of the classroom and needs of the developmental student, postsecondary educators are in a position to make a real pedagogical shift that meets the needs of the current developmental student (Osterholt & Barratt, 2012). Identifying and addressing social and emotional needs of underprepared students has become a common focus of first-year programs at colleges and universities throughout the country (Merseeth, 2011). Many of these students arrive on campus with sufficient academic credentials and standardized test scores, but they fail to meet college academic expectations (Osterholt & Barratt, 2012; Fowler & Boylan, 2010). However

more recent studies suggest an interest in social development integrating learning communities and paired courses (Brothen & Wambach, 2012; Bonham & Boylan, 2012).

With today's generation, educators need to move toward student-centered learning in which regular, structured collaborative activities are integrated into the content as the primary delivery system for emotional and social aspects of learning (Frowler & Boylan, 2010). Research indicates that computerized instruction can be implemented into a custom, tailor-made individualized plan of learning for a student who is severely deficient in developmental courses (Frowler & Boylan 2010, p. 1; Li et al., 2013). Such instructional plans utilize the emporium model of learning, which is a modularized self-paced approach to learning (Bonham & Boylan, 2012; Frowler & Boylan, 2010; Hudesman et al., 2013). Studies suggest that nonacademic factors such as achievement motivation and institutional commitment (Frowler & Boylan, 2010) impact student learning. Moreover, incorporating mandatory orientation programs (Bonham & Boylan, 2012), First Year Experience programs and learning communities (Asera, 2011) create a positive learning environment. Such programs allow the students to feel they have a safe environment in which to learn and are supported as they form social support networks and progress toward educational goals (Frowler & Boylan, 2010).

## **Contributing Factors in Secondary Schools**

Many instructors in higher education believe the secondary school system is to blame for the lack of preparation (Long & Boatman, 2013). However, secondary schools are not always solely responsible for the deficiency in a student's education. There are many contributing factors that can lead to the road of unpreparedness. Such factors include: first-generation student status, apathy, low self-expectations, lack of education from former school, and no consequences for not learning material. Consequently, there are several reasons and factors why a student needs developmental courses. In a New Zealand study, factors such as school characteristics, socio-geographic determinants and peer determinants were factors affecting success in higher education (Shulruf, Hattie, & Tumen, 2008). However, an essential issue is the misalignment of expectations between high school and college (Russell, 2008). Russell contends that the "K-12 system was never designed to prepare all students for college, and students may meet all high school requirements and be admitted to college, only to later discover that they cannot pass placement tests for entry into college-level courses" (p. 1). Furthermore, despite the amount of attention that is placed on the curriculum in secondary schools, only 11 states have aligned the secondary assessments with postsecondary offerings (Parker, Bustillos & Behringer, 2010). This attitude and belief in the K-12 system is not reassuring for the future leaders of our country. Students should receive a foundation and obtain the basic fundamental skills prior to graduation. In addition to obtaining the basic skills, the expectation levels in secondary schools have increased. It is estimated that 75% of high school graduates are to earn a four-year college degree in the U.S. However, this

generation of prospective college students is coming from an academically underprepared group which will add to the cost and increase of remediation (Russell, 2008).

### **No Child Left Behind in Secondary Schools**

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act established in 2001 was designed to remove gaps in academic achievement in the United States, particularly involving minority, low income and students with disabilities (McCoach et al., 2010). NCLB [is a] test focused approach to learning (Cawelti, 2006). The No Child Left Behind Act created mandatory testing requirements and test based funding which is connected to a student's test performance on state testing; moreover, this Act was designed to increase student attendance and school accountability based on the student's performance (Guskey, 1994). With the initiative of NCLB, instructors now have to be more qualified to be able to teach, and the school must meet certain goals. However, this Act can hinder rural school districts, especially if they do not obtain adequate test scores, graduate rates or highly qualified instructors.

The primary purpose of NCLB is to certify that public school students meet learning goals while being educated by qualified instructors (Yell, 2006). For instructors to be certified to meet the demands of NCLB, they must meet three basic requirements. The teacher must have a bachelor's degree from a college or university, have a full state teacher certification or licensure in the area in which they teach, and be able to demonstrate subject matter competency in the core areas they teach (Yell, 2006). In many cases, if rural schools cannot meet the standards and goals of NCLB, then the schools must consolidate (Eppley, 2009). The act of consolidating students can create



conflict for the students such as personal hardships, longer bus rides in the rural areas, and even student riots when merging different socioeconomic backgrounds (Larson, 1997). Moreover, consolidation can terminate teaching positions for qualified certified instructors who meet NCLB mandates. Other primary goals of NCLB are that all students will graduate from high school; students will be educated in a drug free, safe environment which is conducive to learning, and be educated by highly qualified instructors (Yell, 2006). Federal mandates forced rural schools to choose to either spend funding on where it is most needed, such as hiring more teachers or improving facilities, or to spend the funds to be in compliance with government regulations (Bryant, 2010).

### **Standardized Testing in Secondary Schools**

Historically, standardized testing has been a part of the educational realm since the 1800s (William, 2010). By 1853, the role of education funding was expanding due to grants. Moreover, in an 1861 Commission's report, a recommendation in England was made that the amount of

Public money paid to each elementary school should depend on three factors: the condition of the school buildings, school attendance, and the performance of the students attending the school in an oral examination, undertaken by one of the national school inspectors of every child in every school to which grants were to be paid. (William, 2010, p.6; Royal Commission, 1861)

Meanwhile during the same time period in the United States, White believed making the results of testing tied to monetary funds could damage the students and the teachers (William, 2010). Moreover, White continued by stating:

They have perverted the best efforts of teachers, and narrowed and grooved their instruction; they have occasioned and made well-nigh imperative the use of mechanical and rote methods of teaching; they have occasioned cramming and the most vicious habits of study; they have caused much of the overpressure charged upon schools, some of which is real; they have tempted both teachers and pupils to dishonesty; and last but not least, they have permitted a mechanical method of school supervision. (William, 2010 p.7)

By the 1970s, legislatures passed laws mandating students to complete standardized tests to measure academic achievement; this was to evaluate a student's progress and ensure the public that their tax dollars were being spent towards education (Popham, 1998; Haddy, 2004). Later, parents began expressing concern over the levels of high anxiety that the children experienced while being required to take a standardized test; in fact, the parents themselves suffer from anxiety due to the impact that the scores will have on their children (Domenech, 2000). Thus, standardized testing and test anxiety are other contributing factors for under- preparedness in secondary schools (Wigfield & Eccles, 1989).

K-12 instructors are expected to meet criteria of standardized testing. Instructors are so focused on students learning the testing standards that they neglect to teach the basic core standards (Haddy, 2004). Moreover, some school districts are utilizing a teacher-proof instructional program into their curriculum (Hoff, 1999; Haddy, 2004). This approach to learning takes away the freedom from the teacher to create the curriculum, instead following a test based program (Hoff, 1999; Haddy 2004). School districts are receiving pressure from the state to show Adequate Yearly Progress in reading and math (Cawelti, 2006; Perlstein, 2007). In order to meet these standards,

instructors spend much of the academic year focused on and teaching the material which will be on the test. A 2006 study reported that 71% of school districts reduced instructional time in at least one course in order to have additional instructional time in reading and math; in addition, some districts are eliminating the instruction of some subjects entirely (Cawelti, 2006).

Ninety-two percent of two-year institutions use scores on assessment tests for placement into remedial education (Hughes & Scott-Clayton, 2011). Standardized testing has become a part of the schools' core; it will not be replaced or taken out in the near future (Haddy, 2004). As a result, standardized test results are influencing how a student feels about themselves and their peers (Haddy, 2004). Instead of a student being proud of what he/ she accomplished, as early as the 3rd grade, students learn that their competency is compared to other students and the comparison is based on grades and test scores (Haddy, 2004; Paris et al., 2000).

### **Conclusion**

Over the years, America has focused on enhancing education and creating opportunities that were not present in the past. In reality, a majority of students are not college ready and enter college under-prepared. Remediation is continually on the rise to assist students and make an attempt at closing the readiness gap. Moreover, developmental educators are ready to initiate transformations to create a more conducive learning style for the student. This mentality of nurturing and helping students may be questionable to some larger institutions; however, to small rural community colleges, it is fundamental. There are several unanswered questions and unknown factors that affect

students in developmental courses. Unfortunately, many students never complete their developmental coursework either by getting discouraged or exhausting financial aid. However, just like the students who studied at Harvard over 200 years ago, there will always be students in developmental courses who need extra attention and support in college.

In rural Eastern Kentucky, students are not as prepared as their urban counterparts, nor have they had academic opportunities readily available to them. Students attending rural schools feel that students from larger urban schools are more prepared in academics (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). There are many obstacles necessary for individuals to be career-ready. To be career-ready, one needs a good educational foundation. Rural Eastern Kentucky schools are neglecting to provide a core curriculum for students, and this neglect is reflected in the number of developmental students enrolling in colleges and universities across the United States.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine the underlying factors affecting students who are placed into developmental education courses. Students are continually coming to community colleges underprepared and are not academically ready for college level transfer courses. Moreover, due to placement scores, the students are placed into a sequence of developmental courses which is costly and can affect financial aid; moreover, it lengthens the duration of course completion which affects a student's time to degree.

This chapter restates the purpose of the study as well as provides an outline of the research design, context, limitations and potential implications. In this chapter, there is a description of the following sections: student sample, data collection, limitations and data analysis. In addition, the study provides insight into the lives of ten students who are currently enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural community college in the Appalachian region. The students interviewed for the study represent their fellow students in the Appalachian region.

### **Research Questions**

Two questions were investigated and are as follows:

1. What factors are affecting students who are underprepared when entering community college?
2. To what extent do developmental education courses prepare students to be successful at the community college level?

During the student interviews, the same set of questions were posed to each student. Those questions are listed below. However, when a student went into further detail with his/ her response, I continued to probe the student for additional information; moreover, there was a variance of information among the ten students. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

### **Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself. [Where are you from, where did you go to high school]
2. Tell me how your classes are going this semester.
3. What was it like attending high school in a rural area?
4. Do you feel like you were well prepared for the transition from high school to college classes? [How so?]
5. How were you challenged in your high school courses? [As an example for clarification, were you on an advanced diploma, take dual credit courses or Advanced placement?]
6. What type of math and science courses did you take in high school?
7. How well did you apply yourself with classes and studying in high school?
8. How would you rate your high school instructors and overall educational experience?
9. How does your family expect college will impact your life or future? Do they support your decision to attend college?
10. Are you a first generation student? [first in your family to attend college]
11. What advice would you share with a high school students today based on your knowledge of college placement and being in developmental classes?

### **Context of Study**

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research allows an illustration to take place and the reader to become connected with the participants' story. According to Creswell (1998), the "researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p.15). A qualitative study allows the researcher to obtain personal information of the students which may not have been obtained if quantitative research methods were utilized. This phenomenological study will examine the factors affecting developmental students in rural Appalachia. In particular, the students will be first year, traditional aged students attending a community college in the Appalachian area. In order to answer research question two, a report will be generated on retention in developmental education courses from fall 2014 to fall 2015 using the PeopleSoft database at the community college. The Institutional Effectiveness officer at the community college provided the retention data.

### **Sample of Students**

To obtain participants to interview, I sought students who were currently enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural community college in Eastern Kentucky. The community college is located in a rural mountainous region of Appalachia. The college has five campuses located in a tri-county area. Of those five campuses, only four campuses offer developmental education courses to students. Students were identified using purposeful sampling. According to Coyne (1997), a researcher uses purposeful sampling according to the needs of the study. In this instance, Developmental Education Advisors nominated key participants for interviews. After receiving contact information

from the advisors, I contacted the students and inquired if they would participate in this voluntary study. I elaborated that the study would be anonymous and their real names would not be used. Instead, they would be given pseudonyms. Finally, their participation would not affect their course grade or anything relating to their academic career.

To elaborate on key participants, these are students who met specific criteria and were willing to speak with me on issues dealing with family and educational experiences. To be eligible for interviews, students must have met the following criteria: students had to be a traditional aged student (18-24 years of age) and currently enrolled in at least one developmental education course at the rural college in Appalachia.

Once selected, the participants were referred to the principle researcher to be formally asked to volunteer for the study. Ten student participants were interviewed. The average interview lasted 45 minutes in duration. The interviews provided a narrative of their story and background including why they believe they were placed into and currently taking remedial courses. These students participated in a semi-structured interview on socioeconomic items and questions inquiring about their education experience while in secondary schools. Some of the students elaborated on the quantity of the developmental educational classes they are currently enrolled in and the quality of those courses. In addition, the students were asked to provide advice for future students so they would not be placed into developmental education courses. The interviews were then transcribed and coded so the researcher could identify common themes. The results from the interview were used to answer research questions number one. Below, Table



3.1 depicts the students' demographics including gender, race, GPA and first-generation status.

Table 3.1 Student Demographics

<b>Student</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>First Generation</b>	<b>GPA</b>
Student #1 Heather	Female	White	No	3.8
Student #2 Michael	Male	Black	Yes	GED
Student #3 Candice	Female	White	Yes	3.5-3.4
Student #4 Travis	Male	White	Yes	Does not remember
Student #5 Paul	Male	White	No	2.0-2.5
Student #6 Maria	Female	Hispanic	Yes	3.5
Student # 7 Brooke	Female	White	Yes	3.5
Student #8 Anthony	Male	Black	Yes	3.7
Student #9 Daniel	Male	White	No	3.0
Student #10 Jay	Male	White	No	2.5

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

This mixed method study consisted of a phenomenological qualitative component that included individual interviews of developmental students and a quantitative portion that utilized recorded data on retention that were obtained from PeopleSoft at a rural community college in Eastern Kentucky. The researcher worked with Institutional Effectiveness at the community college to obtain the retention data from the database to answer research question number two. Students self-reported their GPA. The data utilized for question two were from fall 2014 to fall 2015.

The qualitative aspect of the study consisted of semi-structured interviews of ten developmental education students currently enrolled at a rural community college in Eastern Kentucky. Students were chosen based on the recommendation of the developmental education advisor on the corresponding campus. An interview script was used to determine common factors or educational hindrances, if any, that students reported contributed to their being placed in developmental education courses. Students signed consent forms, and participation was voluntary. Student interviews were conducted on the campuses at the rural community college using an audio device for recording. The interviews were transcribed and color coded so the researcher could identify common themes related to research question number one. After the study was completed, the recordings were deleted and all hardcopy data were stored in a locked safe for a duration of three to five years.

## **Limitations**

This study was limited to students who are enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural, community college in the Appalachian region of Eastern Kentucky. A majority of prior research focuses on how institutions can assist developmental students or what measures can be taken to increase retention. This study investigated the factors that contribute to student college readiness, which impacts their Academic track at the community college level. This study included ten students who are currently enrolled students at a community college and were interviewed. They provided a narrative of their story and background--including factors of why they believe they were placed into and are taking remedial courses.

Although generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research, the small sample size and unique Appalachian context limit the extent to which these findings may apply to others contexts. Second, the participant's responses may not reflect accurately their true experiences and beliefs.

Despite the limitations to this study, the findings may offer beneficial information to developmental education educators as well as secondary educatory on the factors which contribute to remediation. As a result of the common factors is identified, stronger ties can be forged between secondary and post-secondary education to assist future students.

## **Conclusion**

The research in this dissertation is crucial to helping students who live in the Appalachian area of Eastern Kentucky. There has not been a significant emphasis on

factors contributing to students being placed into developmental education courses. The study allows a story to be told through the eyes and voices of ten students in developmental education classes. These students came from different socio-economic backgrounds and are each uniquely different. Moreover, the retention data illustrates the extent to which students are being retained and want to make an effort to continue their academic career and obtain an educational goal.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### **Factors Affecting Students in Secondary Schools**

During this study, heartfelt emotions were shared in relation to the students' lives and issues occurring in the public school system. If you passed these students on the street, one would presume that the student did not have any home life problems or challenges in secondary schools. Moreover, one should not judge a book by its cover, and every student has layers and a story that needs to be heard. To set the stage, all ten students are currently enrolled at a community college in rural Appalachia. Throughout the chapter, I will paint a story explaining the circumstances of each of the students: Heather, Brooke, Anthony, Daniel, Jay, Travis, Michael, Candice, Paul and Maria. You will learn of their hardships and what has made school and life challenging for them. You will hear how the area is depleted of jobs, and unlike larger urban area, there is not money being funneled back into the region. Schools are not as heavily funded as schools found in urban areas; moreover, the curriculum is not as rich due to the lack of qualified educators. The area is slowly dying, and the students realize that nothing is left for them in their hometown; however, they persist on to better themselves to obtain an education. Based on what the students chose to share in their interviews, the factors that most affect students include:

- Home environment and lack of stability (switching schools);
- Negative role models;
- Low self- esteem, self-efficacy and test anxiety;
- Lack of motivation from the secondary school teachers;

- Lack of rigorous curriculum in high school;
- Placement in special education courses in elementary school;
- Poor transition from high school to college; and
- Current placement in developmental education classes.

### **Home Environment and Lack of Stability**

Poverty is a fact of life in the Appalachian region. In fact, according to the 2009-2013 US Census, 31.3% of people live below the poverty level in the studied area.

Socioeconomic status and the availability of resources affect the educational process of students (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). In an article written by Elder, Nguyen, and Caspi (1985), they explained the impact on children in economic hardships:

To understand the impact of economic hardship on children's lives requires the knowledge of the adaptations chosen and played out by their parents. The adverse effects of stressful economic times are not necessarily exercised directly. They may be produced indirectly through their disorganizing effects on family relations. (p. 362)

In this section below, nine out of ten students described their home life, lack of stability in their daily lives and emotional issues they have faced as major factors in their lives. Heather, a student living in rural Appalachia, explained how her mother was on drugs and served jail time. In addition, Heather was diagnosed as depressed and did not have a stable home life. She switched schools throughout her academic career. When Heather was eleven years old, she moved out of her house, which she described below:

We [her friends] all lived together at one of my friend's house. I moved out at the age of 11 and moved in with my best friends, and when I came, two or three more came, and we all lived one big happy family. Because each one of us didn't have that home life so we made our own family.... I was the youngest, I was the baby.

I was like 11, Candy and Katie might have been 13 no 14. Darrin might have been 15, and Mary was 15.

When asked if there was adult who lived with them at the house, she responded, “yeah but she didn’t act like an adult”. Heather went on to share feelings about her mother being arrested and the affect that had on her at school.

I hated going to the high school just because of some people. I feel like I was looked down upon because of my mother’s actions. I don’t know if this helps you any but it helps me. My first fight was in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. My mother got arrested for selling drugs, and her pretty little smile was on the front page, smiling literally from ear to ear like she didn’t give a care in the world. And people wanted to make mama jokes, and I didn’t think that was funny. I felt looked down upon by plenty of people and that is the reason I stay to myself... I felt judged, and I didn’t want to be there. I did my homework at home, and I would turn it in. But I would sit in the very back and be quiet.

Anthony explained to me that his grandmother who he calls “granny” took him to raise when he was a baby. His mother lives in Mexico, and his father has been in jail.

He shared his feeling about his father:

My dad was there I’d say for half my life; then he got really bad on drugs and went to prison for three years and just now recently got out. I really say me and my dad’s connection, I don’t have a connection with my dad. I’d rather not talk to him where he’s hurt me so bad. I mean yesterday was my birthday, and he didn’t even call and wish me a happy birthday. So I know I don’t really think I can talk to him ever again. I think at some point in my life I could open back up, but I would rather do it on my own from here on out.

Travis, was placed in foster care after his mother was put in jail; he is a student who switched schools several times. Travis suffered additional loss and disarray at his foster home. He goes into detail by explaining first about his mother in jail and then about his foster parents.

She [Travis’s biological mother] says she may get out next year. I am in foster care ..., not too long ago, recently, my foster mom she passed away on December 19 because of [Health Corp]. He [foster dad] don’t want me saying anything cause lawyers and stuff like that, but what happened she had gone out to get something

from the grocery store at the grocery store and well she said she was going to go to [Health Corp] and go get something and come home after that. She asked my foster dad if he needed anything and she said she would be back after that. Well she went to [Health Corp] and got her shots and what she got was Rocephin, so she had an allergic reaction to it and in her throat it was like swelled up and stuff. And she was at the hospital and was rushed to the hospital. The next day she passed out at the Food City parking lot and died.

Travis goes on to share why his mother is in jail. Initially he said, “It’s a rumor, I guess basically a lie.”

Like I was at church one day and I noticed cops were at the door, and they were taking mom away. I got off the [church] bus and asked what happened. Somebody said that my mom was touching my sister in a different way. I was a little bit confused, and I know she wouldn’t do that because we go to church all the time. Well I went to church one time by myself, and my sister stayed behind but we go to church most times.

I asked Travis if he ever thought about living on his own once he had turned 18 years old.

He responded, “I never thought about living on my own. If I did, I wouldn’t have no place to go. I just stayed with them [foster parents], they helped me out.”

We learn that Jay has faced different home challenges other than drugs and parents serving jail time. He shared his home life experiences below:

[Sigh], brace yourself. My step brother started having sex with me when I was nine years old, and it kind of awoke something, not the whole having sex with your step-brother, but like I don’t really like girls. I dated a girl for like five years and was in denial. Still love her to death just no sexual relationship what so ever. I have the feelings; I love you emotionally just I don’t love you romantically.

When asked later if that experience affected him in high school, Jay said:

Well not really, well to some degree. What really bothered me was we started pre-pubescent and stopped when he was like seventeen. So four or five years and then he just stopped and left me so I was so mad! I was more like a scorned lover basically, and that’s when it started affecting me in 9th and 10th grade. It affected my Algebra course because it challenged me and not the others because I could do it easily.



Candace is a student who moved out on her own at 16 years of age. Her step-father put an apartment in his name for her to live in while she walked back and forth from McDonalds working 48 hours a week and going to high school. She explained how she never had a stable home environment and suffered from being bullied. She said, “I’ve had a rough life. I’ve had... every bone in my face broke and then up here is a little small dent in my forehead.”

I met some people, and I got bullied so mom switched me back over [the mountain]. And I was back with my friends, and all was fine. But then I had to come back over here because she couldn’t drive me every day. So when I came back over here I was getting into fights, and I was just acting out and my mom did too. She was going through a divorce; it was really hard on us. I had no sense of stability. People would ask where my home was, and I would have to think to tell them. They would ask well what’s your address, and I would say I don’t know. They would say, how do you not know your address? Well when you move twenty-five times in two years, you don’t know your address. It’s all I can do to remember zip codes.

When I asked Candace if switching schools affected her performance, she said it did.

It had a big effect on me, especially in high school. I didn’t do half of the things other normal students did because I like... my freshman year I started out at County High School, then I moved in my freshman year to Central High School then I moved back in my freshman year to County and stayed at County until the middle part of my sophomore year. Then I went back to Central then back to County and all in my sophomore year and ending in my sophomore year I was in County. Then beginning in my junior year, I think I went one week to County then back to Central.

Paul is a student who was bullied in school and also experienced school consolidation. Paul experienced some problems with his father and shares a story.

He stole a bunch of money from my school debit card that I didn’t know about and that kind of triggered it. But once we figured that out, started to come out and it got worse, and worse, and worse... At this point I’ve had to step up and assume more responsibility because my dad’s not there, so I’m having to work and go to school to pay for stuff. My mom lost her job not long ago. She got fired for false documentation, which it happens. It’s an honest mistake, and it happens in that line of work. I’ve had to step up as the provider so all my money from all the

stuff I've done since 2013 has went toward that. And this is technically the second time my dad has done this, and they separated one time before back in 2012. And he left, and they separated again this year but it's for good this time.

Michael is originally from North Carolina and moved to the Appalachian region and received his GED. At one point, Michael was homeless; he stated, "things were just bad for me there [in North Carolina]. I was just barely getting by. I didn't have a place to call my own." He shared a portion of his life while he was living on the streets.

So there would be times I would go to my aunt's, but most of the time I would be on the streets just walking. A couple of times I slept under a bridge, but it didn't matter to me. I had my little silk blanket thing, and I would just throw it over my head. I remember one day it was raining really, really bad, and I was underneath the bridge. And I put it over me, and I just sat and just listened to it. It was odd the way the water had come down, and you could see this little thin bubble around me where nothing was touching me; and I just thought that was so odd. All the water had come down to where I was, and then you see that tiny thin bubble where the water was going around it. It made no sense because the water should have hit me and so I find that fascinating.

Brooke, is a single mom who played sports in high school. She took one year off between the transitions from high school to college. In elementary school, her parents almost got divorced. When asked what factors contributed to being placed in developmental education courses, she responded:

Well I know like 6th grade year was a blur because my parents were going through a divorce. Like it was almost a divorce but then they were like we love each other. It was awful. I had the baby, and when I got pregnant, I still lived with my parents. I was totally determined to just take out loans. Not many people in my family have went to college, just maybe two. I wanted to go just to have that degree. I may not do something really awesome with it but still wanted it.

Maria is a native Texan. She said, "I moved here when I was ten years old due to Hurricane Katrina and Rita; it was too much to handle."

As soon as the hurricane hit, the traffic was outrageous like a twenty minute drive would take six to seven hours cause of all the traffic; and you would have six lanes of traffic going one way. It was just too crazy' and I wanted to get away from all that. My mother wanted to be able to reach us.

## **Role Models**

In a child's life, family attitudes play a key component in their development, which may affect their motivation. According to Chenoweth & Galliher (2004), the influence of family has been a key factor in a student decision to enroll in higher education; in addition, family members are viewed as role models and a source of encouragement. While sharing their feelings about role models, I learned that some of the students view their parent's actions as negative and use their behavior faults to push and become a better person. Whereas, other students shared that their parents are their role model. As mentioned in the literature, a study conducted in West Virginia found that parental education attainment was a major factor for a student to aspire and obtain an education (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004). In fact, the study added that a father's educational attainment influences the child to aspire more than the mother's educational attainment.

Anthony describes his parent's poor behavior and failure as a parent as a negative motivator:

This [given a better life] motivates me to succeed in life because I never want my kids in life to know what my dad did to me. You know what I am saying. I wouldn't want them to see what I had to go through.

Paul explains how he had to take on the role of "man of the house" and how his father is a negative role model.

It got to the point where I was sitting my dad down and talking to him, and I'm like this should be backwards. I shouldn't have to be doing this, but it just got to the point where I got tired of doing it; and you're not going to have that control over me. So if you want to do your thing, do it, and I'll do my thing and we'll be done.

When asked if it would have been easier to move away, Paul responded:

There have been several times I have wanted to [leave]. There have been several instances where I've thought if I would just pack up and go it would be easier, but then I think well my dad did that and it didn't fix anything. He just walked out and left, and he helped me to realize that running away from problems isn't the way to fix them. So that's part of the reason well one of the main reasons I stayed is that, and another is like you said cause my mom and my sisters.

Heather explains that she's had "positive role models, just the ones that should have been there wasn't."

My mother is bad for me. My mother is bad for my future. I'll say it that way, and I love her to death with all my heart...Part of me hates my mother; I hate to say that. She should have been there. She should have been there, and she was there sometimes but I wasn't first. If you have a child, you are supposed to put them first, and I wasn't first. It is supposed to depend on you, and you are supposed to love it no matter what. And as I got older, I seen that it is not always like that, and she is a 52 year old woman acting like she is 21 [years old]. And she can party with the best of them and still partied them out.

I love her and I want distance from her, but I'm scared that if I don't hear from her then I may never hear from her again, if that makes sense. She has been a motivation for me to push harder because I don't want to end up like her. It makes me sick to my stomach. Yeah I've went to parties and drunk and stuff, but I will not end up like my mother, will not, I refuse.

Jay explains that the instructors in high school did promote college nor his father.

My dad didn't finish high school. My father actually told me that I would never go to college at one point. [He was angry because of] grades, and he said that he couldn't afford it. I said that has nothing to do with you first of all. I will go to college and back when I was going for Education I was going to get a doctorate just to rub it in your face that I have a Ph.D. But now I am going to culinary, and I don't know if I can get a doctorate in culinary. I may get a doctorate in business.

Unlike the other stories above, Daniel's parents have been very supportive in his academic career.

Most definitely my mom is my biggest motivator. Just push me a little bit more cause she knows I can do better and do better for myself. She helped me out a lot more than dad; she helped me more.

Brooke's parents have been very supportive of her decisions and have helped even with her baby. During high school, Brooke played sports.

My parents, they just want me to get a college education and the baby. You have to go to college, and employers look at that and pay more. Plus I am getting it free. So that helps.

While growing up, Candace did not think that her mother supported her or cared about her education. However, as she got older, she realized how her mother has supported the family.

It used to [bother me] when I was younger, but now that I am older. I understand and see that she has been trying to take care of us. I just didn't really realize it. She's had cancer since I've been in the sixth grade, and she's been really, really sick. She didn't tell us about it that she had cancer until I was in the seventh or eighth grade. Then she was talking to us about it and saying the doctors say that I may not be around so you guys need to prepare yourselves. I went to the doctor with her, and they were saying she may not make it to my high school graduation. So for her to make it to my high school graduation and see me graduate—wheelchair or not—meant the world to me. That showed me that she tried to raise me. She never had an income or anything... she raised us on \$222 a month and that came from my dad. He draws an SSI check or something like that, and they started out giving me \$60 dollars apiece and my brother \$60 a piece from his check. And then every year it went up \$10 and finally my senior year when I graduated, it went up to \$122 a piece. So getting \$250 a month plus food stamps is what we got. That was our income. When I turned 18, they cut me off, as soon as I turned 18. It didn't matter though because I never seen the money that I got.

### **Low Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy**

Research indicates that low self-esteem is a factor affecting success. According to a study conducted by Chenoweth & Galliher, seniors viewed themselves as a misfit in

the college scene, not intelligent enough or possessing the grades for acceptance into college. Moreover, the administrators and teachers felt that the students were academically underprepared and did not possess realistic expectations for college. The beliefs of a student's peers has the tendency to influence the motivational factors and achievements of their fellow students (Chenoweth & Galliher, 2004).

Daniel shared his reservations about going to college straight from high school.

Actually, at first, I wasn't prepared because I thought it's going to be a lot harder on me, and I was a lot nervous, cause that was right after high school. And I seconded guessed myself, and I thought maybe I should try and just get a part time job and work around and decide if I even wanted to try college. Probably about January I thought about trying for college, and then that fall, I applied and registered. Well I guess I wasn't smart enough for it, and there was a lot of people trying out for it and a lot of people and friends I knew were in school and going to college. And I felt left out, and I thought well if they are doing it then maybe I should start because there is a lot of my friends have a semester or two in college, and I wanted to do the same and better myself.

While coming out, Jay shared his self-esteem issues.

I went to class all the time; I had nearly perfect attendance. I just didn't apply myself. And then my junior year I was dealing with coming out, and I have an extremely, extremely religious family. I was suicidal for a little bit; I self-harmed for about six months... a counselor was provided by the state. My father was hoping that they would do a gay conversion therapy.

After Travis shared about being placed in special education courses in high school, I asked if it affected his motivation. He responded, "Well sometimes I may feel like I am not as smart as other people."

Paul who was shy and bullied has had very low self-esteem.

I think it stems all of it but in elementary school I was just really shy and wouldn't talk and that meant I wouldn't ask questions in class because I felt embarrassed in class and that meant I didn't understand. I did really good in like every other class except in math, and I guess it was a pride thing and I was too embarrassed to ask for help... I guess it was just the fear of drawing attention to myself because I had very low self-esteem and you know...

I took Algebra classes in high school, but I've always been very, very bad in math—terrible at math. I was one of those kids in high schools that didn't talk to anybody. Also given the fact that half the people in my class I didn't know so I was real quiet and never said anything. So, given that, I got in the bad habit and never asked for help, even when I needed it—so I got in the habit if I got stuck I would work it out, it would be fine and stuff didn't work out that way.

He continued on later about being bullied.

They wanted to be the cool kids and they wanted ... when I would just hang out with them, because they were my neighbors mostly, and I would hang out with them and when it was just us it would be fine, but when we were in front of people, you know, they chalked it up a little bit. But when I got in high school and the transition from middle school to high school I was like you know what, I don't need these people that aren't my friends so I was going to do my own thing, and I did. I think I came out better for it.

Candace, like Paul, was a product of being bullied in school.

I was thirteen. I had never been in an argument not even to mention an altercation. So I didn't know how to respond [after getting beat up] and my mom said you are going to have to start taking up for yourself cause these girls are going to keep picking on you until you do. So, next time I went to school Betty picked on me, I took a rock and hit the up side of her head with it. I got into a lot of fights. I've fought a lot of people over here, and it was just like the more I fought the less heck I caught from everybody. So once I started fighting people and they seen that I wouldn't put up with it anymore they left me alone and they started liking me and being my friend and stuff. Which is awful.

I feel like my self-esteem impacted my learning because if I hadn't have been bullied in school then maybe I wouldn't have been afraid to raise my hand in class and say hey can you show me how to do this. Sometimes I would and they would explain it and. I still wouldn't do it and would be too embarrassed to say well I still don't understand it. Can you show me again? I still do it.

Michael faced low self-efficacy while trying to learn math in the Adult Education Center while obtaining his GED.

Well that wasn't easy to finish; the math crippled me several times. The math and the way it was set up for me it just wasn't working and finally one day I suggested that we needed small classes in GED. And I guess Ms. Smith took that into consideration. Next thing you know there were smaller classes, and Mr. Jones came into the picture and people started learning because math on the computer is not helping you because no one will explain it. I mean the computer will explain it, but that's not helping because you say well I can do this and that but if

someone is explaining to you step by step you can say well wait I don't see how you got this, and they can be like ok well you do this and do this and do this. The computer didn't do that. It just shows you one clump and another clump and another clump.

He continued to explain about motivation and self-esteem factors while learning math.

It's like you'll be in a class and you would be doing stuff in class. And you take home homework and you get it, but then you take a test, and the test is completely different. I guess to me when I took it I guess I expected to see things I was learning, but it wasn't like that; it was like more other stuff that I didn't know. Like some bridge that has something to do with the area and all that, and I didn't understand it and the bridge crushed me because it was like six to seven questions based on the bridge. Then there would be another question based on a bird house and you got to get the dimensions for the birdhouse and all this.

Anthony suffers from test anxiety and has low self-esteem. As mentioned in the literature, K-12 instructors are expected to meet criteria for standardized testing (Wigfield & Eccles, 1989). Instructors are so focused on students learning the testing standards that they neglect to teach the basic core standards (Haddy, 2004).

I have test anxiety, like tests bother me. I am the type of person that when a teacher puts a test on the desk, I go blank. And you was timed and the math I just could not get. I didn't get the math; it was terrible.

There are some that are in there and they are smarter than me. Like I'm not going to say no names, but in my English class there, is a guy that sits across from me and if he had tried harder I know he is a little bit smarter than I am. And I think if he had at least tried harder, he would have tested out.

I knew I would have to take a remedial math because I am not that good at it. It takes me time to learn math. I have to learn the steps one by one. I can't forget a step, and it take me time to learn the material. I can be a little slow to learn that.

As mentioned in the literature, standardized test results are influencing how a student feels about themselves and their peers (Haddy, 2004). Even though Brooke played sports, she was still not entirely accepted as part of the team. When I asked her if she was treated differently, she replied, "Oh my gosh, yeah!" and went on to say "Even though I was a ball player." She shared about how low self-esteem while she was in special education classes.



It was really weird because I remember this. When I was in Special Ed, I felt really low about myself, really low, but when I got out on the basketball court, I was better than everybody else. It was awesome. It's like school I hated it even lunch; I just hated it.

Unlike the other students interviewed, Maria does not have low self-esteem, due to her Hispanic background and culture. She implied that the Hispanic culture is very hard working, and hard work is instilled in her.

I don't have to be motivated; I don't like that being patted on the back. I think that because down there [in Texas] you are expected to do well. It's not like if you do well then we are going to reward you or give you a trip or money; you are expected to do well. It's just in me I guess.

### **Teacher Attitudes**

While conducting the interviews, I heard several students talk about their teachers with both positive and negative attributes. However, it always seemed like the negative experiences were remembered. In fact, the school setting has an impact on a student's academic motivation. According to Goodenow & Grady (1993), the sense that a student feels "personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others- especially teachers and other adults in the school social environment" (p.61) is largely influences academic motivation. As mentioned in the literature, children of rural areas often cannot obtain a quality education due to the lack of qualified instructors. There is a stigma which extends to instructors who possess low expectations for the students in the Appalachian region seeing, the students as unfit for higher education and consequently offering less support for success (Auwarter & Arguete, 2008). This chapter provides a voice for the students in the rural Appalachian area to express their concerns with the public school system and teacher attitudes.

Echoing responses about teacher attitudes in the public school system. Heather stated,

Act like you love your job, if you don't love your job, don't become a teacher. Talk to me like I am a human being; you know what I mean. Just don't shove my nose in a book and expect me to learn because I'm not. I'll look at this wall, and I'll be like this one is green and this one is yellow. I'm not [going] to learn any of this. Act like you love your job. If you don't love your job, don't become a teacher.

Jay describes his experience with teachers:

Virginia schools teach for the books—well teach for the test. Some teachers taught for the test but then they would supplement with other material. Like the history teacher, he told us what was going to be on the SOL like you are going to need to know this for the test, but here is actually what happened. Like the whole Christopher Columbus but then he told us what actually happened. So there were a lot who were teaching for the test because they had to but were still supplementing us with other information that we should know.

Anthony's opinions of the teachers echoed what other students stated about their experience.

It was the way they taught; some teachers teach different than other teachers. Not all teachers teach the same, and some teachers some of them care and some of them don't. You know some of only are there to get paid; and that's all they are there for. But you have to be the one to step up and do your work and all that; some of them will push you and some of them won't... I think the biggest problem was you know when someone had be teaching for years and years and years and you know it. You know what you have to do, and you know what you have to bring and it's just different.

Paul shared some of his experiences with instructors. He mentioned how teachers would pass students along in the system and the lack of control over their classroom.

I got real behind, and my teacher didn't know that I was behind because I acted like I had my crap together. And by the time I realized I was too far the thing is he ended up passing me cause they just passed us along.

I'm not going to say that they weren't invested cause I know that they were, but I guess they could have acted like it a little more and acted like they cared a little more. I guess a lot of it too would have been to help us to prepare for after high school. As a teacher it's your job to set people up for success and for a good future, and I guess they were more focused on the present and like this is what's going on now.

My geometry class, the teacher didn't really care. I mean he cared, but he was like another person that had very low self-esteem. And he would try to be an authoritative figure in the classroom, which is what he needs to be, but kids wouldn't pay him any mind because he was so passive, and we really wouldn't get anything done. He was so passive that I was like I don't understand this so I'll just give you an A, and it will be alright. So I mean he was a good guy, but he wasn't a good teacher..... He didn't have control of his classroom. If kids were to get into it, then he would be like you all knock it off and let's get back to work. No one would pay attention and he would be like we'll get it later, and we would never get it.

While Paul was in the eighth grade, he had to take state tests.

I know in elementary school and middle school we would take those state tests, and they would get our grades back; and they would always tally up the scores, and you had to be a certain percentage and whatever. I know they always told us when we were in eighth grade that we were all on a fifth grade level. I just remember them saying that and that we were all really far behind in terms of where we should be, and I guess knowledge wise... I guess they are calling us dumb, but at the same time, it was a deal where they were beating it into our heads like we got to do better, we got to do better. I'm kind of like well you all have to do better too.

Maria had similar observations as Paul and she felt her high school experience was lacking.

Like, my freshman year I had a few classes that were ok but some classes were like do whatever you want, we don't care, you'll get a grade. I had one class that the teacher didn't really overlook the students and give out assignments and I had a student who had an Aide that sat next to me in class. As soon as the papers were given out the aid would do his work while the student slept because she thought he was too dumb to do the work, like she wouldn't challenge him or get to know his limits were to do this.

Maria continued to explain the culture in rural Appalachia versus Texas, which is fast paced.

Everyone knows each other, and its small town politics in my opinion. Like who your parents are and how much money you have. If you are good at a sport, this and that... All through high school the one thing that stood out the most was football players. They got to do whatever they wanted whenever, and they didn't have to perform in the classroom. I think sports should be a privilege. The students there in my junior year that graduated, half can't read, can't write properly; they don't have jobs. They steal and are into illegal activities basically. They don't have a desire to want to do better because sports is all they were taught. So I was just... it's all politics in high school basically, and the teachers aren't there for the students.

Michael, unlike the others, did not have any negative experiences with the instructors rather he had concerns with the school administrators.

They had some ok teachers there, but the main faculty or the higher up or principals they were pretty much useless. If they were trying to help you, they made it worse--like the principal and vice-principal. It was mainly the vice-principal, because when you went to the principal, he would ask questions but he wouldn't actually listen. My biggest issue was the vice-principal cause all he did was harass me.

Candace and Heather switched schools a lot throughout her high school years.

Candace did not have stability at home nor in the schools.

Mostly it's my own fault, but I feel like you get these teachers and some teachers care and then some teachers just want to pass you. At Central, you have a lot of teachers who want to pass you. They had been there for a long time, and it is a big school; and I don't blame them I guess, but they didn't really teach as much as they did at County. At County, they had just opened up, and they were teaching the entire time. When I went to Central, you had people skipping class, and people would smoke in the bathrooms and people were less strict. I believe because it had been opened a long time people were less strict that I didn't really try to apply myself. At the time, I believe if they had been more strict then I would have just rebelled to that too and cause, more trouble—that was me in high school.

Heather echoed the same challenges about transferring schools,

Well freshman to junior year I went to the Christian Academy over in town; loved it up there. Then I went to my senior year of high school I went, no half of my senior year I was on line doing online school basically, and then I transferred to County and graduated from County High School. I was used to being a big fish in a little pond. You know what I mean? And then they were sending me to County High School that was making me smaller as in a little fish in a big pond, and I'll be honest with you the first day that I was there, I walked into the lunch room and I cried because it was so massive.

## **Curriculum**

As mentioned in the literature, students attending rural schools often felt that students from larger urban schools were better and more prepared in academics (Schafft & Jackson, 2010). When Candace was in first grade, she was ahead of everyone in her

classroom. The school moved her up to third grade, and she did well in those classes until she reached the math portion. She stated, “The rest of the people caught up with me, and I was still doing good but wasn’t as smart as I was. And then about sixth grade I moved.”

Maria described the curriculum in rural Appalachia as not as advanced as in Texas.

Like when I moved here in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, the stuff they were doing then like the algebra and the long division, I was doing in the second grade. So I wasn’t challenged. I was just like breezing through school. All up until like my junior year of high school everyone would freak out like I have to study for this test, and I would already know how to do that so it was nothing. So, it’s not a challenge here, I don’t think school is.

Heather described while at the Christian School the curriculum was lacking.

I was in Geometry...two weeks. I taught myself. There was no teacher for geometry, so I just got credit for it. Do you know who my teacher was?...LPN nurse, no [an] X-ray tech who couldn’t get a job, so she got hired. Basically what I know, I taught myself. I took Algebra II my sophomore year; I took it first period and third period.

When I asked her why she took it so many times, she responded, “Because there were no other classes for me to fill up that time.” As referred to in the literature, students attending rural schools felt that students from larger urban schools were better and more prepared in academics (Schafft & Jackson,

Brooke talked about the curriculum and her study skills while in high school.

I don’t like school. The only thing I liked was I played sports. I ran cross country’ and I played basketball; that’s all I liked. The only time I really studied was freshman year. Sophomore though junior I didn’t take books home. I know I definitely didn’t senior year. I never had any homework; if I did, I did it in class.

Jay went to a school in Virginia for seventh through twelfth grade. He attended a small high school which had a total enrollment of 364 students.

In math, I had Algebra I, but the teacher I would say was subpar. She would do a few problems and examples. She would give you a workbook. She didn't actually assign you a textbook until my second time around for Algebra I...

Anthony and Paul expresses how the curriculum in high school and even the instructors did not prepare him for college.

I wouldn't necessarily say they prepared me. I mean some teachers did because they knew how they taught. Like with some of the dual credit classes and Mr. C he would come and tell us how it is and stuff, and you don't have responsibilities in high school but when you get out in the real world you have responsibilities and you have to get a job. I mean college ain't free.

Paul echoed Anthony's response by stating:

At the high school and grade school, we didn't have someone constantly pushing us. We had caring teachers, but some were a little too caring cause if you didn't get something done they would be like well that's ok you can redo it or we will give you extra credit or something. So, when I got into college it's like sorry, I don't know what to tell ya cause the professors don't take no crap—which is how it should be because you know when you are in college you are an adult and you should be able to retain that responsibility and so on and so forth, and I understand that.

Several students mentioned that they were not able to take classes due to transferring late or other course conflicts. I was puzzled by Daniel's response to the curriculum and courses he took. When asked if he took honors classes or dual credit, he responded:

No, no I didn't. I didn't have time, to so I didn't get to. Well I guess where I had all my other classes, I guess I had mostly gym classes and I wanted to have that. I didn't know if it would have gotten in the way...

Due to being in foster care, Travis had to switch schools. When transferring schools, it affected his ability to take certain classes. He stated, "Other classes I wanted to take were taken up, and I couldn't get in...it was like in October."

## **Special Education**

An unexpected theme that emerged was student placement in special education courses. While researching, I did not realize how student's placement in special education courses would affect them in elementary school and throughout their secondary school experience. My initial encounter of a student sharing their experience was from Brooke.

So it's first or second grade--I think it's second because I failed it, and I was really hyper and mom didn't want to put me on drugs or stuff whatever it is called. So second though seventh grade they had me in Special Ed, so I guess that is why I never really learned a lot up until 8th grade when I got out of it because I never learned anything. It really makes me mad; it infuriates me. And my mom couldn't get me out of it. I don't know if she didn't try or what; it really makes me mad.

Brooke became very emotional toward the end of the interview when I asked additional questions on the topic of special education. Toward the end of the interview, she informed me she had emotional issues on the topic of special education, and what it stems down to is that due to being in the special education courses, she had no motivation to do better, and she didn't have anyone to motivate her. She believed she could have been taken out of special education even from what another teacher told her, but her mother never tried to get her out of it. Brooke explained that people looked at her differently on the basketball team, and due to being in special education courses and due to that she stopped learning, she put up a block. She went on to say she would make crossword puzzles for the other kids to complete and do multiplication tables as fast as she could over and over and just did it to get the assignment done. She did not learn it; she was the first student done just to get it over with. She eventually became very upset and did not want to talk about special education.

Daniel's experiences were similar to those experienced by Brooke. Daniel said he "was placed in Special Ed a few years in elementary school and also some speech classes." "It felt like people looked at me different and judge me thinking why aren't you in regular classes. I didn't feel like I needed to be in the Special Ed classes."

Travis' experience in Special Ed classes was completely different from Daniel and Brooke's experience. Travis did not seem to mind the classes.

Well they gave us math worksheets and let us try to do it on our own, and then if we couldn't, they said that they would help us out. So we understood it that much better... Like some other kids they would just put us in a room, and Mr. Lee would help out and give us some worksheets. He would just give us something and say try it out.

### **Advice for Future Students**

The students who were interviewed are currently in one if not all three developmental courses. The students shared their thoughts on the courses and if they were beneficial to them, and more importantly shared wisdom they have gained by being enrolled in these courses. The students were asked what advice they would give to someone in high school to help prevent them from being enrolled in developmental education courses. The number of students graduating from high school underprepared and who are not college ready is astounding. As referred to in the literature, only 31% of high school graduates met the math benchmark in Kentucky; 37% met the reading benchmark, and 59 % met the English benchmark (ACT, 2014).

Candace shared the wisdom of class attendance and test prep to help future students.

Try in all of your classes. Attend all of your classes. You know skipping and things like that may seem fun at the time, but it's just hurting yourself even more. It's hurting you now, and it's hurting your future. To do the ACT and take the practice ACT, do anything that you can do because if you can pass that ACT, you



don't even have to take that test when you come to college. Unfortunately, I stink at taking tests. If you stink, take tests tips classes and things like that. Just try.

Daniel echoed Candace's thoughts by saying:

I would tell them to do as much as you can in high school, and when you get out, go to college right away. If you don't know what you want to do, don't take a year or two off; go on ahead and get your basics done and work as hard as you can. Don't slack off. Put a lot of effort in your work.

Paul suggests that students should ask for more help when the material is foreign.

If you have trouble, ask for help as much as you possibly can. I'm regretting it now. I'll put it that way cause at this point with the math I don't typically ask for help because I know he's frustrated with me, and I don't want to deal with that. But had I asked for help more in high school I think it would have helped a lot. So don't keep your mouth shut if you are having trouble. Also, get with your advisors and counselor because they know; part of their job is to help us prepare us, and they are there to help set you up for college. They will make you aware of it and go to your counselor and if college is your thing. Ask how to prepare for it and it would help transition for it.

Michael shared Paul's wisdom by encouraging students to ask and seek help.

Don't be afraid to ask if you need help. If you're afraid to ask a question or raise your hand, how are you going to learn?

Jay's response was rather simplistic, he stated, "I would walk into the classroom and say do your friggin homework." Brooke's response was very similar by stating, "take it more seriously, don't goof off [and] try not to cheat." Heather suggests encouraging a student in middle school to take the curriculum more seriously and take their studies seriously.

I would tell a middle schooler, an 8th grader about to be a freshman, do what you have to do and do more. If you are just writing stuff down just to turn it in, what else do you have to do? What else do you have to do to learn it? If you have the slightest bit of trouble, ask for help. That's what they are there for. Some teachers won't but do what you got to do and do more; that's not even to a high schooler that's to a middle schooler. Figure out what you want to be and works toward that; have a plan. I know that people always tell me to have a plan and do what you got to do, but things change. They change more than you know but at least you have a map of where you go.

While conducting the interviews, the students had obvious regrets of their actions or lack of effort while in high school. As described in the literature, this generation of students has unrealistic demands from their employers and instructors; moreover, these students are slackers who have a false sense of entitlement (Tabscott, 1997). It is after the fact that the students realize they should have put forth more effort in their studies.

### **Retention Data**

It is estimated that 40 percent of first year college students are enrolled in some form of developmental or remedial coursework; moreover, statistics can be as high as six out of ten students at some institutions (NCES, 2003; Bettinger & Long, 2009b; Bailey, 2009; Long & Boatman, 2013). Educators across the nation are facing similar challenges with a lack of college readiness, and an emphasis to address this under preparedness in the field of developmental education continues to increase (Long & Boatman, 2013). Due to factors often beyond the control of community colleges, there is an increase of students placed into developmental courses, and the numbers continue to rise. In 1995, developmental education involved “almost three million students and over 100,000 faculty and staff” (Boylan, 1995, p. 7).

At a rural community college in the Appalachian Mountains, the Institutional Effectiveness officer provided retention data for fall 2014 to fall 2015 and disaggregated it by developmental and non-developmental education students to answer research question #2. The question posed was: to what extent do developmental education courses prepare students to be successful at a community college. The Table 4.1 below depicts the number of students in fall 2014 and those returning in fall 2015.

Table 4.1 Fall to Fall Retention Data

Students	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Retention
All Developmental Education Students	769	358	50%
First Time Developmental Ed	175	95	54.3%
Non Developmental	296	158	53.4%

In the spring 2015 semester, a total of 884 students were enrolled in at least one developmental course, and 215 students withdrew from the course resulting in a 24% withdraw rate for various reasons. The success rate of the developmental education classes, defining success as a “C” or better and not including the withdrawn students, resulted in 659 students (10 students had Incompletes and were not averaged in the calculations). Of the 659 students, 452 students were successful resulting in a success rate of 68.5%.

**Conclusion**

The above heartfelt stories told shed light on the students in the rural region of the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern Kentucky. Their stories illustrate to a reader the hardships they have faced and what support is provided to them in their own home. Moreover, their stories highlight their fears and the lack of education provided by the primary and secondary schools they attended. These are students who want to better themselves, attend college and get a job to make a living for themselves. As stated

previously, these ten students serve as a sample population of students in the rural area. Like their urban counterparts, many of these students exhibited similar high school student behaviors such as skipping class, not putting forth enough effort in their studies and failing to ask for help when they needed it.

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the interviews and statistical retention and success data that have guided and answered the two research questions. The qualitative component of the study has provided a new perspective from the students in a rural Appalachian region regarding what factors contributed to placement in developmental education courses. Throughout the interviews, three main themes emerged connecting a student's home life to their struggle and placement in developmental education classes. For the quantitative component of the study, the retention data provided a detailed visual summary.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to share the voices of traditional age college students who are currently enrolled in developmental courses at a local community college in the rural Appalachian Mountains. Specifically, the study was conducted to obtain their perceptions on factors which contributed to them being placed in developmental education courses. It explored the students' perceptions of socioeconomic factors, secondary school factors and their own attitudes toward education. Ten students were interviewed. The interviews yielded themes providing rich evidence on the problems students face. The results of the study were presented in chapter, and connections with the literature reviewed in chapter two were noted. In this chapter, I will recap the factors that have affected the education of students who are placed in developmental classes. In addition, this chapter will include implications for practice and policy, as well as suggestions for future research.

### **Conditions that Impact the Traditional Aged Students**

According to the interviews conducted in this study, there are three common factors that affected the students involved in the study, all who are traditional aged and currently enrolled in developmental education classes at a rural community college:

- Fear of Asking Questions;
- Low self-Efficacy in math and poor test taking skills; and
- Not having stability at home or in school.

### **Home Environment and Lack of Stability (Switching Schools)**

A great amount of research was found in relation to the home environment and the correlation of the environment to student success (McCabe, 2000; Roueche & Roueche, 1999). The challenges that these students face are very complex. These students are pulled in several directions in their home lives; moreover, it was clear throughout the interviews that all of the students face serious problems in their home environment. Some of the issues are more severe than others—however, each challenge is their own and as important as another individual's.

Many students in the study expressed their lack of stability and support in their homes. On a daily, basis several students dealt with turmoil in their home life. Three of the students interviewed had parents who have been or are currently serving jail time. The abuse of drugs is serious problem in the area. Dealing with not having a parent present to tend to their educational development can stunt students' academic growth. Both Heather and Anthony's parents served time for drug abuse. Both parents were more concerned over their own well-being than that of their child. The result was being passed between friends or relatives to ultimately raise the child, which is the job of the parent. Travis, who was placed in foster care does not know when his mother will be getting out of jail. He switched secondary schools a couple of times, which resulted in him being placed in special education courses. Even though Candace's mother is alive, she did not support her as a mother should. Candace found out later that her mother was battling cancer and stretching the little government assistance they received from month to month. Candace began working when she was 16 years old; she also switched schools constantly while she was in high school. She did not have any academic stability.

There was a regret looking back expressed by the students who switched schools. Since there was no stability, they could not have taken part in the same activities as their peers. This can hinder the social and academic growth of an individual. In some cases, for an unknown reason other than drugs, the parents neglected their children; moreover, the children had to fend for themselves and did as any normal child would do who did not want to go to school. The child did not put forth sufficient effort to succeed and was passed along throughout the academic system. A future study could focus on why some Appalachian parents failed to take responsibility for their children.

There were other students whose parents' lives take control of the child's and turns their world upside down. When parents argue and are on the brink of a divorce, it affects the emotional stability of the child. When a parent steals from the child and destroys all trust and confidence within the family, the child is left with an emotional void. Other issues of abuse affect a child. Jay was sexually abused as a child by his step-brother; even though he was willing, it later affected his academics. This affects their self-esteem and overall self-worth as well.

### **Negative Role Model**

When an individual imagines a role model, it is usually someone who helps to motivate and inspire. Throughout this study, I heard overlapping comments of negative role models. Normally, these negative role models were parental figures. The students would explain that they did not want to live their life as their parents; moreover, they did not want to end up like their parents. Some of the students were adamant to the brink of tears that they would not turn out like their parent, and if they had kids, they would do things differently. As a result, they are using their parents' poor behavior and actions to

motivate them to succeed in life. In one instance, the father of one of the students was stealing funds from his college debit card. The father was having an affair, behaving poorly and not supporting the family as a father should; consequently, the son had to sit down and explain their roles and what the father needed to do to clean up his act and help ease the burden on the family.

In a study conducted by Chenoweth & Galliher (2004), the researcher found that several factors affected college aspirations in rural West Virginia. Initially, the researcher believed that socioeconomic factors such as culture, family influences, economic climate, and low self-esteem would be major contributing factors. However, the study found that parental education attainment was a major factor for a student to aspire and obtain an education. In fact, the study discussed if a father obtained a degree and was working in a professional field, then the student would be more likely to aspire and obtain an education. A majority of the students interviewed throughout the study did not have a parent who possessed a formal education or encouraged their child through praise or accolades to achieve an education; instead, the student refers to the parents' poor behavior as a motivator to succeed in life.

### **Low Self- Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Test Anxiety**

Bullying is an issue that many of today's students must face while at school. Several of the students interviewed shared stories of being bullied. Self-worth and self-esteem can be tied to the attitudes of one's peers. Howard & Solberg (2006) illustrate that negative messages and ideas, particularly in schools and society, can have a negative impact on a student's self-esteem, behavior and academic development. In one circumstance, a student was bullied at school; however, those same kids would later play



in the neighborhood if they were outside the school setting. In another case, one girl wanted to be accepted when she moved to a new school. Instead, she was picked on until she started acting like the people bullying her; she began fighting and being expelled from school. She ended up being tricked by some girls she thought were her friends; however, they lured her out under false pretenses and beat her up resulting in physical and emotional damage.

Another aspect of peer pressure is test anxiety. Throughout the interviews, test anxiety was mentioned by two students. These students would convince themselves that they could not do well on a test or that other students were more intelligent than they were. Such anxiety is a serious problem for developmental students since it hinders their performance on tests that determine whether they are required to take developmental courses.

### **Lack of Motivation from the Teachers**

To a student, the approval from a teacher means as much or in some instances more than that of a family member. A teacher knows a student's progress throughout a school year and the strengths and weaknesses of the student. Thus, when a teacher stands in front of the classroom with no enthusiasm for teaching, the students can detect that lack of desire to teach, and the outcomes will be negative ones. In many cases, students are not self-motivated and want a lot of outside school work. When a teacher does not enjoy teaching, the classroom will not be a conducive environment for learning. In fact, several students mentioned the atmosphere of the classroom as being dull and lifeless. There is not a positive environment for learning. This could be the result of standardized testing taking control of the curriculum in secondary schools; moreover, the teachers are

now forced to teach to the test and have little room for creativity in the classroom. Or, it could be the climate of the school, and as a result, the teachers feel little control over the student outcomes and become disheartened. Another aspect of motivation was the instructor having no control over classroom management. As a result, the students felt they could overpower the instructor and conduct the atmosphere of the class as they saw fit.

### **Lack of Rigorous Curriculum in High School**

While interviewing the students, there was a general consensus that the quality of classes and educational opportunities were not satisfactory in the secondary schools of the Appalachian region. According to Schafft & Jackson (2010), students attending rural schools feel that students from larger urban schools are better and more prepared in academics. Children of rural areas often cannot obtain a quality education due to the lack of qualified instructors. Students shared that there was a lack of rigor in the classroom and there was not a variety of classes to take while in high school. As the literature has indicated and the stories of these students corroborate, the educational curriculum of the rural Appalachian region is lacking. There is not a significant funding to draw instructors and create a competitive market attracting highly qualified instructors. A majority of the teachers of the region are natives and are living in their hometown and giving back to the community. There is a stigma which extends to instructors who possess low expectations for the students in the Appalachian region seeing the students as unfit for higher education, consequently offering less support for success (Auwarter & Arguete, 2008).

This lack of ability to attract highly qualified teachers lends support to proponents arguing for bonuses to attract teachers to hard-to-staff areas. In addition, the lack of a

rigorous curriculum typical of the secondary schools in this regions lens support to a state core standards such as the Common Core, and assessment of these standards for accountability purposes.

### **Placed in Special Education Courses in Elementary School**

A few students shared that they were placed in special education courses in elementary and secondary school and this placement was a factor influencing their need for developmental courses. As a researcher, I had listed other factors affecting students, but I did not initially think of special education. In past generations, special education was an area to serve students who had severe learning disabilities. Today, if students have behavior problems in the school, they may be placed in special education. For the students' interviewed, special education affected their confidence and their ability to succeed in school. One of the students did not know why she was placed in special education classes, and she was angry because she was told later by teachers that she did not need to be there; however, the system nor her mother intervened to eliminate the special education classes. The student felt stigmatized and unintelligent due to these classes. The students felt that they were treated differently by their peers due to the status of special education classes.

It appears that several of these students were inappropriately placed in special education. In addition, once placed there, there was little if any opportunity to return to regular education classes. Given the long term impact of these students, over placement in special education programs needs to be addressed, and more clear paths out of such placements need to be provided.

## **Poor Transition from High School to College**

It is apparent from speaking with all of the students, there is a broken connection between transitioning between high school and college. Once the students attend classes at the community college, they soon realize that no one is there to constantly plead for assignments or make them get to class on time. College is a reality check and the realization of adulthood. The students shared that they have to do their work and the instructors do not take any excuses for missed work like they would accept in high school. They realize that college is different as it should be; however, there is an adjustment period for some to realize the seriousness of earning a college education. As mentioned in the literature, the “K-12 system was never designed to prepare all students for college, and students may meet all high school requirements and be admitted to college, only to later discover that they cannot pass placement tests for entry into college-level courses” (Russell, p. 1). The practice of sampling passing on students who have not demonstrated proficiency in elementary and secondary schools must stop. Furthermore, additional research on the validity of the placement assessments being used to determine college readiness is clearly warranted.

Many students have a deep connection to their mountain home but worry that they will not be able to stay after graduation. Discouraged by the economic conditions and deficient job market, they are pressured to pack up and move elsewhere to make a decent living. The younger generation wants to have a sense of pride for their hometown, but the economy is not providing growth for the poor Appalachian rural towns. Instead, coal mines and industry are shutting down giving the youth no hope for future employment or training to go to work. The industry that is hiring within the rural areas are flooded with

recent graduates. These factors cause many students to question the value of an education and lead to their making less of a commitment.

### **Current Placement in Developmental Education Classes**

While speaking with the students in this study, they did not seem to be angry or disheartened that they were in developmental education classes. In fact, they knew they needed their skills enhanced and the faculty/ staff who teach the classes are trying to help them succeed. Some students were discouraged because they had to overcome developmental mathematics. Of the ten students interviewed, only one appeared to enjoy mathematics. The other nine students have an innate fear of the unknown language of mathematics. Even though there is a large number of students who are enrolled in and take developmental education courses at community colleges, ironically there is little absolute evidence on what makes for successful and effective developmental education practices at the college level (Bailey et al., 2008). More research is critically needed on this topic.

### **Closing Thoughts**

Developmental education will continue to be a significant component of higher education. It has been the mission of the community college to mentor students and help them succeed and obtain a degree no matter their initial skill level. Community colleges have an open door policy. However, unless more initiative is taken in secondary and elementary schools, students will still come to community colleges underprepared. Over the years, we have observed that ACT scores rise in Reading and Mathematics but not for the most underserved students; thus, students continue to be placed in developmental education courses. Sole blame should not be on secondary or elementary schools; some

students in the Appalachian area do not receive the attention and academic motivation from their home. From this study, we learned that students have been raised by their grandparents because of their parents being in jail, or the parent basically leaves the child to fend for themselves while they are irresponsible in their choice.

This mixed-methods study, particularly phenomenological study, included an in-depth look of the student characteristics of the Appalachian region. The research highlighted the common challenges confronting students of the rural Appalachian area. It is clear that there is a tremendous socioeconomic challenge freshman students in the rural Appalachian area. It is likely greater school funding would help eliminate some of the educational problems such as limited curriculum and lack of qualified teachers. However, one factor which is hard to control is the student's home life. Previous research has shown parents swooping in to take control of the problems their children face; however, this study illustrated that the parents are in the background and not acting as parents should. Until parents start taking an active role in their child's education, the home life issues leading many students to be under prepared for college will not be resolved.

This study reflected the stories of ten students who at the time of being interviewed were enrolled in developmental education courses at a rural community college in the Appalachian Mountains. The study obtained firsthand information of their plights and struggles of being a developmental education student in a rural area. Many people may wonder what keeps the students motivated in life and not giving up. These students have lived in turmoil and have seen and lived in poverty their entire lives. They want to better themselves and provide a better life for their children. From their

perspective, they have no choice but to keep persisting. One key motivator is to do so to avoid ending up like their parents. One has to wonder how many other students gave up in part because of their parents as opposed to using them as a source of motivation.

Finally, the study included success and retention rates of developmental education students at a rural college in the Appalachian Mountains. The data indicate that many developmental students continued successfully in college, and it is my belief that the continued improvement of developmental education courses will allow more students to enhance their skills and become better prepared for general education courses. It is my hope that with the data obtained from this study, as well as tips and strategies, can be shared with the public school systems in the area to help strengthen the educations of today's students.

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APPENDIX A:  
Behavior Survey



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## NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL

**Protocol Number: 15-161**

Institutional Review Board IRB00002836, DHHS FWA00003332

Review Type:  Full  Expedited

Approval Type:  New  Extension of Time  Revision  Continuing Review

Principal Investigator: **Erin Reasor** Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Charles Hausman**

Project Title: **Factors that Affect Developmental Education**

Approval Date: **2/6/15** Expiration Date: **12/1/15**

Approved by: **Dr. Sarah Morris, IRB Member**

This document confirms that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the above referenced research project as outlined in the application submitted for IRB review with an immediate effective date.

**Principal Investigator Responsibilities:** It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects, follow the approved protocol, use only the approved forms, keep appropriate research records, and comply with applicable University policies and state and federal regulations.

**Consent Forms:** All subjects must receive a copy of the consent form as approved with the EKU IRB approval stamp. Copies of the signed consent forms must be kept on file unless a waiver has been granted by the IRB.

**Adverse Events:** Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the IRB within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

**Research Records:** Accurate and detailed research records must be maintained for a minimum of three years following the completion of the research and are subject to audit.

**Changes to Approved Research Protocol:** If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a description of those changes must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to implementation. Some changes may be approved by expedited review while others may require full IRB review. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, consent forms, subjects, and procedures.

**Annual IRB Continuing Review:** This approval is valid through the expiration date noted above and is subject to continuing IRB review on an annual basis for as long as the study is active. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to submit the annual continuing review request and receive approval prior to the anniversary date of the approval. Continuing reviews may be used to continue a project for up to three years from the original approval date, after which time a new application must be filed for IRB review and approval.

**Final Report:** Within 30 days from the expiration of the project, a final report must be filed with the IRB. A copy of the research results or an abstract from a resulting publication or presentation must be attached. If copies of significant new findings are provided to the research subjects, a copy must be also be provided to the IRB with the final report.

**Other Provisions of Approval, if applicable:** None

Please contact Sponsored Programs at 859-622-3636 or send email to [tiffany.hamblin@eku.edu](mailto:tiffany.hamblin@eku.edu) or [lisa.royalty@eku.edu](mailto:lisa.royalty@eku.edu) with questions about this approval or reporting requirements.