AN EARLY/MIDDLE COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL CASE STUDY:
HOW GRADUATES PERCEIVE THEIR EXPERIENCES AS CONTRIBUTING
TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS

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ABSTRACT

Although more students than ever are enrolling in postsecondary institutions, students of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds do not enroll because they lack information about the college-going process. Early college and middle college high school models have gained momentum throughout the United States as a way of improving access to postsecondary education for minority and other underrepresented groups. A core principle of early/middle college high schools is to ensure curriculum rigor coupled with academic and social support from faculty members. This combination of rigor and support sets the stage for high achievement and college readiness. The aim of this qualitative instrumental case study was to investigate the perceptions of early/middle college graduates from Belles Early/Middle College High School (pseudonym) in the Piedmont School District (pseudonym) of North Carolina. The study investigated the lived experiences of these graduates and the perceived influence the experience had on their academic success and college preparedness. This study focused on the practices embedded within the structure of Belles Early/Middle College to increase student academic achievement, college preparation, and college-going behavior. Data were collected using a focus group, student interviews, participants’ questionnaires, and college transcripts. After analyzing the data, three main themes emerged: (a) strong, positive interpersonal relationships among students and adults are the social support systems that exist within the structure of Belles Early/Middle College High School, (b) sharing college information and resource are the college-going behavioral strategies existing within the structure of Belles Early/Middle College High School, and (c) Belles Early/Middle College High School prepares its students for college and eases their transition into postsecondary institutions by providing access to college courses while in high school. This study has valuable implications for educators who are considering early
college and middle college high schools as a way to increase the academic preparation and college access of its underserved populations.