

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION GUIDANCE  
COUNSELORS REGARDING THE SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST AND ITS  
RELATIONSHIP TO COLLEGE ADMISSIONS FOR LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Established test score qualifications are experienced by low socioeconomic status (LES) students as a large impediment to college admission. The problem this transcendental phenomenological qualitative study explored was that the established SAT assessment methods and strategies used for secondary students are inundated with data relevant to only students who are in a high socioeconomic demographic. The purpose of this study was to explore the examined perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within Michigan LES communities regarding barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Purposeful sampling was used with semi-structured interviews to examine the topic. Two research questions were addressed: (a) What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT? and (b) How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students? The data from all participant interviews were coded with NVivo to create eight themes with the manual coding using Saldaña's method. The first finding was that secondary school counselors generally think that low SAT accessibility for LES students affects their scores. The second finding was guidance counselors mainly believe that socioeconomic disparities affect the SAT scores of LES students affecting college admissions. The results may be of use to the College Board, urban school districts, LES school administrators, and parents of LES students.

***Keywords:* Guidance Counselors, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Secondary Education, College Admissions, Low Socioeconomic Status**

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Cree. Thank you for your consistent support throughout this process. You were always there during those long nights I was up writing and revising drafts. You reignited my journey of educational pursuits and supported me along the way. I continue to be inspired by your presence and the love you have for me.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Secondary and higher education institutions rely heavily on standardized testing to predict the college performance of students (Zwick, 2019). According to Zwick (2019), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which was first introduced in 1926, is one of the largest standardized tests. Zwick indicated that while scores on this test have been shown to predict college performance, its role in the admissions process fluctuates broadly throughout universities. As noted by Buckley (2020), there is enormous pressure being placed on state systems regarding access to high quality low-cost post-secondary education that is fair and equitable. Buckley stated that using college entrance tests for admissions is an understandably controversial subject for academia. Alvero et al. (2021) stated that there is a “large body of evidence indicating a strong correlation between SAT scores and socioeconomic background, with some having dubbed the SAT to be a wealth test” (para.1).

The problem this study explored was that the established SAT assessment methods and strategies used for secondary students are inundated with data relevant to only the students that are in a high socioeconomic demographic (Geiser, 2017). As explained by Geiser (2017), these methods and strategies do not allow appropriate assessment of students from underserved communities. Bastedo et al. (2022) explained that when standardized tests are utilized, they exclude contextual factors that may influence a student’s performance. Bastedo et al. mentioned that when educational expectations are assessed from the curriculum in a student’s high school, these test scores can become a powerful grouping process that unduly affects the opportunities of admission for candidates from low socioeconomic (LES) backgrounds. Bastedo et al. reported that low enrollment of LES students at selective colleges is not due to a shortage of qualified applicants. Bastedo and Bowman (2017) stated that the performance on college entrance tests

from this population does not predict college readiness for the students, which can restrict qualified students from acceptance into higher education institutions.

Guidance counselors in secondary education have important interactions with young students preparing for their transitions into adulthood (Havlik, 2017). Havlik (2017) noted that school counselors help guide the students into exploring their possible postsecondary school interests, including job placement and postsecondary education. Havlik discovered that because guidance counselors interact with students firsthand, they influence a student's decision to pursue college. Guidance counselors also help students increase their college knowledge (Fitzpatrick & Schneider, 2016). Recognizing that the SAT can be biased against LES students (Bates, 2017), I sought to add to the literature by gaining insight exclusively from guidance counselors. This qualitative study examined the gap in research from the perspectives of secondary guidance counselors on barriers and challenges brought forth by the SAT to underserved LES students in urban school districts.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The key terms used in this study are as follows:

**College Admission:** College admission refers to a college or university's admission decision (Clinedinst & Koranteng, 2017).

**College Knowledge:** College knowledge refers to awareness of the steps (e.g., taking the SAT/ACT, applying to colleges, seeking financial aid) between aspiring to attend college and doing so (Fitzpatrick & Schneider, 2016, p. 1).

**College Readiness Counseling:** Gilfillan defined college readiness counseling as "A process that allows young adults to engage in conversations and activities that allow them to gain more knowledge about themselves and their post-secondary paths" (p. 3).

**Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT):** The College Board (2022) described the SAT as follows:

The SAT is a standardized test that offers colleges a detailed profile of student skills and strengths, informing strategic recruiting efforts and admissions decisions ... Students who take the SAT demonstrate knowledge and skills in areas that current research tells us are most critical for college readiness and success. (paras. 1-2)

**Guidance Counselors:** As explained by Tang and Ng (2019), secondary counselors' job eliminates boundaries to scholarly accomplishment through laying out an extensive academic system as well as offering suitable types of assistance. According to Tang and Ng, school counselors remove barriers to achieving academic success by providing appropriate services and creating comprehensive programs based on school needs. School counselors provide intentional guidance lessons while connecting students to other resources to assist with their chosen path.

**Low Income Individual:** The United States Department of Education (2022) defined low-income individuals as "an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount" (para. 2).

**Low Socioeconomic Status (LES):** For the purposes of this study, LES students are those students whose households are low income, whose parents are unemployed, or whose backgrounds include other indicators of poverty (Bastedo et al., 2022). According to Bastedo et al. (2022), low-income students are those in the lowest income quintile of income in the United States. Bastedo et al. described LES among students as students growing up without the advantages of economic privileges.

**Poverty Guideline:** The United States Census Bureau (2019) defined poverty as "Individuals are considered in poverty if the resources they share with others in the household

are not enough to meet basic needs” (p. 1). Table 1 identifies the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (2021) threshold poverty guidelines. These guidelines are based upon the size of the household and family income.

**Socioeconomic Status (SES):** According to the American Psychological Association (2022), “Socioeconomic status is the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation” (para. 1). Socioeconomic status is normally estimated utilizing a combination of factors including parental education, family pay, parental occupation, and signs of the student’s home climate (Bates, 2017).

**Table 1**

*2021 Poverty Guidelines for the 48 Contiguous States and the District of Columbia*

Persons in family/ household	Poverty guideline
1	\$12,880
2	\$17,420
3	\$21,960
4	\$26,500
5	\$31,040
6	\$35,550
7	\$40,120
8	\$44,660

*Note.* This information was sourced from The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2021).

**Urban School District:** Urban Education (2022) defined urban districts in the following manner:

On average, urban schools have larger enrollments than suburban or rural schools at both the elementary and secondary level and they are more likely to serve low-income students. Forty percent of students in urban locales attend high poverty schools (defined as schools with more than 40% of students receiving free or reduced-price lunch), whereas only 10 percent of suburban students, and 25 percent of rural students attend high poverty schools. (para. 2)

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research has noted that the SAT creates barriers for underserved students in urban areas, particularly those from LES backgrounds (Bates, 2017). This phenomenological study explored the problem that standard SAT evaluation techniques are replete with data related to students from a high socioeconomic demographic and do not allow accurate assessments of students from underserved communities who are in LES demographics (Geiser, 2017). Thus, this population's performance on this test does not measure college readiness for the students and can restrict qualified students from acceptance into higher education institutions (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017).

Because the SAT was not offered due to the COVID-19 pandemic and based on the increasing adoption of test-optional admissions, the focus on reshaping the classroom to fulfill the holistic views of college admissions is an important topic (Cox et al., 2022). As explained by Carnevale et al. (2019), colleges consider SAT scores along with many other factors when making admissions decisions. Carnevale et al. mentioned that these factors include high school grades, essays, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, and talents in what colleges

call a holistic approach to admissions. As mentioned by Carnevale et al., this process is intended to form a well-rounded group of entering students from disparate backgrounds and with different interests.

According to De Los and Uddin (2021), the biases contributing to consistent inequalities in society do not exclude academics. This academic component includes the SAT. De Los and Uddin asserted that schools face an urgent need to dismantle and overhaul current evaluation practices that maintain inequities at multiple stages along the academic pipeline. De Los and Uddin promoted the use of flexible, holistic, and dynamic evaluation models that can be implemented by first acknowledging and recognizing the biases that contribute to ethnic and racial disparities in academia. Further, leaders within academic institutions must drive the adoption of these revised evaluation metrics.

Standardized tests such as the SAT are designed to provide a profile of student strengths and skills to aid in college admissions decisions and recruiting efforts (College Board, 2022). As explained by Knoester and Au (2017), each test taker should be offered a race-neutral, class-neutral, fair, and equal shot at instructive, social, and monetary achievement. Back (2020) found that a long tradition of high stakes tests utilization continues despite the substantial research that supports the method as being deeply flawed in its effects on students, with a particular negative effect on LES students (Knoester & Au, 2017). In addition, Knoester and Au stated that in the early development of the SAT, researchers considered a way to challenge the established upper status gains that favored the wealthy. On those grounds, Knoester and Au explained that the SAT is built on past performance of SAT takers as an indicator of what makes a decent SAT question for forthcoming tests, and past SAT performance relates with race and socioeconomic status.



### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the examined perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within LES communities in regard to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Educators, primarily those in secondary education, will benefit from this study as the results shed light on challenges and barriers created by the SAT from the perceptions of guidance counselors regarding LES students' pursuits of higher education. This study contributed to the ongoing research about the barriers LES students face regarding the SAT in secondary education.

### **Research Questions and Design**

This study involved two research questions. Guest et al. (2013) wrote “much qualitative research is phenomenological in nature in that it attempts to understand individuals' lived experiences and the behavioral, emotive, and social meanings that these experiences have for them” (p. 11). The phenomenological aspect of qualitative research allows collection of data from the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). As reported by Creswell (2007), this gives the research a transcendental phenomenological design. The principal investigator explored the phenomenon of barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students from the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenological research relies on the lived experiences provided by a specified group. Using the key words of “what” and “how” can provide a solid framework for asking questions and recording answers from participants. To examine the topic question, two research questions were addressed:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT?

Research Question 2: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students?

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

The principal investigator utilized both a conceptual and theoretical framework for this study. In this section, the conceptual framework for this study is first explained. Next, the theoretical framework is explained. The principal investigator then details how the conceptual and theoretical frameworks relate to the study.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this qualitative study was based on examining the barriers and challenges the SAT presents for students from LES backgrounds. To examine these barriers, it was necessary to obtain the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors to help fill the gap in research regarding their perceptions about such challenges. Because guidance counselors engage with students daily, they are one of the primary influences on students' decisions to attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). According to Belasco (2013), students interact with high school counselors when making career and college career decisions, but for low-income students, these interactions can be significant for postsecondary decision-making (as cited in Oleka & Mitchell, 2022). Further, according to Perna (2006), high school teachers and counselors play an important role in influencing how students decide upon what to do after high school (as cited in Oleka & Mitchell, 2022). According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), a researcher's position on elements such as variables and distinguished methods can be strengthened by the conceptual framework. Ravitch and Riggan stated the conceptual framework is the argument of the researcher. Further, the conceptual framework explains the argument and

serves both the methods utilized and the significance of the research. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), theoretical stances of a study, amalgam of personal interest, and topical research can be described as the conceptual framework.

The challenges and barriers created by standardized tests such as the SAT relate to the social capital theory, which was the conceptual framework that guided this study. According to Oleka and Mitchell (2022), high school counselors working as a form of social capital may impact the postsecondary opportunities of LES students. Bates (2017) claimed that social capital alludes to social connections and associations that will permit students to receive institutional help. Bates viewed social capital as how the dominant class kept up with its predominant position, repositioning those people who previously had a place with the upper echelon and the social capital that group or organization had.

Social capital theory was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu (1986). Bourdieu described social capital as the combination of real or prospective resources which are available to a system of established and commonly recognized associations. Bourdieu expressed that access to this capital allows those with the network to benefit from the system without any intention or minimal effort by students with high socioeconomic status.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The examination of the relationship among ideas and constructs is the framework that draws on experience, theory, and research of a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated, “the framework provides the theoretical or conceptual basis for development of the study and analysis of the findings” (p. 12). The theoretical framework of this study was Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) student college choice theory. These theories relate to

the concepts of the process of the SAT being included in the first steps of pursuing college and the disadvantages LES students have in relation to social capital.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) first introduced the model decision-making process for college choice as having three phases: predisposition, search, and choice. The beginning of this process, as explained by Hossler and Gallagher, is the predisposition stage. During the first phase, students make conscious decisions on continuing their education beyond high school. In addition, Hossler and Gallagher stated that with this model, there are influencers within each stage. In the predisposition stage, Hossler and Gallagher mentioned these influencers include student characteristics, significant others, and educational activities. Hossler and Gallagher also stated that students enrolled in high-quality high schools have an encouraging approach towards college and its importance. Also, being informed early about financial aid and university costs is important in guiding students toward higher education.

Most importantly, Hossler and Gallagher (1987) explained that among the three phases of college choice, the first phase of predisposition has received the smallest amount of attention. Furthermore, Hossler and Gallagher stated that there are particularly important background characteristics that have shown positive correlations with college choice. Hossler and Gallagher identified these background characteristics as the student's socioeconomic status. Also, Hossler and Gallagher stated that socioeconomic status has a cumulative effect on students enrolling in college. The authors found that students with high socioeconomic status were four times as likely to go to college.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**

In this section the assumptions, limitations, and the scope of this study are identified. First, the principal investigator explains the assumptions that were made for this study. Next, the

limitations of the study are explained. Lastly, the scope of the study and the participants are described.

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions refer to what the researcher considers is true during a research study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2015). An assumption of this study was that guidance counselors help guide students' decision making for postgraduation plans. The principal investigator further assumed that the secondary counselors are familiar with the SAT and the college admission process. The principal investigator also assumed that the secondary counselors have developed relationships with their students and, therefore, would provide insight on how the SAT creates barriers to college, particularly for LES students.

### **Limitations**

One of the largest challenges of the research was the limitations that came with this research topic. As claimed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), the external conditions that constrain or restrict and may affect a study's outcome or scope are its limitations. Bloomberg and Volpe stated that given the research design, flaws or inherent weakness are presented as its limitations. One limitation of this study was that the principal investigator only interviewed guidance counselors from districts that are considered to have LES students according to the United States Department of Education (2022). Other limitations were the lack of transferability and the lack of generalizability based on geographic factors.

### **Scope**

The scope of the research was limited to guidance counselors that have previously or are currently working with LES students in multiple urban school districts within Michigan. Although there were invitations distributed for all secondary guidance counselors from 30

districts in Michigan, the goal was to interview four to 10 guidance counselors. Four to 10 participants was deemed appropriate for reaching data saturation.

### **Rationale and Significance**

In this section, the rationale and the significance of the research are explained. In explaining the rationale, the principal investigator discusses the problem and why it was researched. Next, the significance of the research topic is described. The study's significance relates to its connection to secondary education students' access to higher education.

#### **Rationale**

The rationale for this study related to the problem that traditional SAT assessment methods and strategies used for secondary students are saturated with data relatable to only the students that are in a high socioeconomic demographic (Geiser, 2017). Alvero et al. (2021) stated, "critics have noted the large body of evidence indicating a strong correlation between SAT scores and socioeconomic background, with some having dubbed the SAT a wealth test" (para. 2). Secondary education and educators will benefit from this study as the results shed light on challenges and barriers created by the SAT that have not been considered regarding their college pursuits. Notwithstanding, Bates (2017) stated that guidance counselors from areas of low socioeconomic status are restricted in their capacity to affect students because of high caseloads, little resources, as well as various obligations such as discipline, planning, and advising. This study contributed to the ongoing research about the barriers LES students face regarding the SAT in secondary education.

#### **Significance**

This qualitative phenomenological study was important because it examined the perspectives of secondary counselors on barriers and challenges brought forth by the SAT to

underserved students from LES backgrounds in urban school districts. As claimed by Jennett (2017), guidance counselors play an incalculable role in selective college admissions because they frequently set the framework for students to transition from a high school to college. The study's results provided steps in preparation for recognizing the barriers created by the SAT from the perspectives of frontline guidance counselors. Information acquired from this study can help counselors deliver suggestions derived from data collection. These practices may help educators develop strategies to decrease barriers and increase the performance of LES students on the SAT.

### **Summary**

Secondary and higher education institutions rely heavily on standardized testing such as the SAT in evaluating students' academic proficiency (Zwick, 2019). Zwick (2019) stated that these established test score qualifications are experienced by LES students as a large impediment to college admission because of differences in accomplishments among class, ethnic, and financial classifications. Bates (2017) stated that guidance counselors can impact students' routes to higher education. The purpose of this study was to explore the examined perceptions of secondary education counselors working in urban school districts within LES communities in regard to barriers and challenges created by the SAT to college admissions. This approach and method were supported by the reviewed literature.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review covers the works of multiple authors and research on the relevance of SAT barriers and challenges underserved low socioeconomic status (LES) students face to college admission. Other factors such as students enrolled in LES secondary urban school districts, the problems of the SAT, and how this subject appears from the perception of guidance counselors are also covered. Within the study, thematic buckets were discovered. Chapter 2 first covers the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks as well as standardized testing and the SAT. The principal investigator then introduces research on college admissions and socioeconomic status and the effects of both factors on LES students. Lastly, the principal investigator discusses the roles of guidance counselors and their effect on students' process of taking the SAT and pursuing college.

### **Conceptual Framework and Theoretical Framework**

This section includes a discussion of the conceptual framework and how it relates to this study. Next, the theoretical framework is explained. Lastly, an extensive literature review is provided.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative study's conceptual framework was built on studying the limitations and problems that the SAT poses to students from LES backgrounds. The conceptual framework of this study was based on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice theory. Because guidance counselors interact with students on an ongoing basis, they are one of the primary influences on students' decisions to attend college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). According to Belasco (2013), students connect with high school counselors when making career and college career selections, but for low-income students, these contacts can be crucial for postsecondary decision-making (as



cited in Oleka & Mitchell, 2022). Furthermore, Perna (2006) explained how high school instructors and counselors play an essential role in helping students decide what to do after high school (as cited in Oleka & Mitchell, 2022).

### ***Students College Choice Theory***

The choice to pursue postsecondary education is a decision secondary education students must face. The impact of college selection for an individual can last for their entire life (Johnson, 2019). In a young student's life, these college decisions will affect the outcome in their postsecondary life (Plummer, 2018). Related to public policy, student access to college and student financial aid started an interest in choice research on the state and federal levels (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) expanded on Litten's (1982) three phase model of college choice. Litten (1982) stated that between 1972 and 1982, college choice and attendance received a substantial amount of scholarly attention. As claimed by Litten's examination of occupational attainment and social mobility processes, the initial interest in the topic came from sociologists. As believed by Litten, economists who were concerned with the enormous amount of public funds and motivated by public policy became involved in the matter.

The model decision-making process for selecting a college was first described by Hossler and Gallagher (1987) as having three phases: predisposition, search, and choice. The first phase, according to Hossler and Gallagher, is a developmental stage during which students decide consciously whether to continue their education after high school. Hossler and Gallagher stated that the second stage includes the student's choice to further their education at a university or college. During this second stage, students gather the necessary information about college institutions. The third stage is the student's choice. In this stage, students choose the college or

university they will attend. Hossler and Gallagher explained that among the three phases of college choice, the first phase of predisposition received the smallest amount of attention at the time of their research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study's theoretical approach is based on Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. Bourdieu's (1986) ideas relate to the notion of the SAT process being included in the initial steps of postsecondary decision making and the disadvantages students with LES status face in terms of social capital. According Moschetti and Hudley (2015), in terms of social capital theory, networks of ties may benefit students by giving them access to pertinent knowledge, direction, and emotional support as they navigate an unfamiliar environment.

### ***Social Capital Theory***

As reported by Bates (2017), social capital alludes to social connections and associations that will permit students to receive institutional help. Bates stated students' relationships with institutional agents, especially in schools or within various settings, are necessary in gaining access to information and important resources provided by the operationalization of social capital. According to Rey-Garcia and Mato-Santiso (2020), social capital refers to shared norms, understanding, and values among or within groups that are integrated regarding the group's elements that regulate and depend on available resources. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the actual or potential resources linked with possessing a durable network of various amounts of recognition or mutual acquaintance in institutionalized relationships in which social capital is a collective. Social capital provides each member with the support of collectively owned capital, which is a privilege in the form of a networking credential (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Bourdieu, social capital consists of a combination of strategies, whether collective

or individual, meant to create or duplicate social relationships that will be beneficial in the short or long term.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

Examining pertinent research was the first step in reviewing the literature regarding why and how the SAT creates barriers for underserved students in urban areas as perceived by secondary guidance counselors. The topic is a small portion of a broader topic of bias, disadvantages, and challenges that standardized tests can create for LES students. In this particular study, the SAT was examined. Factors and research that are relevant to the overall topic are referenced, followed by more focused literature which references the sub-topics.

### **Standardized Testing**

The understanding of standardized tests varies. According to Shepherd (2017), examining standardized testing is beneficial because such an examination provides insight into social class formation and structure. Shepherd mentioned that student groups as well as socioeconomic levels were created by the tests in the strengthening of the social classification concept of students. According to Cunningham (2019), standardized testing has been used to assess school achievement on both an individual and organizational level in the United States for over a century. Further, Cunningham stated that this type of assessment, which appears to be a harmless tool, has guided the allocation of resources and the placement of students in coursework consistent with their apparent ability. Shepherd (2017) stated that standardized tests are evaluations that are planned and controlled in a consistent style. Factors that are controlled include how long test-takers are given, the content that is administered, the instruments utilized by the test administrators, and even the guidelines test administrators are given. As reported by Albano (2021), in order to contribute to the elimination of educational disparities, academia must

be more proactive in test design and execution in order to ensure the validity of the testing industry and the assessment community more widely. Shepherd mentioned that standardized tests can vary in form and use, and these methods can be used as guidelines for promotion within grades. Furthermore, Shepherd stated that standardized tests hold much weight and are considered high stakes when they are used as tools for entry to college or higher education.

***The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT).***

As reported by Marini et al. (2020), the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) is a higher education and college readiness assessment tool that is utilized worldwide to survey and foresee prospective students' readiness for the advancement of their education. Marini et al. stated that concerning admissions to college or universities, the SAT serves to reinforce data collected. According to Scholarships.com (2023),

The SAT is a standardized test designed to measure basic critical reading, math and writing skills. Most colleges and universities request ACT or SAT score results from applicants. Students may usually take their test of choice, but it is best to check with schools of interest before selecting (unless the student plans to take both exams).

Standardized tests are an important factor in the admissions process, and students should do their best to show schools that they know their stuff. The SAT is composed of three main sections, each with its own subsections. The three major sections will be graded on a scale of 200-800. The final score will be the sum of all sections, a number between 400 and 1600. will be used to assess the three main portions. The total of all parts will determine the final grade, which will range from 400 to 1600. (para 1)

**The SAT As a Measure for College Readiness.** College readiness has been correlated to the scores of the SAT (Westrick et al., 2020). According to Westrick et al. (2020), SAT scores

allow colleges to identify students who can benefit from additional academic support as they enter universities and inform meaningful conversations about course selection and students' academic weaknesses and strengths. As reported by Wilson (2017), when the SAT was redesigned by the College Board, it aimed to measure important skills for college and relate the test content to daily learning in classrooms. As mentioned by Wilson, when first administered in March of 2016, the redesigned SAT scale was changed, and the College Board did not recommend comparing the performance between the redesigned SAT and the original.

Marini et al. (2018) stated the redesigned SAT version was found to better reflect students' work in higher education. In addition, Marini et al. mentioned that the focus of the new test was based on the core skills and knowledge that are critical in career and college preparation based on evidence. As reported by Marini et al., this was the overall difference between the two tests. Marini et al. stated, however, that to more clearly present findings in this comparison study, the College Board noted specific differences in format and scoring.

The redesigned SAT test included several significant changes (Shaw et al., 2016). Shaw et al. (2016) mentioned the redesign focused on the core skills and knowledge evidence that has proven vital in preparation for career and college. The authors stated that based on the redesign of the test focus areas, it is vital to examine and understand how the changes to the format and content of the test impact the inferences made from the test's scores. Shaw et al. stated that the primary use of the SAT is for admission and placement decisions. The authors mentioned, therefore, that is essential to examine the correlation between the scores from the redesigned test with student outcomes, such as first-year grade point average (FYGPA) and college course grades.

**The SAT in College Admissions.** Geiser (2017) found that college admissions exams like the SAT have benefits and costs for the universities and colleges that utilize them. Geiser stated that the exam's main benefit is predictive validity, which is its ability to predict student performance in college and provide a standardized numerical measure to help admissions officers sort large numbers of applicants. According to Geiser, SAT and other college entrance examination test scores that are nationally norm-referenced, compared to admissions criteria like class rank and high-school grades, are highly correlated with student background characteristics such as parents' education, race, ethnicity, or family income.

Buckley et al. (2017) found that supporters of standardized admissions testing have long argued that tests such as the SAT are essential for admissions officers at selective institutions. Under this assumption, standardized tests effectively address the dual challenges of uniformity and fairness in college admission (Buckley et al., 2017). Carnevale et al. (2019) found that colleges consider SAT scores along with various other factors, such as high school grades, letters of recommendation, essays, extracurricular activities, and talents in what would be considered a holistic approach to admissions. Carnevale et al. mentioned that this process intends to form a well-rounded group of entrants with disparate backgrounds and interests each year.

Test scores are consistently listed as one of the most important admissions factors in national surveys of postsecondary institutions (Zwick, 2019). Table 2 lists the number of 4-year colleges that offered test-optional and test-free entrance requirements for the SAT/ACT.

**Table 2***Four Year Colleges That Did and Did Not Require SAT for Admissions*

Academic Year	2016–17	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
4 Year Colleges	2,832	2,828	2,703	2,679	2,637
Colleges that offer test option or test free SAT	870	950	1000	1050.	1790
Colleges requiring SAT	1,962= 69% of colleges	1878= 66% of colleges	1703= 63% of colleges	1629= 60% of colleges	847= 32% of colleges

*Note.* Amount of 4-year colleges provided by National Center for Education Statistics (2022). Amount of colleges that offer test option or test free SAT. Provided by Fair Test. (2023).

Furthermore, Zwick stated these established test score requirements are a large impediment to campus diversity. Zwick continued that the decentralized higher education framework in the United States has the capacity to provide a wide scope of support to eliminate such impediments to diversity. Zwick found that it was fundamental to contemplate the effect of policy strategy changes and to consider the ramifications of these policies. As determined by Buckley et al. (2020), “Downplaying standardized tests, some education leaders say, can help increase the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of a campus population” (para 1).

**Challenges With the SAT.** The SAT has faced pushback from educators regarding various factors, such as time allotted to complete the test (Toppo, 2020). According to Toppo (2020), it is questionable whether college success depends upon 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills such as collaboration, close reading, and critical thinking, and whether college admissions tests such as the SAT be timed at all. According to Toppo, advocates argue that making the test untimed for everyone would make it harder for students with advantages of wealthy or well-connected parents to benefit from the system and may more accurately measure students’ capabilities.

The barriers created by the SAT for various groups remain evident (Torres, 2016). According to Torres (2016), SAT results continue to bring good news for individual schools in terms of the schools' ability to prepare students academically for college, but there more needs to be done to shrink the gap in student success based on gender, race, and income. Torres explained that by understanding the limits of standardized testing, individual schools will continue to explore assessments that may allow for assessing growth in school and student development. According to Wai et al. (2018), much emphasis is dedicated to schools, curriculum, and instructors in education research and policy, but less attention is paid to student characteristics. Differences in general cognitive aptitude are sometimes neglected as a source of significance across schools and in student outcomes within schools. Wai et al. further stated that standardized test scores, including scores from tests like the SAT and ACT, are strong predictors of cognitive aptitude.

Barack (2021) found that in U.S. 4-year colleges and universities, more than two-thirds adjusted their admission process and did not require SAT or ACT scores of prospective students for fall 2022 because of COVID-19. In addition, Barack stated that in most college admissions processes, standardized test scores have long been considered a necessary step only accomplished by students sitting for hours filling in multiple-choice questions in hopes of achieving a score that sends their application to the top of the pile. Lastly, as claimed by Barack, kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12) administrators are considering options for how they can support secondary students' applications in other ways so that they are still appealing to admissions directors.

**Bias in the SAT.** According to Hurwitz et al. (2015), the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required states to establish accountability exams to monitor student and school progress



to receive federal funds. Hurwitz et al. stated that as a result of this legislation, numerous states had chosen a college admission exam such as the SAT or ACT as their statewide assessment test. According to Dillon and Smith (2013), the lack of information and support among poor and rural students is well documented. Dillon stated that this often leads to unfavorable college application and enrollment decisions. Thus, the mandatory SAT policy was likely to have the greatest impact on LES students (Dillon & Smith, 2013, as cited in Hurwitz et al., 2015).

Geiser (2020) found that the SAT/ACT results are far more connected with student variables such as family income, parental education, and race/ethnicity than high school grades. Further, Geiser stated that as a result, when researchers exclude student demographics from prediction models, the predictive value of the exams is artificially increased. Lastly, according to Geiser, the results are reversed when student demographics are included in the model. High school scores in college-preparatory courses are a better predictor of first year college student success (Geiser, 2020).

Lopez de Mesa Mo (2018) found that advantages, such as honors classes, are a competitive alternative to more elite colleges due to scholarships, smaller honors classes and seminars, special advising, encouragement of research and studying abroad, among other benefits. Lopez de Mesa Mo stated, however, that a common worry is that such financial incentives may cause students to put off finishing their degrees and forgo college quality. This is especially problematic for those from lower socioeconomic origins who, from the perspective of social mobility, stand to benefit the most from attending a top-notch institution but are also most likely to be sensitive to financial factors when assessing college possibilities.

**Benefits of the SAT.** As explained by Bowen et al. (2018), because the SAT primarily measures the skills academically needed for admittance to college but does not have the ability to

predict actual graduation rates, it is not surprising that tests like the SAT are more useful for the traditional admissions process. The College Board published the first national operational SAT validity study on the new SAT in May 2019 (Westrick et al., 2020). Westrick et al. (2020) found data from more than 221,000 students across 169 four-year universities and colleges. The study revealed that the SAT was fundamentally as effective as high school grades in the prediction of college performance of students and that, when combined, the two measures offer a more accurate understanding of the performance of students than either measure alone (Westrick et al., 2020).

Marini et al. (2019) stated that the results showed that institutions can feel confident utilizing SAT scores and high school grade point average (HSGPA) for awarding scholarships, admission, and advising and retention decisions across institutional and student subgroups. Like previous research, Marini et al. found that the SAT and HSGPA tend to have little stronger predictive relationships with first year grade point average (FYGPA) for female students, Asian and white students, students whose first language is English, and students with higher parental education levels. The SAT and HSGPA tended to have slightly stronger predictive relationships with FYGPA across institutional subgroups at small and private institutions (Marini et al., 2019). Further, Bauer-Wolf (2022a) found that the ACT and College Board have defended their products, claiming that the test assists disadvantaged students in connecting to financial possibilities and allows them to demonstrate academic talents outside of academics.

Liu et al. (2016) demonstrated satisfactory totals and subscale reliabilities of critical thinking scores that correlated with HSGPA, SAT scores, and college GPA. The authors found that the scores could detect cross-sectional performance differences between seniors and first-

year students. In addition, Liu et al. found most examinees reported having tried their best when taking the test.

**Socioeconomic Effects on SAT Scores.** The process of taking the SAT can create challenges for LES students. One barrier that affects these students is the process of sending scores to colleges and universities. Hurwitz et al. (2017) stated,

Many factors contribute to the suboptimal college-exploration and selection process of lower income students, including confusion about financial aid availability, poor access to high quality college guidance, “micro-barriers” such as college application fees, and familial obligations or cultural norms, which limit the scope of colleges that students might consider. (p. 1)

According to Hurwitz et al. (2017), while enrolling for the SAT and for a brief period after sitting for the test, students taking the test can choose up to four universities to receive their certified SAT score report free of cost. Hurwitz et al. stated that this process expects test takers to know where they might want to apply and to be sure enough in their completion of the test to choose schools without knowing whether their scores are sufficiently high to fulfill university acceptance guidelines. Lastly, Hurwitz et al. expressed that the expense of extra scores being sent to additional colleges or universities may stand as a genuine hindrance to LES students applying to an ideal number and scale of colleges.

**Low Socioeconomic Status (LES) Students.** As explained by Leonard et al. (2017), LES households have limited money or resources to cushion against the unfavorable effects of an adverse health occurrence among adult household members. According to The National Cancer Institute, “People with a lower socioeconomic status usually have less access to financial, educational, social, and health resources than those with a higher socioeconomic status” (para. 1)

According to Trawalter et al. (2021), LES students frequently lack access to public space, and when they do have it, they are frequently discouraged from using it. Further, Trawalter et al. added to the knowledge of socioeconomic differences in higher education.

***Low Socioeconomic Status (LES) Students in Michigan.*** According to Mischooldata.org (2022), LES in Michigan is described as, “Adults with lower levels of education, who are unemployed or under-employed, or who live at or below the U.S. federal poverty level, are considered to have low socioeconomic status (Low SES)” (para. 1). According to Mischooldata.org (2022), LES students are,

All students who are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunches are considered to be economically disadvantaged. Starting in Fall 2017, the direct certification of free or reduced-price eligibility was expanded to include income data for Medicaid eligible students. This expansion led to a significant increase in the number of students directly certified eligible for free meals, and a decrease in the number eligible for reduced-price meals. Overall, there was a significant increase in the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals compared to Fall 2016. (Section 5.0 & 6.0)

According to the Michigan Department of Education (2021), to guarantee that the requirements of every student are fulfilled, adequate and fair funding is essential. Several studies conducted over many years have demonstrated that many districts in Michigan lack enough funds as a result of the state’s public school funding scheme.

***Challenges for Low Socioeconomic Status (LES) Students.*** According to Bastedo et al. (2022), while LES students have made solid progress in scholastic achievements since the 1970s, affluent students have made much more grounded gains on similar scholarly markers. According to Marini et al. (2020) many aspects such as the validity of the SAT can also cause challenges.

Bastedo et al. also stated that LES students continue to be in a difficult spot in the specific admissions process in contrast to their higher socioeconomic peers, and over-dependence on standardized test scores may worsen these disparities. As reported by Bastedo et al., low-income students (those in the lowest income quintile) continue to be underserved in selective universities, accounting for fewer than 5% of enrollment at the most selective colleges.

As explained by Appelrouth et al. (2017), higher socioeconomic students utilized more personal tutoring hours, but lower socioeconomic students used much more group tutoring hours. Additionally, the authors found that higher income students began practice sessions 1 month sooner than lower income students and improved their scores in every component of the SAT. The authors claimed that the discovery that more affluent students obtain more expensive test preparations falls within the trend of shadow schooling or tutoring informally by individual teachers. According to Appelrouth et al., research shows that dispersing tutoring sessions over time has a positive effect on a student's success on the SAT.

Fischer et al. (2020) said that high poverty schools may suffer from lower district expenditures. Additionally, Fischer et al. mentioned that poorly equipped classrooms, higher student-teacher ratios, and out-of-field teaching create difficulties in retaining and recruiting highly qualified teachers. Furthermore, the authors stated that this illustrates conditions that are underlying and contribute to existing academic gaps in accomplishments, such as low GPA and low SAT scores.

Several factors affect LES students. Peña et al. (2018) found that per-pupil funding exists because school districts use systems that do not distribute funding but distribute teachers to specific locations. Peña et al. explained that schools with lower numbers of at-risk students or LES students have more experienced teachers. According to the authors, this method leaves LES

students with the most needs with inexperienced teachers. Peña et al. reported that this results in students lacking resources due to being at-risk or categorized as LES.

*The Appeal of College for LES Students.* As mentioned by Cunninghame et al. (2020), major barriers to college access remain for many LES students. Cunninghame et al. claimed that one barrier is the incongruence between the policy rhetoric of raising aspirations, implying that LES students do not have the desire to go on to higher education. The authors determined that research asserts an interplay between high desire to go on to a university and the low expectations from the result of a student's perception of what is possible for postsecondary education.

Evans (2016) explained that it is commonly recognized that low-income students are underrepresented in prestigious universities. Evans found that studies provide insight into the elements that influence whether young adults enroll in college. Further, Evans found that researchers examine how top high schools help students get into elite institutions. However, Evans stated that little research has been conducted on how high schools especially prepare disadvantaged students for entrance into selective institutions. The author further asserted that most LES students who are qualified to attend prestigious and highly selective universities do not apply.

According to Evans (2016), supporting research included in-depth interviews and direct observation. Evans mentioned that 30 highly accomplished 12<sup>th</sup> graders who participated in interviews provided a thorough description of their course selection, college application, and decision-making processes. Fifteen instructors were interviewed to learn more about their college preparation and selection strategies for pupils. Additionally, Evans reported that participant observation in college recruitment sessions and counselor offices indicated how students were

taught about the higher education environment. Evans stated that students with high academic achievement but poor socioeconomic status are more likely to attend less selective or nonselective institutions and universities.

As mentioned by Williams (2021), because of a lack of financial and social capital, many low-income minority students who pursue postsecondary education will attend 2-year community colleges rather than 4-year schools and universities. Williams went on to say that first-generation college students, low-income students, minority students, nontraditional students, academically unprepared students, and older adult students are common populations that enroll in community college. Further, Williams stated the financial expenditures of attending community college to seek postsecondary education, on the other hand, may be a barrier for LES students and their families. Lastly, Williams stated that, as a result, many students investigate the costs of a postsecondary education as well as ways to fund a postsecondary education.

According to Grawe (2018), the chance of young people attending college varies based on their academic skills. Grawe remarked that comparing a pair of hypothetical offspring reveals the enormous variety in college-going odds. According to Grawe, the chance of a student with a family income of \$125,000.00 attending a 4-year college surpasses 95% based on experiences recorded in the Education Longitudinal Study (ELS, 2002). Finally, Grawe stated that an LES student with a household income of \$40,000.00 has less than a 10% chance of entering a 4-year institution.

***The Effects of Social Capital on (LES) Students.*** As reported by Deslonde (2017), LES students and their families have limited social capital. Deslonde stated that this limitation requires LES students to find information on postsecondary opportunities from unfamiliar

sources. Deslonde claimed that students who have low social capital typically do not possess the knowledge regarding college choice criteria and admissions requirements.

Fitzpatrick (2020) found that racial minorities and low-income students access college at lower rates than their more advantaged peers, caused in part by lower social capital. Further, Fitzpatrick stated that the personal networks of LES students rarely provide help navigating the application and enrollment process, preventing even academically capable students from competing in the process of college admission because of their low social capital. Fitzpatrick claimed that research indicates that socioeconomic status (SES)-based disparities in college readiness are reconciled by counselors, but research also provides little guidance on how counselors should help students.

Ware (2019) found that SES is a critical construct for practitioners and researchers in health, education, economics, and other social sciences. Ware went on to say that reality is a challenge for millions of families with extenuating consequences impacting their quality of life. Ware stated that students in these communities are often subject to adverse living conditions and stress-inducing experiences that are damaging to their social, physical, and emotional well-being as well as to cognitive processes such as language, memory, and attention span.

***College Admission and (LES) Students.*** As reported by College Access (2017), admission officers at selective colleges will offer spots to low-income students if they have a better understanding of the high schools that those students attend. According to College Access, 311 admission officers at 174 competitive colleges were asked to review three applications, all from fictitious Caucasian male students who would major in engineering. College Access reported that each school included fictional details about graduation rates and parental education status, signaling that the school was either in high or low-income communities.



College Access (2017) stated half the participants were given more information about the schools, advancement placement (AP) courses, poverty rates, course offerings, students' scores on AP tests, and average ACT scores. As specified by College Access, the details provided more educational information. College Access went on to report that when more detailed information was released to admission officers about low-income students' schools, admissions officers were 26% to 28% more likely to admit students when familiar with the high schools that students attend.

According to Bastedo and Bowman (2017), LES students are underrepresented at selective colleges. Bastedo and Bowman mentioned that a randomized controlled trial was used to determine whether providing detailed information on high school contexts increases the chances that admissions officers would recommend admitting LES applicants. Bastedo and Bowman further stated that the admissions officers in the detailed-information condition were more likely to recommend admitting a student from an underserved high school than those in the limited information condition, although the admissions officers in the limited information condition were provided important details about family SES and high school contexts.

### ***COVID-19's Effects on College Preparation for Secondary Students***

As reported by Howland et al. (2021), the entering class of 2021 was affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and some students changed their college plans accordingly. Further, Howland et al. stated that most seniors had plans to attend the same sort of institution they were planning on prior to the pandemic, but some students planned on a different institution that had lower tuition or was closer to home. In addition, Howland et al. claimed that aside from the drastic changes that occurred in education from the pandemic, students were confident about their plans. Howland et al. also reported that students were still concerned about how their

academic preparation, including college preparation for admissions tests like the ACT or SAT, was affected by the pandemic. According to Joachin (2022), COVID-19 raised awareness and discussion on student health and lost education across the nation. According to Ma et al. (2021), 74.2% of senior year students claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their preparation for the college entrance test, and 68% of students believed that the pandemic had worsened the psychological strain they were under to prepare for the exam.

**COVID-19 and the SAT.** Hoover (2021) referenced the announcement of the College Board's decision to stop the optional essay section of the SAT and the SAT subject tests. In addition, Hoover stated that COVID-19 disrupted the admissions realm by limiting access to exams and forcing most colleges to temporarily suspend their testing requirements. Hoover stated that college admissions exams have been a way for high-achieving students to stack their college applications with additional evidence of their academic success. Lastly, Hoover mentioned that many of the nation's most selective colleges that once required or encouraged applicants to submit scores from one or more of the college admissions exams would not require them.

COVID-19 created questionable use and validity of the SAT (Marini et al., 2020). According to Schultz and Backstrom (2021), in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State University of New York (SUNY) and other colleges or universities decided to support the applicants who had less access to SAT and ACT testing. Additionally, Schultz and Backstrom mentioned most colleges extended their policies for test-optional applications through fall 2022. Further, according to Schultz and Backstrom colleges and universities committed to remaining test-optional until 2023. While rapidly growing to implement test-optional admissions, schools continued to commit to this change (Schultz & Backstrom, 2021). Although more than 1,800

schools no longer require applicants to submit scores (Fairtest.org, 2023) some converted to test-optional admissions, while colleges reverted to requiring entrance exams. According to Bello (2022) the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) stated in March of 2022 that it would halt its COVID-19-inspired postponement of entrance testing, reversing a trend that began during the pandemic. Bello (2022) warned that the decision was unique to MIT, but that when a high-profile university makes such a change of policy, higher-education analysts would inevitably question if other universities that have abandoned the use of standardized assessments should follow suit. Bello reported that MIT's dean of admissions, Stu Schmill, mentioned that considering standardized testing substantially improves MIT's ability to reliably forecast student academic achievement.

***Test Optional Admissions.*** Furuta (2017) stated that schools that are more committed to enlarging conceptions of student belonging are more likely to adopt a test-optional policy to recruit potential students who fit the distinctive characteristics of their school's purpose. With this option, a more socioeconomically diverse student population is possible. Further, Furuta said that since the 1990s, a growing number of schools have adopted test-optional admissions and confronted existing conceptions of meritocracy for admissions policies. Furuta stated that by 2015, this trend had been popularized and discussed by the media and organizations like The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (Fairtest.org, 2023). The FairTest organization promotes fair, open, valid, and educationally helpful assessments of students, teachers, and schools to increase access to excellent education and equitable opportunity (Fairtest.org, 2023). FairTest also aims to eliminate the shortcomings and misuses of testing techniques that obstruct those goals. Moreover, Furuta reported that around 10% of 4-year universities and colleges that previously required standardized test scores for admission had explicitly adopted this policy.

Bauer-Wolf (2022b) reported that through a \$1.4 million Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant, the National Association for College Admission Counseling collaborated with researchers to examine enrollment patterns at 150 four-year universities, some of which have test-optional policies. Bauer-Wolf expanded on a survey and six case studies conducted at selective and minority-serving schools. A consultant in the research, The Equity Research Cooperative, also investigated how test-optional procedures affected enrollment of Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and LES students. Lastly, Bauer-Wolf stated that more research would help higher education authorities understand the ramifications of test-optional policies as well as provide minority students with a voice in the admissions process.

As reported by Buckley et al. (2017), few people, including parents, students, teachers, and policymakers, understand how admissions decisions are based upon tests like the SAT or ACT. Furthermore, Buckley et al. said that college entrance exams are considered a vital tool for gauging students' college readiness and that standardized tests have been vital tools for over 75 years. Also, Buckley et al. claimed that while these standardized tests are increasingly criticized as being biased in favor of traditionally privileged groups, these tests were once touted as the best way to evaluate prospective students from various backgrounds. Buckley et al. went on to say that a small but growing number of colleges has made such testing optional for applicants. Buckley et al. stated that there are many motivations behind the test-optional movement, and because lower-scoring students are less likely to submit scores, test-optional policies are more attractive to enrollment advisors. According to Buckley et al., test-optional admissions can boost the number of applicants to a college and increase the selectivity of eligible applicants.

According to Bauer-Wolf (2021c), students admitted to the University of Missouri to attend in the fall 2021 semester who did not submit admissions test scores had lower GPAs in their first

semester than students who did submit admissions test scores; however, both groups had identical retention percentages. Bauer-Wolf stated that although test-optional admissions increased application numbers, they did not diversify the candidate pool in terms of ethnicity or financial level compared to past admissions cycles.

The landscape of the enrollment management profession has been changed by test-optional admission policies (Gage, 2017). According to Gage (2017), critics argue that average test scores are artificially inflated by some institutions that adopt test-optional admissions to improve their national rankings. Finally, advocates state such policies are adopted to be more inclusive, to offer a holistic application review process, and to support the institutional mission and cite HSGPA as being a better predictor of college success. According to Bauer-Wolf (2022b), California State University did not use entrance examinations in the academic year of 2020 or 2021, and instead used a system that evaluated characteristics such as HSGPA, college preparation classes, and extracurricular activities to determine admissions eligibility. Bauer-Wolf found that a system advisory council began analyzing standardized examinations in spring 2021 and decided standardized examinations provided marginal advantages to Cal State's admissions procedures. They were rejected by the panel. Bauer-Wolf reported that the advisory group highlighted data suggesting that HSGPA predicted academic ability better than testing.

***Test flexible.*** According to Rubin and González Canché (2019), in the United States, growing numbers of postsecondary institutions are removing standardized testing as a requirement for admission. Rubin and González Canché found that researchers have suggested that the test-optional policies may not benefit the underrepresented student population as intended but may instead serve as an additional revenue source resulting from tuition based on increased admissions for the institution. Rubin and González Canché further stated that the

broader test-optional policy agenda has a subset of test-flexible admissions policies which seek to not emphasize the use of standardized entrance exams like the SAT and ACT for admission to postsecondary colleges and universities in the United States. Rubin and González Canché (2019) stated that test-optional policies universally remove standardized test scores for all applicants. In addition, test-flexible policies are unique in that only those applicants who meet specific requirements may apply without submitting test scores (Rubin & González Canché, 2019).

### **Secondary Education Guidance Counselors**

Secondary education guidance counselors play a critical role in the growth and exploration of secondary education students (Bates, 2017). As reported by Jennett (2017), guidance counselors play an incalculable role in selective college admissions because they frequently set the framework for students to transition from secondary schooling to postsecondary schooling. Jennett mentioned that a counselor can suggest resources for testing, essay writing, and interview attire. Jennett went on to state that navigating class differences is difficult because a person's social class membership is determined not just by economic characteristics but also by behaviors, appearance, connections, and interactions with others. According to Morton et al. (2018), counselors include school counselors, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) advisers, and college advisors who were allocated to respective schools. According to the California Department of Education (2022), "Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) is an in-school academic support program for grades seven through twelve" (para 1.).

### ***Role of Guidance Counselors***

As determined by Bates (2017), scholars have shown that school advising projects and school guidance counselors can significantly affect their students' routes to postsecondary

schooling. In addition, Bates stated that guidance counselors are restricted in their capacity to affect each pupil because of underlying imperatives like high caseloads, low assets, different obligations like planning and discipline, and direction for social necessities. School counselors communicate with and influence the students they serve via their varied duties (Tang & Ng, 2019). Tang and Ng (2019) stated that comprehensive school counseling programs have been found to help increase test scores, improve student grades, cut suspension rates, and increase sentiments of school pride in state-wide research concentrating on school counseling programs. According to Deslonde (2017), guidance counselors in the United States are uniquely situated to support students in transitioning from high school to college. Deslonde also stated that high school counselors aid the college transition process for students by assisting with college matching, encouraging aspirations, and directing students through the process of financial aid and its mechanics.

According to the American School Counselors Association (ASCA, 2022), school counselors are educators who are certified or licensed and who improve student success by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. As determined by the ASCA, school counselors promote access and equity for all students and work to maximize student success. As critical members of the school leadership team, school counselors create a school culture of success for all students (ASCA, 2022). According to the ASCA (2022),

School counselors design and deliver school counseling programs that improve student outcomes. They lead, advocate and collaborate to promote equity and access for all students by connecting their school counseling program to the school's academic mission and school improvement plan. They uphold the ethical and professional standards of the

ASCA and promote the development of the school counseling program based on the following areas of the ASCA National Model: define, deliver, manage, and assess. (p. 2)

As specified by Rutter et al. (2020), the role of school counselors is to establish a safe learning environment that promotes equity for all students. Rutter et al. stated school counselors are expected to fulfil administrative duties and perform nonguidance activities. Nonguidance duties include testing, record-keeping, and assisting students with their postsecondary planning, including navigating into higher educational pathways (Rutter et al., 2020). Rutter et al. stated that school counselors' roles have continuously changed over time. In the 1950s and early 1960s, school counselors' roles with secondary education students centered on vocational guidance. However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, school guidance counselors' role shifted to focus on college preparation.

Johnson (2017) found that school counselors were asked by the ASCA to provide services to all students based on a comprehensive school counseling program. Johnson stated that this national model provided school counselors with a framework to use in implementing and designing a comprehensive school counseling program (CSCP). The plan was focused on providing students with lifelong learning competencies. The ASCA developed the *ASCA Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success* for school counselors to utilize in the delivery service component of the plan (Johnson, 2017). This plan included individual student planning, responsive services, and counseling core curriculum. There were 35 standards contained in the document that could be applied to the social/emotional, academic, career, and academic domains of the CSCP (Johnson, 2017). Lastly, as determined by Johnson, the updated ASCA ethical codes included specific guidelines to help school counselors to behave in a culturally competent manner when providing CSCPs for all students.



**Secondary Education Guidance Counselors.** As specified by Sackett et al. (2018), school counselors are grouped into two areas: indirect and direct services. Sackett et al. stated that school counselors are expected to serve all students in a school through these services. Direct services refer to face-to-face interactions which include individual student planning, crisis response, teaching classroom lessons, and individual and small group counseling (Sackett et al., 2018). Sackett et al. went on to state that it is recommended by the ASCA that school counselors spend 80% of their time in direct services, but it is not known what percentage of time counselors should have in group and individual counseling specifically. Lastly, the direct services focus on three areas, including social/emotional, career, and academic, while indirect services include tasks the school counselor does on behalf of the student, such as consultation, referrals, and collaboration efforts (Sackett et al., 2018).

Secondary school counselors, according to Havlik (2017), can support LES students in their postsecondary endeavors by working with them to develop the awareness and necessary skills to rise out of poverty. Havlik stated that, while doing so, counselors can provide career and college counseling and advising that addresses students' specific needs. Havlik reported that counselors can educate students early on about several types of financial support, including grants, loans, fee waivers, work-study programs, and scholarships, and identify college and career options that fit students' interests and strengths.

A guidance counselor's specific role varies depending on the extent of a school's needs and existing professionals with overlapping roles and areas of expertise, such as psychologists and social workers (O'Connor, 2018). Furthermore, O'Connor stated that, historically, the primary responsibility of school counselors has been to help students prepare for the transition to college or careers, which continues to be a central part of the role of guidance counselors.

O'Connor mentioned that with the increasingly varied postsecondary learning options available and the quick-changing demands of the workforce, students are coming to depend on counselors to provide accurate, comprehensive, and personalized guidance for postsecondary planning.

**Counselors' Effects on Students and College Readiness.** Guidance counselors have firsthand interactions and discussions with students about college (Paolini, 2019). Enyioha (2021) found that counselors are sometimes not educated in college advising before working at a high school and must seek out ways to obtain college advising knowledge. As specified by Paolini, research shows that school counselors play a significant role in the college exploration, college decision, and career preparedness of all students, particularly minority and LES students.

School counselors are accountable for all students' educational journeys and are in a unique position to take on leadership positions in their schools (Paolini, 2019). Furthermore, Paolini stated that one of the most crucial components of guiding students is supporting students in making suitable course selections, as these decisions have an influence on their overall preparation and readiness for postsecondary efforts. Academic difficulty in high school has a negative impact on postsecondary achievement, college acceptance, and job satisfaction (Paolini, 2019).

Robinson and Roksa (2016) found that socioeconomic inequality of postsecondary outcomes is well documented, but limited research has explored the extent to which examining high school counselors can help to reduce inequality in college destinations. Research rarely considers interactions between high school students and counselors as well as the other sources of social and cultural capital available to students (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). Robinson and Roksa found that interacting with a counselor plays an important role in predicting a student's decision to complete a college application, and while the relationship can be weakened between

the two, it remains strong when factoring in other sources of information provided by the secondary guidance counselors.

As specified by Gilfillan et al. (2020), the process of college readiness counseling allows students to engage in conversations and activities that increase their knowledge about their postsecondary paths and themselves. Gilfillan et al. stated that this type of school counseling focuses on assisting students in choosing a major, gaining awareness and self-knowledge, and becoming knowledgeable about available resources. However, given the lack of training in the areas of college and career readiness, school counselors often need more effective professional development and training in these areas (Gilfillan et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

Researchers have explored the relevance of the SAT and the barriers and challenges to college admissions faced by underserved students enrolled in LES urban school districts (Hurwitz et al., 2017). The problems associated with the SAT and how the subject is viewed from the perception of secondary education counselors provide a critical, creditable, and unique perspective on the subject. Research has exhibited that school advising projects and school guidance counselors can significantly affect their students' routes to postsecondary education (Bates, 2017). Thematically, the junction of income, systematic educational processes, and social capital has created a tough learning experience for LES students. The research on the SAT and the barriers it creates for LES students and their access to college has substantiated and revealed the commonality of its origins (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017). Alternatives like test-optional and holistic admission processes were emerging (Buckley et al., 2017), and in accordance with research and external events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, these options were utilized. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of the research process and methods utilized for this research.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Standardized testing continues to be highly valued by secondary and higher education institutions for predicting students' success in college (Zwick, 2019). One of the biggest of these standardized tests, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), was created in 1926. Furthermore, Zwick claimed that while SAT scores have been found to contribute to the prediction of college achievement, the SAT's significance in the admissions process varies widely between campuses. The problem that was investigated was that standard SAT evaluation techniques and procedures utilized for secondary students are inundated with data pertaining to students primarily from affluent socioeconomic backgrounds (Geiser, 2017). These approaches and procedures do not allow for the evaluation of students from communities that have poor socioeconomic status (Geiser, 2017). As a result, this population's score on this exam does not equal college preparation for pupils, which might prevent qualified individuals from being admitted to higher education institutions (Bastedo & Bowman, 2017).

### **Site Information and Demographics/Setting**

This section includes a description of the study's setting. The principal investigator then provides the problem statement, goal, and research question. The principal investigator then addresses their connection with participants and the study's methodology. Lastly, the principal investigator explains how they achieved access to participants.

#### **Site Information**

The location and target site for the study was a sample of secondary education schools within urban school districts located in Michigan. The districts are represented in the chart in Appendix B. The districts were chosen according to the lowest median income for families with children under 18. The annual poverty guideline based on income of families, according to the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 2021a) is represented in

Table 1. Districts were categorized by each county's median income and compared to the USDHHS (2022b) definition of poverty (see Appendix B).

### **Demographics and Setting**

In this study, the principal investigator searched for counselors within 30 districts listed in Appendix B with students with LES. These students included those whose families earned a low income, have parents who were unemployed, or who exhibited other signs of poverty. Low-income students are those who fall into the lowest income quintile (Bastedo et al., 2022). Low-income districts were selected according to lowest median income with families with children under 18 versus the state's median income of \$69,790.00 (Mack, 2020). The estimates were based not just on the families with children in the district schools, but all residents who resided within a school district's boundaries; school district boundaries typically differ from city and township boundaries.

### **Participants and Sampling Method**

In this section, the principal investigator explains the study's participants. The reason the participants were chosen is also discussed. Lastly, the sampling method is then explained in more detail.

#### **Participants**

This study was granted an exemption from IRB oversight by the University of New England's Office of Research Integrity (Appendix A). The participants in this study were willing adult secondary education guidance counselors who were involved with students that have taken or will take the SAT and who are from LES urban districts. This study defined guidance counselors as educators in secondary education that help students with transitioning to postsecondary education. Participants interact with the students that have or will take the SAT

and who are from LES urban districts. The participants worked as guidance counselors in secondary education in districts in low socioeconomic communities as defined by The Department of Education (2022).

Guidance counselors are educators in secondary education who help students with transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education (Deslonde, 2017). As claimed by Tang and Ng (2019), secondary guidance counselors eliminate boundaries to scholarly accomplishment by laying out an extensive academic system as well as offering suitable types of assistance. According to Tang and Ng, school counselors remove barriers to achieving academic success by providing appropriate services and creating comprehensive programs based on school needs. School counselors provide intentional guidance while connecting students to other stakeholders in their chosen path.

### **Sampling Method**

The sampling method used for this study was purposeful sampling. According to Rai and Thapa (2015), nonprobability sampling, sometimes referred to as nonrandom sampling, is a method by which the researcher chooses a sample based on considerations other than the probability with which a unit might join the sample, such as common sense, experience, intention, and competence of the sampler. Rai and Thapa continued to state that a variety of nonprobability sampling strategies are included under the heading of purposeful sampling. Lastly, Rai and Thapa mentioned that purposive sampling, sometimes referred to as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, depends on the researcher's judgment when choosing the units to be researched.

Invitations were distributed to all secondary guidance counselors in 30 districts with the expectation of interviewing six to 10 participants. Participating counselors were chosen

according to the district in which they were employed and its comparison of its students' family income to the median income in the state. These districts were identified as the poorest districts in the state (Mack, 2020). The principal investigator interviewed the first four guidance counselors that responded to the invitation. All email contacts for counselors were identified from public sites that are readily available emails. These emails were utilized as the main source of communication and distribution of letters. The principal investigator sent invitation to 32 eligible participants.

The principal investigator sent out invitations via email and phone to potential participants. Participants' office phone and email addresses were collected from emails and phone numbers publicly available from the website of each specific district listed in Appendix B. The principal investigator had to adjust the process to include phone calls. The principal investigator searched each website for the district's high school(s), then each school's counseling department, and then those available office phone numbers and emails that indicate a staff member as a counselor. Once the phone numbers and emails were identified, they were inventoried on the principal investigator's secured master list. Counselors were then contacted by phone and email and provided the invitation letter for emails and a script for phone calls listed in Appendix C and Appendix D.

The principal investigator sent the counselor invitations via phone and email to all eligible participants using the emails and phone numbers within the entire list that was researched and collected. The principal investigator encouraged all participants and their relatable and eligible colleagues to forward the invitation to all eligible participants. The master list contained all possible eligible participants discovered by the principal investigator. The principal investigator sent invitations via email every week until they received four acceptance

responses or the invitation had been sent four times over a 4-week period. The principal investigator did not receive five to 10 responses in the first 4 weeks, so invitations were sent via email every week for an additional 8 weeks. As the principal investigator did not receive five to 10 acceptance responses in the 12-week outreach, an adjustment had to be made with recruitment, and invitations were sent every week via phone call.

The principal investigator called the first half of the list on the first week after the initial 12-week outreach of emails. The principal investigator called the last half of participants the following week. During the third week, the principal investigator called the first half of participants, and during the fourth week, the principal investigator called the second half of the list. Each participant received two phone calls. Voice mails included invitations to participate in the study, encouragement for participants to pass along the invitation to other eligible participants if they were not interested, and the option to opt out. Recruitment phone calls occurred as one phone call, along with the direct communication with eligible participants, and included calling the counseling departments, main offices, and calling with the purpose of follow-ups regarding participation. If colleagues of eligible participants directed the principal investigator to a different number, the principal investigator called the given number. This thread of communication counted as one contact or call.

The amount of four to 10 participants was chosen as a contingency in the event that participants would respond but inform the principal investigator that they could not participate in the interview. The selection of the four participants had no order or specifics. Once four to 10 participants were interviewed, the remaining eligible participants on the master list were notified at the earliest opportunity during the project that the research was closed. The principal investigator contacted all publicly available counselors. The 30 school districts created a



delimitation for the principal researcher. The principal investigator's objective was to contact all eligible participants of each of the 30 districts. If this was not possible, the next objective was to contact the counselor office or counseling departments from each of the 30 districts. This was an attempt to discover the contacts for counselors or to request any advice of best form of contact. If a district did not have two eligible participants, the principal investigator increased the contact sample size of those districts that have more than two. This meant that some districts had three or four eligible participants.

Districts were chosen in no specific order. This process occurred until all eligible participants discovered by principal investigator were contacted. The first counselors that responded were prioritized for participation. The principal investigator prioritized head counselors for participant selection within top priority responders. These counselors came from the list of schools listed in Appendix B. The principal investigator scheduled times for interviews via email and phone call or both after participants responded with interest to the recruitment e-mail and phone call or both. The principal investigator responded to the four interested participants no longer than 4 days after receiving their response email and sent the participation sheet along with possible scheduled dates and times for interview. After interviews were conducted, the principal investigator notified other interested participants that recruitment for the project had been closed. This communication process was conducted via email from the email contacts that were previously stored on the principal investigator's master list.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

In this section, the instrumentation is explained in detail. The appendices are also introduced as well as the documents that are included in them. Lastly, data collection, including the interview process, is discussed.

## **Instrumentation**

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G). In this qualitative study the phenomenological aspect allowed the principal investigator to use the lived experiences (Creswell 2007) of secondary guidance counselors from LES school districts by conducting interview questions and developed an interview protocol to follow. The principal investigator ensured there was alignment between the research questions and the interview questions. The principal investigator allowed participants to view their answers as part of the triangulation process to validate the data collected.

## **Data Collection**

The principal investigator provided the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix F), which included the purpose of the research study, to participants to review. This happened after the participant responded to the invitation letter or phone call from principal investigator. The Participant Information Sheet was emailed to participants. The principal investigator read and covered the Participation Information Sheet with each participant prior to the interview and asked for permission to record the interview. The principal investigator provided participants an opportunity to ask questions or express concerns after going over the content of the Participant Information Sheet. The purpose was to ensure each participant understood the document. To ensure anonymity, each participant was given the chance to choose a preferred pseudonym, or one was provided for them. Each participant was asked to acknowledge that they approved of proceeding with the interview.

After interviews were conducted, the principal investigator notified other interested participants that recruitment for the project had been closed. This communication process was done via email from the email contacts that were previously stored on the principal investigator's

master list. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews (see Appendix G). Interviews for the guidance counselors were in-depth to capture the phenomenon as explained by the counselors. The questions were semi-structured to give the participants the freedom to express their thoughts. The principal investigator reviewed the questioning process with each secondary education guidance counselor at the beginning of each interview. The phenomenological structural approach to interviewing applies questions based on themes related to experience (Bevan, 2014).

The questions were semi-structured to give the participants the freedom to express their thoughts. Interview questions (see Appendix G) were developed in order to go more in depth to capture the phenomenon as explained by the counselors. The developed questions were utilized during the interviews via the Zoom online platform. The interviews were recorded via Zoom. Participants invited (see Appendix B) gave permission for recording of interview. Interviews were anticipated to be 45–60 minutes in length. Interview transcripts were stored on files of the principal investigator's password-encrypted computer, and hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet to which only the principal investigator had access.

Transcriptions were generated via Zoom Caption. Following the conclusion of the study, all audio documents were deleted and destroyed. Transcripts will be held for 3 years. The data was transcribed using the caption feature from the Zoom platform. The principal investigator printed out the transcripts generated by Zoom in order to review transcribed answers. The principal investigator looked for themes in transcribed answers from participants. Participants were given their transcribed answers to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation.

## Data Analysis

The principal investigator analyzed responses and recorded common themes that arose. For the purpose of this study, once ideas were discovered three times, they were considered a phenomenon of the theme. The data from all participant interviews were coded with NVivo to create themes. NVivo software is used for mixed-methods and qualitative research and is specifically used to analyze unstructured text, audio, video, and picture data from sources such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles. QSR International is the company behind NVivo (Kent State University, 2023). Data was manually coded using Saldaña's (2009) process to find common themes in the answers. Once these themes were created, they were examined and labeled as data discovered. Once the data was transcribed, the next step was interpreting the participants' answers. The principal investigator chose inductive thematic analysis as the coding and analysis method for this research study. According to Nowell et al. (2017), when working with research and analyzing sizable qualitative data sets, thematic analysis is an effective qualitative technique. Nowell et al. continued to mention that each qualitative research strategy includes unique methods for carrying out, recording, and assessing data analysis procedures, but it is the duty of the individual researcher to ensure objectivity and reliability. Lastly, Nowell et al. claimed that by documenting, organizing, and exposing the techniques of analysis in sufficient detail for the reader to assess the process's credibility, qualitative researchers may show how data analysis has been carried out. This allowed the principal investigator to delve into each line of discussion from the participant transcripts to explore patterns, embedded themes, patterns, and commonalities within the varied lived experiences of the participants.

Thematic analysis was used in this phenomenological research study. Thematic analysis allows researchers to investigate and highlight participants' emotions, beliefs, sentiments, experiences, and perspectives, and allows themes to arise straight from the data (Saldaña, 2009). The principal investigator categorized the data from each participant interview transcript into data sets, which allowed the material to be coded more rapidly and properly (Saldaña, 2015). To maintain a comprehensive study, the principal investigator thoroughly assessed the data from each participant's transcript to establish initial codes, which aided in increasing reliability among the acquired data (Khandkar, 2014, p. 8). Once the first codes were produced, the principal investigator evaluated each code to form a set of core categories that showed early similarities among participants' lived experiences in relation to the study's research topics (Kuckartz, 2015). The principal investigator analyzed data from each major category to discover subcategories of obtained data after the data were categorized and sorted into workable main groups. After establishing the subcategories and thoroughly analyzing the obtained data within each subcategory using inductive thematic analysis, the principal investigator created a summary of results based on the discovered themes in line with the study's research goals (Kuckartz, 2015).

### **Limitations, Delimitations, and Ethical Issues**

In this section, the principal investigator explains the limitations that were brought about because of the study. The delimitations of study are explained next in detail. Lastly the ethical issues are explained.

#### **Limitations**

As claimed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), limitations are those influences outside of the study that are not controlled and can affect the data results. One of the largest challenges of

the research was the limitations that come with the research topic. The scope of the study posed limitations. Study limitations are flaws in a research design that might have an impact on the findings and conclusions of the study (National Library of Medicine, 2019). The scope was limited to secondary counselors working in urban LES school districts.

### **Delimitations**

The number of secondary counselors serves as a delimitation in this study. Only four participants were recruited for this study. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), conditional decisions made by the researcher to limit the scope of the study are its delimitations. Participants were only interviewed once during a full-length session. Participants were able to review transcripts as a part of member checking. The researcher remained as evidence based as possible when interpreting data. No personal bias was applied to interpretation.

### **Ethical Issues**

Participant rights and ethical concerns were an important part of this research. The study was conducted and adhered to The Belmont Report (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). The goal of this concept is to alleviate apprehension and approach participants ethically. The Belmont Report is a declaration of fundamental ethical principles and rules that should help in finding solutions to the ethical issues raised by the use of human subjects in research (The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 1979). These interviews explored the perceptions of the participating counselors. In interviews, no names, departments, or employee numbers were listed or exposed or labeled on surveys. Throughout a study, ethical practices must be used by researchers (Smith et al., 2012). In this study, participant confidentiality was prioritized. Interview data did not have names or indications of the participant. Fairness also remained a high priority during the research.

## Trustworthiness

In this section, the principal investigator explains the components that comprise the trustworthiness of the study. The trustworthiness portion of the section is explained first. Next, the principal investigator explains the credibility, transferability, dependability or validity, and finally, confirmability of this study. Lastly, the principal investigator provides a summary of the section.

As reported by Watts and Finkenstaedt-Quinn (2021), trustworthiness must be demonstrated by researchers when conducting qualitative studies. Additionally, Watts and Finkenstaedt-Quinn stated that their analysis must be shown trustworthy to practitioners and researchers who are consuming their work. Furthermore, Watts and Finkenstaedt-Quinn stated that the purpose of trustworthiness is so researchers can understand if and how the presented research conclusions and claims may be transferable to other studies. According to Sutrisno et al. (2014), qualitative research maintains trustworthiness by providing detailed accounts of the translation process; minimizing translation errors which, in this study, entailed member checking; and including multiple types of transcribing, such as manually transcribing and Zoom caption. To achieve this, the principal investigator performed member checking to ensure the translation of the interview was correct and valid.

In this study, several strategies were utilized to establish trustworthiness. One of them was triangulation, which entails the use of different sources of information or procedures from the field to repetitively establish identifiable patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Investigator triangulation was employed because multiple researchers and their work were utilized and referenced to complete comparative analysis of individual findings. Moreover, member checks were utilized for establishing credibility. This is referred to as respondent or participant

validation (Hanson, 2017). After collecting data from the study subjects, the principal investigator returned the transcript to them to check for accuracy as well as resonance with their experiences. All four participants confirmed that the data gathered from them was accurate, which established credibility. The other procedure used to increase credibility was peer review, which entailed discussing the process of the research with peers of a doctoral level. A peer review helped to ensure that the results of this research study were described with adequate detail and determined the credibility of those results.

### **Credibility**

As part of the triangulation procedure to confirm the data gathered, the principal investigator gave participants access to see their responses (Creswell, 2007). Credibility is one of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers in validity that seek to ensure that the study tests or measures what is actually intended to be measured (Shenton, 2004). Creswell (2007) stated that when conducting a qualitative research study, triangulation of data sources and methods must be used by the researchers to establish credibility within the study. Creswell (2007) wrote, “In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroboration evidence” (p. 208).

### **Transferability**

The research conducted on the perceptions of counselors at the secondary level in LES communities regarding the SAT can be transferred to other sites or states that have similar environments and structures. The study is transferable because counselors from similar school districts may have similar answers based on the same context of the study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that one of the subcategories of trustworthiness, transferability, consists of how well the research findings can be applied to other studies. Further, the study can reach



transferability by providing detailed and robust descriptions of the contributions of participants as well as the study's background.

### **Dependability or Validity**

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) stated that the ability to repeat the processes and procedures used when interpreting data and collecting data supports the dependability of a study. Data analysis aided in exhibiting dependability in the study because it is sourced from multiple origins. An accurate description of procedures and processes provides dependability in the study. Accurate themes, transcripts, and findings were validated by member checking. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), excluding any researcher biases and utilizing descriptive notes to record findings strengthens the dependability in the study. Findings were recorded based on factual data presented and not interpretation of data.

### **Confirmability**

Findings that are adequately explained by the results of the research and not because of the biases of the researcher are considered confirmable (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The confirmability in the study was established by the triangulation method used. One strategy for data analysis and sharing the findings with others to help them comprehend a common phenomenon is triangulation (Denzin, 1978). According to Patton (2002), the use of triangulation strengthens the study by using several kinds of data collection. Member checking, digital recording, and detailed note taking, supported the results were derived from actual results and had no influence from biases.

### **Summary**

This chapter identified and included a discussion of the study's participants, why they were chosen, and how their selection matches with the study's objectives. The study utilized a

qualitative transcendental phenomenological approach, which allowed participants to express their experience of being a secondary guidance counselor (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The phenomenon of the study was the barriers and challenges of the SAT for LES students. Chapter 4 includes the results of the study.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The aim of this study was to investigate the discrepancy between investigated perspectives of guidance counselors working in low socioeconomic status (LES) communities in urban school systems regarding impediments and challenges produced for students by the SAT and its connection to college admissions. To guide this study, two research questions were used. The first research question asked, What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from low socioeconomic urban school districts regarding the SAT? The second research question asked, How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for low socioeconomic students? The data from all participant interviews were coded in NVivo to create shared themes. Data were manually coded using Saldaña's (2009) process to find common themes in the answers. The phenomenological aspect of this qualitative research allowed collection of data from the participants regarding their lived experiences (Creswell, 2007).

Four participants were interviewed to answer each of the research questions. This allowed the principal investigator to easily conduct in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was utilized to move inductively from coded units to larger representations, including categories and themes. This chapter provides the details of the analysis method. Next, the results and findings are presented. The chapter concludes with a summary.

### **Analysis Method**

Thematic analysis was utilized to move inductively from coded units to larger representations including categories and themes. The process involved steps as described by Braun and Clarke (2019). First, the principal investigator became familiar with the collected data. This was achieved by reviewing the transcript from each study subject individually. Phrases, paragraphs, and sentences that were found to be meaningful to the topic were

highlighted by the principal investigator. The second step related to the development of codes. Each code was labeled to represent potential themes that were expected to emerge from the data. The principal investigator started the manual coding using Saldaña's (2009) process by referring to the descriptive text highlighted in the first step.

In the third step, themes were developed. Groups were formed from codes that were alike. These groups formed themes that were used to answer the research questions. Data that was connected in one way or another were clustered together. Review of themes was the fourth step. As patterns began emerging in the data, data that were related to a particular pattern were identified. The data from the clusters created earlier were categorized (see Table 4) to make up relations or patterns. To explain the pattern, direct quotes from the data/transcribed interviews were utilized.

The fifth step involved finalization and definition of themes. The principal investigator looked for the emergence of overarching themes in the patterns. Related patterns were combined and clustered into themes. After identifying themes that were more meaningful, a more abstract descriptor was assigned to them. After analyzing all the data, the themes were arranged in a matrix with their corresponding supportive patterns and codes for each data cluster. The data were then synthesized to create a composite synthesis of data gathered in regard to the research questions. In the final step, a report was generated. There was no discrepant data discovered.

### **Presentation of Results and Findings**

In this section, the findings are presented and explained. A discussion of the data as well as corresponding tables to support the data are provided. The results from the data analysis are explained next. The themes that were discovered are explained last with the corresponding narrative that includes details about each theme.

**Table 3***Participant Demographics*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Years of experience as a guidance counselor</i>	<i>Years of working with students who have taken SAT and are from LES urban districts</i>	<i>Bachelor's degree in school guidance and counseling</i>
<i>Alabama:</i>	Female	28		28	Yes
<i>Michigan:</i>	Female	11		8	Yes
<i>Texas:</i>	Male	3		3	Yes
<i>MT:</i>	Male	6		3	Yes

**Results**

The results of the data analysis are organized by the two research questions. The themes and their related research question are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4***Research Questions and Their Corresponding Themes*

		Themes used to address the research question
1	RQ1: What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT?	Main-Theme 1: Accessibility Matters Sub-Theme 1: Accessibility and Test Structure Sub-Theme 2: Accessibility and Test Timing Sub-Theme 3: Accessibility and Availability
2	RQ2: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students?	Main-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and the SAT Sub-Theme 1: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Resources Sub-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Curricular Alignment Sub-Theme 3: Socioeconomic Disparity and Outside of School Responsibilities

**Table 5***Research Question 1 Themes*

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing to this theme ( <i>N</i> = 4)	<i>n</i> of references to this theme in the data
Main-Theme 1: Accessibility Matters	4	15
Sub-Theme 1: Accessibility and Test Structure	4	4
Sub-Theme 2: Accessibility and Test Timing	3	4
Sub-Theme 3: Accessibility and Availability	3	4

***Main-Theme 1: Accessibility Matters***

The first main theme suggested that the high school counselors who were interviewed believed that LES students generally have low accessibility to the SAT. Lack of resources contributes as well. Indicators to the theme of low accessibility of the SAT for LES students were mentioned 15 times in the interviews between all four participants. This low accessibility is

due to the SAT having a poor structure, being timed, as well as low availability and times for SAT. According to MT:

There's a lot of pressure to perform on this one test, and if they don't do well, they have the stress of finding availability to take it again. and that standard error of measurement of how well they can do if they retake the exam is limited because of how frequent the exam is offered.

MT added that “So if it was offered more frequently and with a limited, without a timeframe, I think there could be some possibility of better performance, especially with these populations.”

Similar views were shared by Michigan, who stated:

That short period of time then that's what they're judged on ... And if they had an opportunity to review some of those things and then go back and properly think about what it was that was given to them, I'm sure many of them would do better.

Participants indicated that the limited timeframe to take the test reduces its accessibility for LES students. All the interviewed counselors believed that providing students with transportation to the SAT sites is important. This was mentioned seven times by all four participants. Texas stated that “there are vans available that can be provided to them.” According to Alabama, “we were able to provide that transportation. It was a wonderful opportunity for our kids, otherwise our kids would not be taking that Saturday test.” This participant added that “because we're able to provide that transportation for our students, it's a positive thing.” Themes two, three, and four provide further detail describing the items that create low accessibility of the SAT for LES students.

**Sub-Theme 1: Accessibility and Test Structure.** Sub-Theme one indicated that the counselors think that the SAT is poorly structured. The structure of the SAT was mentioned four

times total between all four respondents. Alabama noted, “I don’t think the structure of it is proper at all.” Michigan mentioned, “It attempts to test for what a student's potential could be, but it does not always match based on the questions that are asked.” Similarly, MT stated, “I do think that the SAT is structured in a way that prevents students from gaining a full grasp of the knowledge base that's available to them from their educators.” These continuous mentions of structural issues with the SAT supports the commonality that was mentioned between counselors regarding the SAT’s poor structure. MT also shared the following:

The way I see it structured is that it's based on the expectations right in the standards that are set by the government. And therefore the education that students receive is set to what they expect students to know or learn versus, what public career opportunities as well as actual educational opportunities are needed, to be able to fund.

This theme also suggested that the SAT is too lengthy and creates test fatigue. For example, Texas stated:

There's so many different assessments at one time we had the MStep standardized test we had the NMSTP standardized test. The P. S. A. T. whole bunch of other assessments going on doing that same week or weeks before. So like a test fatigue for students it was just drain.

These responses support the counselors’ belief that the SAT is inadequately structured.

**Sub-Theme 2: Accessibility and Test Timing.** Sub-Theme two demonstrated that the high school guidance counselors think that the SAT should be untimed. The allotted time barrier was mentioned between three participants a total of four times. MT stated, “I don't think it should be timed. I think maybe there should be a window. I think, timed tests only provoke more anxiety, and there are studies that show that, test anxiety is what does deterrence.” The other



guidance counselors believed that timing the test is a bad idea. For example, Texas noted that he does not think it should be timed because “everybody learns differently. Some students learn visually. Some students are auditory. Timing that assessment puts a lot of pressure on students.” These participants referenced the same subject and reinforced the idea that counselors think the SAT should not be timed.

**Sub-Theme 3: Accessibility and Availability.** This sub-theme showed that the guidance counselors believed that the availability for taking the SAT should be extended. This was mentioned four times between all four participants. According to Texas, “it should be increased.” Similarly, MT noted that the availability of this test needs to be increased because “There's a lot of buildup in pressure to try and perform well on this one exam.” Michigan shared the following:

I would say that the availability should be increased because, even though they give the test dates. That would save a lot of time for students to plan ahead there are certain things that may come up in the population of students that I work with, well most of them.

Michigan also stated, “In that short amount of time, which is sometimes the case the student can't get out exactly what they want in a way that makes sense, and that short period of time then that's what they're judged on.” The various issues concerning timing factors that create barriers for LES students are supported by these participants’ statements.

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

The second research question was as follows: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students? A total of four themes emerged in regard to this question: (a) counselors believed that inadequate resources, lack of curriculum-SAT testing materials

alignment, and outside school day responsibilities impact LES students' performance on the SAT, leading to low SAT scores, which ultimately hinders their college admission options; (b) counselors believed that insufficient resources, including tutors, affect LES students' SAT performance; (c) counselors believed that school curriculum is not aligned with SAT testing material and affects the academic proficiency of LES students; and (d) counselors believed that students' outside school day responsibilities influence their academic performance. Table 6 illustrates the number of participants who mentioned each theme.

**Table 6**

*Research Question 2 Themes*

Theme	<i>n</i> of participants contributing to this theme ( <i>N</i> = 4)	<i>n</i> of references to this theme in the data
Main-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and the SAT	4	23
Sub-Theme 1: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Resources	4	7
Sub-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Curricular Alignment	4	9
Sub-Theme 3: Socioeconomic Disparity and Outside of School Responsibilities	4	7

**Main-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and the SAT.** The second main theme suggests that all the interviewed guidance counselors hold the belief that LES disparities affect the LES students' performance on the SAT, leading to low SAT scores, which ultimately hinders their college admission. These disparities were mentioned 23 times between all the four respondents. This shows that there are few teachers at the school to teach certain subjects. Teachers are important human resources, and having few teachers negatively impacts the LES students' performance in those subjects. Comparable views were shared by Alabama who noted the following:

So maybe, as far as two tutors for SAT prep of the school programs. Our school is not so much focused on those scores and they're just not they know I mean realistically they don't really push. Okay, well, we're going to, you know provide these workshops. We're going to provide this for our students to push this course to be higher. It used to be because I think it was tied into funding at one point in time, and not so more now, and because it's not it's not that push to get those scores up anymore.

Alabama's view demonstrates that the school lacks sufficient resources in terms of tutors and funds necessary for students to achieve academic success. Sub-themes 1, 2 and 3 provide further detail about the factors that contribute to Main theme 2.

***Sub-Theme 1: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Resources.*** This particular theme demonstrated that the counselors believed a major barrier created by the SAT was a lack of resources in these schools. Resources, in this case, include instructors. This was mentioned seven times between all four participants. Alabama stated that they only have "Two tutors for SAT prep of the school programs ... I think it was tied into funding." In some schools, other students act as tutors. MT stated, "we don't have a whole lot of tutors for SAT we do have teachers who, you know, stick around but most of our tutors right now consist of other students." MT also stated:

I think the financial support that's available it's gonna be better and more in affluent districts and so, if we're in those lower socioeconomic statuses, there's only so much financial support that can be given. I think tutors can be a huge benefit.

This theme shows that instructors and money are necessary resources and when schools lack adequate instructors and funds, the SAT performance of LES students is adversely impacted. The students end up receiving lower scores that cannot guarantee them college admission.

***Sub-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Curricular Alignment.*** The focus of this theme was that the high school counselors did not think that the school curriculum and the SAT test materials were compatible, and the curriculum affects the academic aptitude of LES students. This barrier creates a large disadvantage for LES students in their pursuit of entering higher education. This was mentioned between the four participants a total of nine times.

Alabama stated:

I don't think so. In the past, our curriculums were aligned to what's going to be on the SAT 100 percent, and it was forced, and like embedded in them, and all the classes and everything. You know you had those skills that kind of transfixed themselves throughout math or science, you know. It's not like that anymore.

The study participants noted that the school curriculum, which is not aligned with the SAT testing materials, affects students' academic proficiency compared to other similar districts but not compared to wealthier districts. According to Alabama:

Well, there's no comparison at all compared to more affluent districts. I mean they have the funding. They have the quality of teachers and to me that makes a difference. They have the parents who are able to be involved, and you know take a stance when something is not right as regards to their child's education. And unfortunately that's not what happens in urban districts.

***Sub-Theme 3: Socioeconomic Disparity and Outside of School Responsibilities.*** This theme suggested that the counselors think that the students' academic performance is influenced by responsibilities that the students have outside of the school day. Such responsibilities include work or taking care of siblings. This was mentioned seven times between all four participants.

For example, Alabama stated:

We do have a large amount of students who are responsible for their younger siblings, which yes, it does affect their performance in school. Our students who are responsible for their younger siblings sometimes find themselves having to miss school.

Similar sentiments were shared by Michigan, who shared, “A lot of them are taking care of siblings. Many of them have jobs.” Some students are overworked by their employers, which does affect their school performance. Texas stated, “I have to report some employers sometimes because they try to overwork the kids.” These references support the emergent themes regarding outside school day responsibilities influencing the academic performance of students.

### **Summary**

The results of this study adequately addressed the two research questions. Firstly, this study sought to determine the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT. As demonstrated by the results, these counselors believed that there is low accessibility to the SAT for the LES students. They perceived the SAT as poorly structured, felt that it should not be timed, and believed that its availability and times should be increased. Secondly, concerning the barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students, the counselors believed that inadequate resources including lack of instructors, lack of curriculum-SAT test alignment, and outside school day responsibilities, such as working and taking care of younger siblings, were major barriers. These barriers negatively affected the performance of LES students on the SAT, leading to low SAT scores, which ultimately hinders college admission opportunities for students. These results addressed the research problem and achieved the purpose of the study by shedding light on the perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within LES communities

regarding barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Chapter 5 contains a discussion and interpretation of the current study's results.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the gap in examined perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic status (LES) communities in regard to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. The principal investigator sought to address two research questions. Both questions have been answered adequately.

There were two findings in this research. The first research question was: What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from low socioeconomic status (LES) urban school districts regarding the SAT? The first finding revealed that the counselors perceived the SAT as poorly structured, felt that it should not be timed, and availability and times for SAT should be increased. The second question was: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students? Based on the second finding, the counselors believed that inadequate resources, such as tutors, lack of curriculum-SAT testing materials alignment, and outside school day responsibilities, impact the performance of LES students on the SAT, leading to low SAT scores, which hinders students' college admission.

### **Interpretation and Importance of Findings**

The results of this study helped to answer the research questions and to adequately address the research problem. Secondary education guidance counselors believed that low socioeconomic disparities affect the SAT scores of LES students, which in turn hinders LES students' chances of college admission. The counselors perceived that LES students had limited access to the SAT. Counselors thought that the SAT was badly constructed, should not be timed, and that its availability and times should be extended, all of which led to its low accessibility. Counselors felt that LES students' resources were insufficient. These resources included a

shortage of teachers, a misalignment between the curriculum and the SAT test, and extracurricular commitments. Because of these obstacles, LES students performed poorly on the SAT, resulting in low SAT scores that eventually limit their ability to apply to colleges. Table 7 shows the connection between the research questions, findings, and themes. The next section connects the themes to the findings.

**Table 7**

*Research Question Connection Table*

Research questions	Findings	Themes used to address the research question
1 RQ1: What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT?	Low SAT Accessibility to the SAT for LES students	Main-Theme 1: Accessibility Matters Sub-Theme 1: Accessibility and Test Structure Sub-Theme 2: Accessibility and Test Timing Sub-Theme 3: Accessibility and Availability
2 RQ2: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students?	LES Disparities affect the SAT scores of LES students which hinders their chances of college admission.	Main-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and the SAT Sub-Theme 1: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Resources Sub-Theme 2: Socioeconomic Disparity and Lack of Curricular Alignment Sub-Theme 3: Socioeconomic Disparity and Outside of School Responsibilities

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question explored the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT. From the perspectives of secondary education guidance counselors, the principal investigator researched the phenomenon of barriers and challenges in the accessibility to college regarding the SAT for LES students.



Secondary education guidance counselors believed that LES students' low SAT accessibility affects their test results.

***Finding 1: Low SAT Accessibility Affects Scores for LES Students***

Concerning the first research question, the results indicate that the interviewed secondary school counselors generally think that low SAT accessibility for LES students affects their scores. In their interviews, they indicated that that this test is poorly structured, should not be timed, and that the availability and times for SAT should be increased. Out of this finding, the subthemes were discovered as they were commonly mentioned by participants. According to Geiser (2020), high school grades have much less of an impact on SAT scores than do factors like household income, parental education, and race/ethnicity. The dearth of knowledge and support among underprivileged and rural students is widely established, claimed Dillon and Smith (2013). According to Dillon and Smith, this frequently results in undesirable college application and enrollment decisions.

The first subtheme suggests that counselors believe that the structure of the SAT is problematic for LES students. Geiser (2020) found that the SAT results are far more connected with student variables such as family income, parental education, and race/ethnicity than high school grades. According to Dillon and Smith (2013), the lack of information and support among poor and rural students is well documented. Dillon stated that this often leads to unfavorable college application and enrollment decisions. Thus, the mandatory SAT policy was likely to have the greatest impact on LES students (Dillon & Smith, 2013, as cited in Hurwitz et al., 2015).

The second subtheme supporting the low accessibility is the issue of time. As explained by Appelrouth et al. (2017), higher socioeconomic students utilized more personal tutoring hours, but lower socioeconomic students used more group tutoring hours. Additionally,

Appelrouth et al. found that higher income students began practice sessions 1 month sooner than lower income students and improved their scores in every component of the SAT. According to Toppo (2020), advocates argue that making the test untimed for everyone would make it harder for students with advantages of wealthy or well-connected parents to benefit from the system and may more accurately measure students' capabilities. These views are important as they reveal how the design of the SAT, including its timing and structure, may impact students' SAT performance. Students may struggle to succeed when the SAT is poorly structured or has limited times and availability (Belasco, 2013). The third subtheme addressing the availability of the SAT supports the low accessibility as well. Hurwitz et al. (2017) stated,

Many factors contribute to the suboptimal college-exploration and selection process of lower income students, including confusion about financial aid availability, poor access to high quality college guidance, "micro-barriers" such as college application fees, and familial obligations or cultural norms, which limit the scope of colleges that students might consider. (p. 1)

When students do not score well on the SAT, they may not be admitted to the college of their choice. This is consistent with the college choice theory (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), which served as the theoretical framework for this study. Counselors help students to choose the right colleges and complete the necessary applications to those colleges. The impact of college selection for a student could last their whole life (Johnson, 2019). In the life of a young student, these college decisions can greatly impact the outcome of their postsecondary life (Plummer, 2018). Belasco (2013) noted that students interact with high school counselors when making career and college career decisions, but for LES students these interactions can be significant for postsecondary decision making. Counselors may believe that the SAT has some faults due to

their previous experiences with it. They are all familiar with the SAT, and perhaps their involvement with students that have taken this test and who are from LES urban districts has shaped their perceptions of it. This aligns with Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice theory, because guidance counselors are one of the main factors influencing students' decisions to attend college since they often engage with students (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

### **Research Question 1**

The second research question asked, How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students? The belief of the guidance counselors was that LES disparities have an impact on LES students' SAT scores, which reduces their chances of getting into college. Counselors explained these differences as a lack of resources, such as tutors, a misalignment between the curriculum and the SAT exam materials, and time spent outside of class.

### ***Finding 2: Socioeconomic Disparities Affect the SAT Scores of LES Students Which Hinders Their Chances of College Admission***

Concerning the second research question, the guidance counselors mainly believed that socioeconomic disparities affect the SAT scores of LES students, which hinders their chances of college admission. From the second finding, three subthemes emerged. The sixth theme addressed resources. As reported by Deslonde (2017), LES students and their families have limited social capital. Deslonde stated that this limitation requires LES students to find information on postsecondary opportunities from unfamiliar sources. Deslonde claimed that students who have low social capital typically do not possess the knowledge regarding college choice criteria and admissions requirements. The discovered disparities created the subthemes for theme 5.

Sub-theme one was lack of resources. According to the Michigan Department of Education (2021), several studies conducted over many years have demonstrated that many districts in Michigan lack enough funds as a result of the state's public school funding scheme. As claimed by Bates (2017), social capital alludes to social connections and associations that permit students to receive institutional help. Bates saw social capital as how the dominant class kept up with its predominant position, repositioning those people who previously had a place within the upper echelon and that group or organization's social capital. According to Hurwitz et al. (2017), the expense of extra scores being sent to additional colleges or universities may stand as a genuine hindrance to LES students applying to an ideal number and level of colleges.

Sub-theme two addressed curriculum alignment with SAT material. Westrick et al. (2020) found data from more than 221,000 students across 169 four-year universities and colleges. Westrick et al. stated that the SAT was fundamentally as effective as high school grades in the prediction of college performance of students and that, when combined, the two measures offer a more accurate understanding of the performance of students than either measure alone. According to Lopez de Mesa Mo (2018), advantages such as honors classes are a competitive alternative to more elite colleges due to scholarships, smaller honors classes and seminars, special advising, encouragement of research and studying abroad, and other benefits.

Sub-theme three addressed the impact of outside activities. According to Geiser (2020), high school grades have much less of an impact on SAT scores than do factors like household income, parental education, and race/ethnicity. Ware (2019) found that socioeconomic status is a critical construct for practitioners and researchers in health, education, economics, and other social sciences. Ware continued that reality is a challenge for millions of families with extenuating consequences impacting their quality of life. Ware stated that students in these

communities are often subjected to adverse living conditions and stress-inducing experiences that are damaging to their social, physical, and emotional well-being as well as to cognitive processes such as language, memory, and attention span. The lack of curriculum-SAT testing materials alignment and outside school day responsibilities negatively impacts the performance of LES students on the SAT, resulting in low SAT scores and ultimately hindering their college admission. These barriers and challenges may be a result of a combination of factors, such as poor funding of schools in LES regions and the low socioeconomic status of the students in such schools. Furthermore, these barriers and challenges are in line with Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory as the students lack the social connections and associations that would enable them to obtain institutional help. If they could gain the necessary social capital, then these LES students may be able to succeed just as their counterparts in wealthier school districts. These findings matter because they contribute to the ongoing research about the barriers LES students face regarding the SAT in secondary education. Moreover, these findings highlight the challenges and barriers created by the SAT that have not been considered regarding the college pursuits of students of low socioeconomic status.

### **Implications**

The results of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders. The results of this study may be of use to the College Board, which is the organization that creates and administers the SAT. The results may also be of use to urban school districts, school administrators of schools in LES areas, and even parents of LES students. Specifically, the College Board may use the findings to understand the barriers created by the SAT from the perspectives of high school guidance counselors. Consequently, the College Board may redesign

the SAT based on the results of this research by giving it a proper structure, not timing it, and increasing the availability and times for the administration of the SAT.

Furthermore, school administrators, principals, and school districts can use the findings of this study to address the many barriers and challenges in the college admission process in regard to the SAT for LES students identified by the counselors. For example, curriculum administrators can redesign the curriculum to ensure it is aligned with SAT testing material and make sure that the school curriculum does not negatively affect the learners' academic proficiency. Evans (2016) stated that students with high academic achievements but poor socioeconomic status are more likely to attend less selective or nonselective institutions and universities. Further, Evans found that researchers looked at how top high schools help students get into elite institutions. However, Evans stated that little research has been conducted on how high schools especially prepare disadvantaged students for entrance to selective institutions. When these barriers and challenges are addressed, the performance of LES students on the SAT will improve. Ultimately, more LES students will receive college admission.

Moreover, parents of LES students can use these findings to address some of the challenges and barriers, particularly those related to those outside of the school day. These Lit support responsibilities influence their children's academic performance, such as working or taking care of younger siblings. SES is a crucial construct for practitioners and academics in the fields of health, education, economics, and other social sciences, according to Ware (2019). Ware continued by stating that mitigating circumstances have a negative influence on the quality of life for millions of families, making reality a challenge. Parents may utilize the findings to ensure that their children are not involved in these responsibilities so that they can focus on their academics. Overall, the study contributes to the body of knowledge and larger body of literature

by revealing the challenges and obstacles created by the SAT to college admission from the viewpoint of high school guidance counselors who work in urban school districts.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Based on the findings of this study, a number of recommendations for action are made. Firstly, the College Board should redesign the SAT and the way it is delivered. The College Board may begin redesigning the SAT by giving it a different structure, such as eliminating the timed nature of the exam and increasing its availability and times. According to Toppo (2020), advocates argue that making the test untimed for everyone would make it harder for students with advantages of wealthy or well-connected parents to benefit from the system and may more accurately measure students' true capabilities. This will help to eliminate the barriers inherent to the SAT identified by the counselors mentioned in theme three.

Secondly, it is recommended that school administrators, principals, and school districts redesign the curriculum so that it aligns with SAT testing material and make sure that the academic proficiency of learners is not adversely affected by the school curriculum. Evans (2016) discovered that researchers looked at how top high schools assist pupils in entering prestigious colleges. Evans argued that there has not been much study on how high schools prepare underprivileged children for admission to elite colleges.

The second piece of advice is for parents to make sure that their children are not engaged in extracurricular activities that might compromise their academic achievement. According to Ware (2019), students in LES communities frequently endure stressful situations and unfavorable living circumstances that harm their physical, social, and emotional health as well as cognitive functions including memory, language, and attention span. These recommendations

will benefit stakeholders as they will help to increase the SAT performance of LES students in urban school districts and, ultimately, improve the college admission rates of these students.

There are several ways through which the results of this study may be disseminated. First, publication in peer-reviewed journals would ensure that the findings can be accessed by many stakeholders and other individuals who are interested in the findings of this study. Additionally, dissemination can be done through conference presentations and meetings which are attended by relevant stakeholders. Thirdly, the findings can be published in local newspapers and magazines which are easily obtainable by all the stakeholders. Furthermore, the findings may be published on a website to which everyone has access.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

In this study, the principal investigator interviewed four guidance counselors from four school districts with LES students in the state of Michigan. Counselors from school districts with no or a low percentage of LES students were not interviewed, yet these counselors could have provided crucial data that would have helped to address the research problem. Therefore, future studies on the topic should aim to recruit counselors from school districts with non-LES students to explore their strategies and methods of SAT and college preparation. Another recommendation is that future studies on the topic should seek to obtain views of other school personnel, such as teachers or principals, regarding the SAT. The current study was limited to guidance counselors, yet other school personnel who are also familiar with the SAT and the college admission process were not enlisted as participants. Additionally, future studies on the topic should use a larger sample size of at least 20 participants and ensure that the respondents are representative of the population. This is important considering that the current study used a very small sample size of only four counselors within one state.



## Conclusion

The explored problem in this phenomenological study was that standard SAT evaluation techniques are replete with data related to students from a high socioeconomic demographic and do not allow accurate assessments of students from underserved communities who are in LES demographics (Geiser, 2017). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within LES communities in regard to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. The principal investigator sought to answer two research questions. First, What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from LES urban school districts regarding the SAT? Second, How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for LES students? A review of literature demonstrated that in most college admissions processes, standardized test scores are often considered as one of the necessary steps. Researchers have reported that the process of taking the SAT can create challenges for LES students.

Based on these findings, a recommendation for action is that the College Board should redesign the SAT by giving the SAT a proper structure, not timing the SAT, and increasing the availability of the SAT and the times it is offered. Urban school districts, principals, and LES school administrators should redesign the curriculum so that it aligns with SAT testing material and make sure that the academic proficiency of learners is not negatively affected by the school curriculum. Future studies on the topic should use a larger sample size of at least 20 guidance counselors and recruit school personnel other than guidance counselors to participate in the study.

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Appendix A  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER



INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

**Institutional Review Board**  
**Julie Longua Peterson, Chair**

Biddeford Campus  
11 Hills Beach Road  
Biddeford, ME 04005  
(207) 602-  
2244 T  
(207) 602-  
5905 F

Portland Campus  
716 Stevens Avenue  
Portland, ME 04103

**DATE OF LETTER:** June 13, 2022

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Lamont Vines

**FACULTY ADVISOR:** Laura Bertonazzi, EdD

**PROJECT NUMBER:** 0522-15

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Perceptions of Secondary Education Guidance Counselors Regarding the

Scholastic Aptitude Test and its Relationship to College  
Admissions for Low Socioeconomic Students

**SUBMISSION TYPE:** Exempt Project **SUBMISSION DATE:**  
5/25/2022

**ACTION:** Determination of Exempt Status

**DECISION DATE:** 6/13/2022

**REVIEW CATEGORY:** Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu) with any questions.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Kennedy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bob Kennedy, MS  
Director, Research Integrity



Appendix B  
SITE AND DISTRICTS

<b>District</b>	<b>2021-22 School Population</b>	<b>% Of Low Socioeconomic Statuses (Low SES)</b>
Alma (Gratiot County)	1,894	27.1%
Atlanta (Montmorency County)	262	34.5%
Baldwin (Lake County)	440	37.5%
Battle Creek (Calhoun County)	3,850	33.6%
Beecher (Genesee County)	658	52.4%
Bendle (Genesee County)	1,055	44.7%
Benton Harbor (Berrien County)	1,510	42.4%
Bridgeport-Spaulding (Saginaw County)	1,524	30.8%
Carman-Ainsworth (Genesee County)	3,936	28.4%
Covert (Van Buren County)	321	26.6%
Detroit (Wayne County)	48,745	43.4%
Ecorse (Wayne County)	1,124	40.8%
Fitzgerald (Macomb County)	2,235	36.3%
Flint (Genesee County)	3,042	49.1%
Genesee (Genesee County)	727	ACS-ED not available for this district due to insufficient sample size.
Hale (Iosco County)	334	22%
Hamtramck (Wayne County)	3,116	53.6%
Harrison (Clare County)	1,267	35.8%
Highland Park (Wayne County)	974	58.6%
Lansing (Ingham County)	10173	33.1%
Mount Morris (Genesee County)	1,578	24.9%
Muskegon (Muskegon County)	3,478	36.7%
Muskegon Heights (Muskegon Heights)	660	46.3%
River Rouge (Wayne County)	2470	59.5%
Saginaw Township (Saginaw County)	4,669	13.1%
Van Dyke (Macomb County)	1,917	35.6%

Walkerville (Oceana County)	302	25.2%
Westwood (Wayne County)	1,431	30.6%
Westwood Heights (Genesee County)	1,852	38.3%
Whittemore-Prescott (Iosco County)	698	27.3%

**Student Population Source: MISchoolData.org (2022).**

**% of Low SES Students Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2022)**

## Appendix C

### GUIDANCE COUNSELORS EMAIL INVITATION

Hello Counselor,

I hope this email finds you well. I am conducting research for my dissertation which is required as a component of the Doctor of Education program from the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. I am seeking your permission to use your insight on the topic for the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the gap in examined experiences of secondary education counselors working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Participation in this research is completely voluntary.

#### **You are being asked to participate in this research project because:**

- You are a guidance counselor that is involved with students that have or will take the SAT.
- You interact with students that have or will take the SAT and who are from low socioeconomic urban districts.
- You work in secondary education in a district within low socioeconomic communities.

#### **Interview**

You will be asked a series of interview questions based upon your lived experiences working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admission.

- Your permission will be sought to record this interview using the Zoom online platform. You have the option to participate in the interview with the camera off.
- Your permission will be sought to choose a pseudonym for yourself or a pseudonym will be assigned one.
- This interview is anticipated to be 45–60 minutes in length. You will be asked to review the transcript following the interview, as well as after all of the data collection to ensure that I have captured your words accurately.
- You also have the right to withdraw your participation at any time throughout the study.

As part of this study, your participation will be kept strictly confidential. The content collected throughout the data collection process, coding, analysis, and subsequent writing will be kept within a password-protected file and laptop. Any hard copies of content will be stored in a locked metal file cabinet at my home. I will only have access to this data. At the earliest opportunity during the project, after member checking has been completed, all audio and video files will be deleted and destroyed. Member checking means that all transcripts have been

individually verified with participants for accuracy. Transcripts will be held for three years. This will add more anonymity to the process. With the exception of the master list and the audio/video recordings, all other study data will be retained for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study. The principal investigator will strip the transcript of all personally identifiable information, and the participant's name will be replaced with a pseudonym. A Participant Information Sheet is attached to this email as well and includes the purpose of the research study.

If you agree to participate in this study, please contact me via email or phone to schedule an interview. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, you will receive a participation sheet which serves as the consent form. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions, please do not be reluctant to ask. I thank you in advance and look forward to your reply.

Educationally,

Lamont Vines

Doctoral Student

University of New England

lvines@une.edu, P: 231 457-8228

## Appendix D

### GUIDANCE COUNSELORS PHONE SCRIPT INVITATION

Principal Investigator: Hello Counselor, XXX

How are you? My name is Lamont Vines. I am conducting research for my dissertation which is required as a component of the Doctor of Education program from the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. I am calling to request your permission to use your insight on the topic for the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the gap in examined experiences of secondary education counselors working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Participation in this research is completely voluntary.

**You are being asked to participate in this research project because:**

- You are a guidance counselor that is involved with students that have or will take the SAT.
- You interact with students that have or will take the SAT and who are from low socioeconomic urban districts.
- You work in secondary education in a district within low socioeconomic communities.

Principal Investigator: Participation in this study requires a 45-60 minute confidential interview.

Principal Investigator: Would you like to hear information about the interview?

**Answer 1. Participant:** Yes

Principal Investigator: Reads Information about the Interview Script

Principal Investigator: Does participation in the study interest you?

**Answer 1. Participant:** Yes

Principal Investigator: Great! Reads conclusion script

**Answer 2. Participant:** No, I am not interested.

Principal Investigator: Thank for your time, is there anyone you can forward this invitation to, or you think may be interested?

**Information about the Interview**

You will be asked a series of interview questions based upon your lived experiences working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admission.

- Your permission will be sought to record this interview using the Zoom online platform. You have the option to participate in the interview with the camera off.
- Your permission will be sought to choose a pseudonym for yourself or a pseudonym will be assigned one.
- This interview is anticipated to be 45–60 minutes in length. You will be asked to review the transcript following the interview, as well as after all of the data collection to ensure that I have captured your words accurately.
- You also have the right to withdraw your participation at any time throughout the study.

### **Conclusion Script**

As part of this study, your participation will be kept strictly confidential. The content collected throughout the data collection process, coding, analysis, and subsequent writing will be kept within a password-protected file and laptop. Any hard copies of content will be stored in a locked metal file cabinet at my home. I will only have access to this data. At the earliest opportunity during the project, after member checking has been completed, all audio and video files will be deleted and destroyed. Member checking means that all transcripts have been individually verified with participants for accuracy. Transcripts will be held for three years. This will add more anonymity to the process. With the exception of the master list and the audio/video recordings, all other study data will be retained for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study. The principal investigator will strip the transcript of all personally identifiable information, and the participant's name will be replaced with a pseudonym. .

Upon agreeing to participate in the study, you will receive a participation sheet which serves as the consent form, and possible scheduled dates and times for interviews via email.

Principal Investigator: Could you please confirm you work email address?

Principal Investigator: Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Principal Investigator: Do you have any questions? If you have any questions between now and the scheduled interview, you can contact me via email or phone. Email: [lvines@une.edu](mailto:lvines@une.edu), P: 231 457-8228,

## Appendix E

## GUIDANCE COUNSELORS VOICE MAIL SCRIPT INVITATION

Principal Investigator: Hello Counselor,

My name is Lamont Vines. I am conducting research for my dissertation which is required as a component of the Doctor of Education program from the University of New England in Biddeford, Maine. I am calling to request your permission to use your insight on the topic for the study. The purpose of this study is to explore the gap in examined experiences of secondary education counselors working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. Participation in this study requires a 45-60 minute confidential interview and is completely voluntary. Please forward this invitation on to any and all eligible colleagues that you think would be interested.

You have the option to opt out of the study and or contact list. With either choice you can contact me via email at [lvines@une.edu](mailto:lvines@une.edu), or cell phone 231 457-8228

## Appendix F

## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



INNOVATION FOR A HEALTHIER PLANET

Office of Research Integrity

Institutional Review Board

## Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet Version Date:	June 5 , 2022
IRB Project #:	0522-15
Title of Project:	THE PERCEPTIONS OF SECONDARY EDUCATION GUIDANCE COUNSELORS REGARDING THE SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST (SAT) AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO COLLEGE ADMISSIONS FOR LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STUDENTS
Principal Investigator (PI):	Lamont Vines
PI Contact Information:	<a href="mailto:Lvines@une.edu">Lvines@une.edu</a> P: 2314578228

## INTRODUCTION

This is a project being conducted for research purposes. The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The use of the word ‘we’ in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty.
- Should you withdraw from the project any data collected will be destroyed and deleted and will not be used in the project.

## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT

The general purpose of this research project is to explore the gap in examined perceptions of guidance counselors working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. The study is a required part of my doctoral program. Two research questions guide the study:

**RQ1.** What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from low socioeconomic urban school districts regarding the SAT standardized test?



**RQ2.** How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for low socioeconomic students?

### **WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?**

You are being asked to participate in this research project because:

- You are a guidance counselor that is involved with students that have or will take the SAT standardized test.
  - This study defines guidance counselors as educators in secondary education that will help students with transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education..
  - Interact with students that have or will take the SAT and who are from low socioeconomic urban districts.
- You work as a guidance counselor in secondary education in a district in a low socioeconomic community as defined by the Department of Education (2022).

### **WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT**

- You will be asked a series of interview questions based upon your lived experiences, reflections, and perceptions involving working in urban school districts within low socioeconomic communities with regards to barriers and challenges created for students by the SAT and its relationship to college admissions. This interview is anticipated to be 45–60 minutes in length. This is a recorded interview, and you will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include confidentiality concerns and discomfort around describing your experiences. The principal investigator will make every attempt possible to secure any personal or identifying information. The final paper will not include any identifying information. You have the option to stop, skip and/or not answer any question, for any reason during the interview at any time.

Please refer the participant to the ‘What About Privacy & Confidentiality?’ section of the Information Sheet for steps I will take to minimize an invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality.

### **WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

The information we collect may help us understand and provide first steps in preparation for the issue of recognizing the barriers created by the SAT from the perspectives of frontline guidance counselors. Therefore, the study may inform counselors' best practice.

### **WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?**

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

## **WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?**

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

- Email addresses and phone numbers will be collected as identifiers, but emails, phone numbers pseudonyms and names will also be maintained in the master list. The master list will be stored securely and separately from the study data. At the earliest opportunity during the project, after all transcripts have been verified for accuracy, the master list, all audio and video files will be deleted and destroyed.
- If you do not have a pseudonym preference, you will be assigned a pseudonym of your choosing. Transcripts will be stripped of all personally identifiable information, and the participant's name will be replaced with a pseudonym.
- The principal investigator will be conducting the interview in a private setting so that others cannot hear the conversation.
- Participants can keep cameras off and are encouraged to participate in a private space.
- The transcripts of your interview(s) will be stored within the principal investigator's password-protected computer and hard copies will be stored in a locked file cabinet only the researcher can access.
- At the earliest opportunity during the project, with the exception of the master list and the audio/video recordings, all other study data will be retained for a minimum of 3 years after completion of the study.

## **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT**

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

## **WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?**

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

## Appendix G

### GUIDANCE COUNSELORS SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONS

#### Introductory Script

Hello Counselor, the following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality. I will review the Participation Sheet with you, and ask for permission to record the interview. I will ask you if you have any questions or concerns after going over the content of the Participant Information Sheet. Email addresses and phone numbers will be collected as identifiers. Emails, phone numbers and pseudonyms will be stored in a master list. The master list be stored securely and separately from the study data. I will destroy the master list after member checking has been completed. Only I will have access to the study data. This interview is anticipated to be 45-60 minutes in length. You also have the right to withdraw your participation at any time throughout the study. The questions that will be asked in this interview are to get a better insight of the following research questions: RQ1: What are the perceptions of secondary education guidance counselors from low socioeconomic urban school districts regarding the SAT? RQ2: How does a sample of secondary education guidance counselors describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for low socioeconomic students?

#### Questions

Do you have a preferred pseudonym? If you do not have a preference, the I will randomly assign you a pseudonym.

#### Background Questions

How long have you been a guidance counselor?

How long have you been in your current role?

If you have served in another district aside from this current one, was it in a low socioeconomic community?

For the purpose of this study, low socioeconomic communities consist of residents that are low income. The Department of Education defines low-income individuals as “ An individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount” (US Department of Education, 2022, para. 2).

#### Topic questions.

From your experience, how do you view the importance of the SAT standardized test?

- From your experience, how is the SAT structured?
  - Timed sessions-From your experience, do you think the SAT should be timed?
  - From your experience, should availability dates and times be increased or decreased? Why?
- From your experience, how do you view the subject material?

- From your experience, are subjects relevant to the curriculum of provided to your students ?

### ***Sub-Questions***

For the purpose of this study college readiness is defined as “A process that allows young adults to engage in conversations and activities that allow them to gain more knowledge about themselves and their post-secondary paths” (Gilfillan et al., 2020, p. 3).

- How much of your time is spent supporting college selection or applications by your students?
- From your experience, is this an adequate amount of time?
- How many hours are spent on SAT Prep?
  - What is your involvement in this process?
  - What are the preparatory materials used?
- How much time is spent on workshops and college visits?
- From your perspective, how do your students perceive the SAT?
- From your perspective, do your students understand its purpose?

What are your perceptions about the level of priority given to college counseling?

- What is your perspective about the amount of support from your district for college counseling?
- What is your perspective about the amount of support from parents for students?
  - Are students encouraged to speak with counselors?

What are your perspective about assistance provided by the school with seeking financial support regarding the SAT?

- Is there support for students with the SAT fee waiver (score sending)?
- Is there support for students with transportation to SAT sites?
  - In your role, do you support assistance regarding transportation?
  - What is your perspective of this transportation support in your role?
  - What is your perspective of your district’s support (for what - unclear)?

What are your perspective about student confidence about speaking to a counselor about going to college?

What are your perspective about whether parents speak to a counselor about college admission requirements?

What are your perspective about whether parents speak to their children about college admission?

### **Topic Question**

How would you describe barriers and challenges in the college admission process regarding the SAT for low socioeconomic students?

***Sub-Questions***

Based on your interactions with students, can you please elaborate on common barriers (again, needs to be specific – barriers to college, the SAT) from your lived experience that have or currently affect your students?

What is your perspective on school resources for students?

- What is your perspective on tutors for SAT prep?
- What is your perspective on after school programs focused on SAT prep?

What is your perspective on the school day and curriculum?

- How does the curriculum align with the SAT testing material?
- What is your perspective on how your school curriculum prepares students for the SAT material?
- Does the curriculum affect the academic proficiency of your students compared to other districts?

What is your perspective on students outside school day responsibilities?

Do these responsibilities influence academic performance?

**Closing Questions**

Are there any additional comments you would like to share about your perspective regarding the SAT and students of low socioeconomic status?

Do you recommend the continuation of the SAT for all students?