

# Fast Break?: A Case Study of Basketball Recruits to Boarding Schools

by

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this case study is to understand the experience of basketball recruits in their transition from Middle Schools to private boarding schools. I seek to understand which factors lead to a successful transition or dropping out. To better understand this case study, I explore the influences of student athletics, engagement and attachment, private school structure, out-of-school-time, and the black-white achievement gap. I also consider sociological theories of cultural, social, and financial capital and stereotype threat and prejudices. To better understand the experience of basketball recruits, I looked specifically at New Heights Youth, Inc., an out-of-school-time program located in New York City, who provides tutoring, basketball training, and placement into private schools. I interviewed 13 out of their 40 students who attended boarding school. This study had the following major findings: first, the student's prior school preparedness negatively impacted their adjustment to the challenging academics. The private school structure seemed to narrow this gap by providing extra services. Second, I also find a strong influence of social and cultural capital. Lastly, my findings show that financial capital and stereotype threat had little influence on the student's adjustment and achievement.

## Introduction

I first came into contact with New Heights Youth at their 2009 Summer Academy. New Heights Youth, Inc. is a New York City based program that targets “talented young athletes from failing schools and economically disadvantaged backgrounds that aspire to use the sport of basketball as a tool to access educational opportunities.”<sup>1</sup> I was doing research on out-of-school-time (OST) programs with the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education at NYU. It was through this study that I had the opportunity to observe and get to know New Heights Youth. I was able to attend a day of their Summer Academy program where I sat in on classes, the High-School Assist programs, and team practices. Through a partnership, the summer program takes place at Riverdale Country School, a private school on a beautiful suburban campus with well-manicured lawns. During the year, the high school tuition cost at Riverdale is \$36,900,<sup>2</sup> but for New Heights Youth’s Summer Academy participants tuition and transportation are free of charge.

While observing practice that day I spoke to Lauren, the Summer Academy program director. Lauren established the relationship between New Heights Youth and Riverdale Country School in 2007, while working in the school’s office during the school year. As we were sitting on the sidelines, I asked Lauren to describe some of the difficulties she faced as a staff member

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<sup>1</sup> [www.newheightsnyc.org](http://www.newheightsnyc.org). Accessed March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Riverdale Country School website. [www.Riverdale.edu](http://www.Riverdale.edu). Accessed February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

of New Heights. She responded by pointing to a boy named Jonathan<sup>3</sup> playing on the court. Jonathan had already caught my attention in the game because he seemed to be a team leader and one of the most talented young players; while we watched him play, Lauren explained his story.

New Heights staff had worked hard with Jonathan. He lived in Central Brooklyn, over an hour-long journey away by subway to Riverdale Country School and the New Heights' Harlem offices. He joined the program in sixth grade; the next year, when he was in seventh grade, New Heights helped him fill out his forms, meet with the admissions office and a basketball coach and successfully attain admissions to Riverdale starting in eighth grade. During his first year at Riverdale, Jonathan had an excellent basketball season – as one of the top scorers for the team – and was doing well by keeping up with the new and challenging academics. In his last month of the school year, however, he was brought to the discipline committee for allegedly stealing money from a classmate. The committee decided to suspend Jonathan for the rest of the school year and have him petition to be re-admitted over the summer. Lauren explained the disappointment and conflict she felt with his actions and how nervous she was about what would happen next.

This was not the first time New Heights Youth (NHY) staff had dealt with this kind of problem. Their retention rate within New Heights was

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis I use pseudonyms to protect confidentiality of my interview participants.

admirable for a small program, but their rates of dropouts from private and prep schools was troubling, around 20% of students left their private school placement. Many times the students were not being punished, as in Jonathan's case, but instead decided to leave the school entirely because they were unhappy with the school's social environment or basketball program. Some of the students left the school after a couple of months, while others lasted a year, but almost all of them stayed involved with basketball and specifically the New Heights program.

I was later able to interview Jonathan about his difficulties at Riverdale and the discipline committee's decision. He spoke about the meeting that New Heights staff attended with him because his mother couldn't make the long commute from Central Brooklyn to Riverdale between her two jobs. Although he never said whether or not he had stolen the money, he did talk about the wealth that his peers had access to and the differences in their daily lives compared to his. He spoke about how much he appreciated the help of New Heights staff as they continued to work with him over the summer to try and return to the school in the fall. Jonathan also talked about how hard it was to keep his mom enthusiastic about his goals of getting back into Riverdale, because she did not whole-heartedly support his decision to commute and put all the extra stress on himself. He explained that she was happy that he was doing so well in school and at basketball, but did not feel he needed to go so far away to accomplish these goals. She was also unhappy

with the amount of paperwork and petitioning required from her and New Heights to get him back into the school. All of her complaints and misgivings about the school were clearly putting pressure and stress on Jonathan's decision to return.

After hearing Jonathan's story, I started to see similarities with my own experience and other work I had done with New York City organizations. I remembered a student I had worked with summers before at KIPP Academy in Bronx, NY who excelled in academics but was not able to keep her grades up at boarding school. I thought of my own tough transition from public high school to a small private college. Based on some of the realizations I made during my freshman year at Wesleyan, I tried to understand what these students were going through. It appeared to me that the issues with transition to a private or independent school were large and complex and filled with a variety of factors and influences. Was it the large amount of wealth from which the majority of the student body came from? Was it the cultural references in the classroom? Did it help to be involved in extra-curricular activities? Did it matter which ones? For this project I wanted to better understand these influences and what makes a transition successful or not. I also wanted to explore the ways in which programs, such as New Heights, or schools, such as Riverdale, could influence the transition process or secure a successful transition for all their students.



### *Research Question*

The purpose of this study is to discover possible patterns of a successful transition and career at boarding school for New Heights participants. More broadly speaking, this study seeks to understand what makes a recruited athlete successful at a prep school and to determine some of the larger societal factors that influence the path toward successful completion of high school for low-income, high-potential youth. I also want to explore how organizations, like New Heights, could impact or possibly help the transitions.

I specifically choose to work with New Heights because I saw it as a great opportunity to learn about the larger social issues affecting programs of its type. I was curious whether New Heights was a potential solution to the achievement gap. Their vision for closing the achievement gap involves providing social capital, through their coaches and staff, to help students gain admission to top prep and private schools, while putting them on a path to higher education. In choosing New Heights, I understood that they had a small participant pool, but I hoped that the information and data that I collected would be applicable to most high-potential youth programs that place their students in prep and boarding schools.

I was also drawn to study New Heights because of specific perks that my paper could potentially identify as key components of a successful transition. When new students enroll in the New Heights program they

dedicate themselves to both aspects of the program: as athletes, they join a small basketball team that develops their skills as players with good sportsmanship conduct, and as students, they participate in after-school required tutoring and the Summer Academy. Both of these programs continue throughout high school. New Heights staff has high expectations for their student-athletes, shown through their dedication to helping them gain admission to top high schools and colleges. My paper has the potential to find that these two special aspects of New Heights, social capital and high expectations, could be two of the key factors in diminishing the achievement gap, both in the public school system but also in other out-of-school-time programs.

New Heights, with the hook of basketball, also offered the opportunity to explore the benefits of having an immediate attachment to a school activity and/or the researched benefits of sports in youth development. I also saw this case study as potential to find out what happens when students use basketball as a means or leverage point to gain academic and social capital. New Heights' specific approach to stopping the commoditization of athletes, not by ending the recruitment process, but by making sure the students have the opportunity to gain all that is available at the respective school they are recruited to, helps translate basketball skills into social, cultural and institutional capital.

Finally, I saw this study as an opportunity to explore the possibility of

athletic social capital traded for Bourdieu's theory of institutional capital, which has not been previously studied.

*New Heights Youth, Inc.*

Before going further into my research questions, I will provide background on the range of activities that New Heights offers. New Heights Youth, Inc was started in 2001 by Nick Blatchford as a program through the Children's Aid Society. The program's goal was to respond to the "glaring inequities in education opportunity available to inner-city students" and to stop the exploitation of student-athletes for "their athletic talent at the expense of their academic, social and character development." At the time, Blatchford was a public school teacher and basketball coach who had seen the inequities of the public school system and the exploitation of top inner-city athletes and wanted things to change. In 2005, New Heights became its own independent, non-profit organization.<sup>4</sup>

New Heights serves talented athletes from "failing schools and economically disadvantaged backgrounds." Instead of allowing their athletic talent be exploited in the New York City basketball scene, New Heights uses basketball as a tool for young people to gain greater access to educational opportunities that develop them as a student-athlete in all capacities.

Currently, New Heights serves over 200 student-athletes, aged 10-18. The New Heights program is 70% male and 30% female. 80% of the players will

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<sup>4</sup> New Heights Youth Website. [www.newheightsnyc.org/history](http://www.newheightsnyc.org/history). November 11, 2009.

be first generation college graduates. 71% are African American, 18% are Latino, and 11% are White or other. 75% of the students New Heights serves live in Washington Heights, Harlem, Bronx, or Central Brooklyn.<sup>5</sup>

To combat the large social issues facing their student-athletes, New Heights uses the experience of basketball to engage students and help them develop academic, character, and social skills. The program has five major components: Basketball Program, Academic Resource Center, High School Assist, College Assist, and Summer Academy. The first is the basketball program, which is the primary hook and engagement tool for the participants. New Heights has two aspects to its basketball program, the first of which is the Saturday Skills development program. This program runs for 20 Saturdays and allows players aged 8-12, to learn basketball fundamentals and life skills for the first 10 weeks and then the second 10 weeks are used for organized league play. This program is open enrollment and serves around 1,000 kids annually.

The second aspect to the basketball program is the Travel Club Basketball Program. These travel teams are for both boys and girls aged 10-17. These teams compete within local, regional and national tournaments and allow the players to gain access and exposure to various high school and college environments. They also provide fun opportunities to travel, meet

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<sup>5</sup> New Heights Youth Program Model. [www.newheightsnyc.org/program-model](http://www.newheightsnyc.org/program-model). November 11, 2009.

new people and experience new places. This program is year round and coincides with the High School Assist and College Assist programs.

The High School Assist program provides assistance and resources to the student-athletes and their families so they can gain acceptance, matriculate and succeed in a college preparatory high school. The resources are provided all year long through the New Heights office and include academic instruction, life skills development, homework help/ tutoring, exposure and test preparation for sixth through eighth graders. For the families, New Heights offers assistance in the application process: conducting and organizing school visits, financial aid workshops, and individual and family counseling for support in the application and selection process. The staff keeps up on each individual student-athlete through report card collection and individual meetings, sometimes two to three times a week during their eighth grade year.

College Assist is similar in structure and support. New Heights again helps the family with school visits, financial aid workshops and provides individual help with the application, the recruitment and NCAA eligibility standards, and the selection process. Throughout high school New Heights offers academic support through collection of report cards, tutoring, SAT and ACT exam prep, and monitoring course selection.

The Summer Academy, which is what I observed during my summer research, is a “five week, comprehensive academic, athletic and leadership

development program for middle school student-athletes.”<sup>6</sup> Through the above-mentioned partnership, the Summer Academy takes place on the Riverdale Country School campus. The 50 student-athletes who attend the Summer Academy attend academic classes on test prep, math, and reading to bridge the learning gap that occurs over the summer months. Student-athletes also develop their character and habits through the classes offered on social issues, eating habits and healthy lifestyles. The students also cultivate leadership, communication, and basketball skills through the afternoon activities and basketball practices. There is also a class that addresses test prep, school choices and the high school application process, getting students ready for the High School Assist Program.

The success of New Heights programming is apparent through its numbers. Since its launch in 2001, 118 New Heights graduates have matriculated to colleges throughout the US (98% success rate) and currently 206 New Heights student-athletes attend college preparatory high schools. For the purpose of this study I will be focusing on the success of students who have come through the High School Assist program and have been placed in boarding schools.

### *Thesis Outline*

In order to better understand the larger social issues that impact New Heights students, I will explore the black-white achievement gap and the loss

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<sup>6</sup> New Heights Youth Program Model. [www.newheightsnyc.org/program-model](http://www.newheightsnyc.org/program-model). November 11, 2009.

of educational gain over the summer (“summer slide”) in Chapter 1. The achievement gap during the school year and the summer slide both create a need for organizations like New Heights to offer out of school time programming for their participants.

While there are a variety of out of school time programs in New York City, only some of them recruit and encourage high-potential minority youth to apply to predominantly white independent/ private institutions. It is important to understand why organizations such as New Heights take this “elite schools” approach, and in order to do so, I will explore the culture and tradition of private and prep institutions. To further elucidate the basics of the transition and the students’ position, I will spend time in Chapter 1 exploring the explicit differences between the capital found in the private and prep schools and that found in their schools of origin.

Although each New Heights student is going through a unique transition to a private/ boarding school, it is vital to understand the importance of educational transitions in general. A lot of a students’ success at the private school depends on their initial transitions and their ability to acclimate to the school culture and feel a sense of belonging, which is described in Chapter 1 as the benefits of attachment. When the social and academic transition goes smoothly, the student is able to perform better academically, athletically and be a happier student. Engagement with activities and school culture is important for each student’s overall success

and this attachment is explored in Chapter 1.

There are numerous other programs that place their best and brightest students in private/ independent institutions but very few focus on sports, or even more specifically basketball. Can this specific hook of New Heights Youth help their players make a smooth transition? In Chapter 1, I explore the possible benefits and negative influences on success and transition of being a student-athlete.

The larger social issues outlined in Chapter 1 systematically explain the individual student's experience. In order to understand the specific transition and success of the New Heights players, it is important to understand sociological theories and relate them to the transition, to see what the New Heights participants go through. In Chapter 2, I discuss the various general theories that can help to understand the individual experience of New Heights students. I argue that capital deficiencies such as financial, human and cultural capital could impact the New Heights students' ability to adjust. I also discuss the various social networks that surround these students. Both adults and peers from their neighborhood, New Heights and private school influence them. All these social networks play unique roles and will be discussed in Chapter 2. I also look at the impact of stereotype threat as a possible negative influence on the transition and subsequent success at school.

In Chapter 3, I discuss my research methods. I discuss my choice to



conduct open-ended interviews versus other options, such as a survey or longer ethnography. I also share my choice of interview questions, describe my path from the theory to the development of my interview questions throughout my interview script and discuss the potential biases and limitations of my study and what could be changed for future study. In Chapter 4, I report my results and discuss both the positive and negative aspects that influence the transition and success of the New Heights students.

## Chapter 1: Larger Societal Issues

### *Black-White Achievement Gap*

Over fifty-five years ago the United States government declared that it was unconstitutional for blacks and whites to attend segregated schools because it denied them equal educational opportunities. In 1998, Jencks and Phillips wrote,

African Americans currently score lower than European Americans on vocabulary, reading, and mathematics tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence...the typical American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests (Jencks and Phillips, 1998:1).

This gap is still persistent today as seen in *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress*, where Magnuson and Waldfogel report black teenagers score 10% less than their white peers on both reading and math scores, recorded by the National Assessment of Educational Progress Long-Term Trend data (NAEP-LTT). American youth are still segregated by the achievement gap and the education opportunities afforded to them. The achievement gap can be influenced by economic and social inequalities, such as a student's environment, family structure, the social pressures of adolescence, under-resourced schools, biases within schools and testing methods (Jencks and Phillips 1998; Magnuson and Waldfogel, 2008).

Jencks and Phillips (1998) noted that there were three "traditional"

explanations for the test score gap: “culture of poverty, two-parent Black families, and genes” (Jencks and Phillips, 1998: 15). The explanations were later found false by Jencks and Philips because the culture of poverty did not explain the trends in the black-white achievement gap among black students from wealthy backgrounds. The explanation of two-parent black families (when controlled for) did not hold any statistical evidence relevant to the achievement gap. Although genes could be a determining factor in academic success within racial groups, Jencks and Philips found that there was no evidence and/or proof that these genes differentiate between races (Jencks and Phillips, 1998).

In contrast, contemporary researchers argue that economic and social inequality, social and peer pressures, schooling inequalities, family structure and testing biases are main causes of the black-white achievement gap. In the following paragraphs, I will outline the more contemporary theories and their implications for students.

Students’ access to economic means has a large impact on their level of achievement in school. Poverty is correlated to race in the United States, “Nearly one out of two African American children is poor... African American children are five times as likely as white children to be dependent on welfare... and twice as likely to live in substandard housing.” (Landson-Billings, 1994:2) Students with low socio-economic status (SES) have less access to academic resources, such as computers or study aids in their home

and neighborhoods, because they are often expensive items that their parents may not see value or use in, often times because of their own level academic completion. The SES of a student's family could also increase pressure on the student to get an after school job, or add stress about the financial situation of their family. Magnuson and Waldorf cite the difficulties students have in performing well in school when they have to worry about issues of access to quality health care. These socio-economic stresses and problems have only worsened in the recent past. Income inequality has increased because the bottom ten percent of the wage spectrum has seen a decrease in their wages, due to companies outsourcing to the international workforce, and an increase in the wages of the top ten percent, as the need for highly skilled workers has increased. These situations have been exacerbated by the current economic crisis, which has drastically affected the unemployment rate in the United States and specifically in low-income urban environments (Magnuson and Waldorf, 2008).

The SES of students can influence their achievement opportunities not just on an individual basis, but also because their SES affects their school choice (or lack there of) and the resources the school can access. The way resources are divided by the government perpetuates existing inequalities among schools because it is based on the structure of our tax system. The amount of government funding a school receives is based on property taxes of the surrounding area and local industries. Therefore "the property tax is

the decisive force in shaping inequality.” (Kozol, 1991:54) Black students are disproportionately enrolled in under-resourced, poorly performing schools (Rothstein, 2004). When schools lack resources and strong sources of funding, it is hard to attract top teachers and administrators. Therefore the students have a lower level of teacher quality. The teachers who do decide to stay in the school are severely limited by the lack of resources they have available for their lessons and classrooms. (Jencks and Philips, 1998)

Even within racially diverse schools there are still black-white opportunity gaps. Schools that are racially mixed tend to have tracking systems, which are “the practice of assigning students to instructional groups on the basis of ability.” (Hallinan, 2007:313) On standardized measures of achievement, black students score below white students in all core academic areas including science, mathematics, reading and writing (O. Fashola & Cooper, 1999). This may be because black males are severely underrepresented in the most rigorous academic programs including gifted programs, honors courses, and Advanced Placement courses while being vastly overrepresented in remedial academic tracks (Noguera, 2008).

According to some studies, the lower tracks have the lowest quality teachers and fewer resources. There is also a clear correlation between SES and tracking since minorities tend to be placed in lower tracks, thereby reinforcing the academic stereotypes that black students and Latinos are less capable (Hallinan & Oakes, 2009). There are numerous reasons why tracking

takes place without contention. One involves low expectations of students by their teachers and the low test scores of the students from previous grades. “It has been documented that teachers expect less of lower-class children than they do of middle-class children” (Rist, 2007:76). Another is the lack of parental pressure on the school for their students to be on a higher track (Jencks and Philips, 1998). Parents can have a large influence on a school’s decision for tracking or where their student is placed, but that is only able to happen if the parent feels comfortable approaching school administration and officials. A parent’s ability to speak and pressure the school to believe in their child’s ability to be in higher tracks can greatly influence the opportunities their child attains (Noguera, 2008). Unfortunately this influential power most often is possessed by parents of wealthier students who exercise their “considerable political capital on behalf of their children [while] lower SES and minority students tend to have families who are precluded from such political maneuvering by their ignorance of schools’ frequent acquiescence to parental pressure or by their timidity about exercising such pressure” (Hallinan & Oakes, 2007; 321). This tracking phenomenon is again mentioned by Magnuson and Waldfogel in *Steady Gains and Stalled Progress* (2008) when they prove that racially diverse schools yield decreased test scores for blacks along with increased test scores for whites, showing that the tracks have even more impact in racially diverse schools.

Another possible explanation for the black-white achievement gap is

our education system's heavy reliance on the scaffolding method of teaching, which is when a teacher builds off of what should be previously acquired knowledge. When students enter a new grade level, they are expected to build on the lessons and concepts taught in previous years. With this style of teaching, students who do well in previous years continue to do well and those who suffer early on have a hard time catching up to their peers. Although the scaffolding practice seems practical, to build on previous knowledge as the student gets older, it also explains how the achievement gap can grow exponentially as a child gets older. Research done in elementary schools finds large gaps in achievement when the students enter school (Fryer and Levitt 2004; Jencks and Philips, 1998; Magnuson and Waldorf, 2008). The research shows that the gap begins very early and once schools start to use the scaffolding method, the gap widens with age. Policy makers have focused on how to equalize the gap with programs like Head Start, to try and give students from low SES background an equal opportunity at a young age (Jencks and Philips, 1998).

Not only are poor school structures and tracking methods sustaining the black-white opportunity gap, but biases inside the classroom also make each individual class another struggle for black students. Teachers' expectations of black students are considerably lower than those of white students (Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Jencks and Philips, 1998; Noguera, 2008; Rist, 2007). Jencks and Philips (1998) also claim that teachers'

expectations actually impact black students more. Rist (2007) explains how labeling and low-expectations can have a strong impact because “*over time*, the consequences of having a certain evaluative tag influence the options available to a student within a school” (Rist, 2007; 71). These expectations not only become reflected in the students’ academics but also in their behavioral patterns. Out of all the demographic groups in American schools, black males have the most behavioral problems by having the highest rates of detentions, suspensions, and expulsions (Noguera, 2008).

These biases and influences do not solely come from teachers; black students in American schools feel pressure from their peers to construct their identity and this also affects the achievement gap. Magnusson and Waldford (2008) point to the psychological effects of the achievement gap when they argue that students compare themselves to people of higher economic status and this creates low self-esteem, which could be another explanation for the growing disparities. In *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Jencks and Philips (1998) argue that the competitive nature of schooling and the feeling of inferiority make black students reluctant to attempt to succeed in the classroom. Again Noguera (2008) reinforces this point when he talks about the influences of society’s stereotypes on the black student population. Most famous blacks are known for their music or athletic talent. Black students have confidence that they can succeed in those areas, but are not confident in their ability to succeed in the classroom (Noguera, 2008).



### *Summer Slide/ Out of School Time and the Achievement Gap*

A substantial contributor to the achievement gap between low-income, minority students and their more affluent peers is a phenomenon referred to as the “summer slide,” the loss of learning that occurs over the summer. The degree of learning loss for each student varies depending upon a variety of factors, such as grade level, subject/ skill area, and socioeconomic status. Though nearly all students experience some degree of learning loss over the summer, the summer slide disproportionately affects students of low socioeconomic status (Borman & Boulay, 2004; Martin et al., TBA). A number of studies have concluded that the accumulation of learning loss that occurs for low-SES students summer after summer is a key contributor to the academic achievement gap (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Burkam, Ready, Lee, & LoGerfo, 2004; Downey, Paul T. von Hippel, & Broh, 2004, Martin et al., TBA).

In their 2007 study, Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson studied the relationship between early summer learning losses and later schooling outcomes. They used data from the Baltimore-based Beginning School Study, which uses statistics on public elementary school students from 20 schools across Baltimore. The study concluded that there were large learning losses for students from low-SES and the losses accumulated over the four summers of elementary school. The gap that they identify between low-SES and high-

SES students in the sample predicts the severe differences in later schooling outcomes. 62% of the high-SES students in their sample were enrolled in a college prep program in high school versus 13% of low-SES students. Over a third of the low-SES students were high school dropouts versus only 3% of high-SES students. Lastly, 60% of high-SES students attended college before the age of 22 versus only 7% of the low-SES group (Alexander et al., 2007; Martin et al., TBA). Studies such as this one highlight the importance of out of school time with regard to the achievement gap between low-SES and high-SES students. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson conclude, "Since it is low SES youth specifically whose out-of-school time learning lags behind, this summer shortfall relative to better-off children contributes to the perpetuation of family advantage and disadvantage across generations." (Alexander et al., 2007, 175).

Because of the difference in outcomes, out of school time has been viewed as both "risk and opportunity" (Halpern, 2002, p.1). The possible risks associated with out of school time range from learning loss to boredom to socially destructive behavior. On the other hand, out of school time could be filled with opportunities to build relationships with positive adult figures, academic/ curricular enrichment, and structured time for child development. The beginning of out-of-school-time programs came when the need for child labor diminished and compulsory education was rising due to education laws. To keep kids entertained and out of trouble during this extra time,

adults realized the need for OST programming that would provide alternate activities to street culture thus preventing loitering and crime (Halpern, 2002, Martin et al., TBA).

Throughout the years, the goals and emphases of OST programs have included the care and protection of children, child development, structured playtime, vocational preparation, and academic/ curricular enrichment (Halpern, 2002, Martin et al., TBA). Currently the range of OST programs continue to serve these function and many more. Still, research has suggested that there are a number of benefits for black students who participate in some form of OST programming. Documented benefits include improved performance in core subjects, decreased behavior referrals, increased attendance, (McPartland & Nettles, 1991, Martin et al., TBA) improved classroom participation, higher rates of college attendance, decreases in high-risk behaviors, and increased self-esteem and cultural pride (Woodland, 2008, Martin et al., TBA).

#### *Private Schools*

The origins of the American prep/ boarding school come from Great Britain, where wealthy English and Scottish American families sought exclusive educational communities where they could pass down elite power and privilege. The schools were composed of mostly upper-class families, with limited middle class enrollment or access to the elite education (Cookson and Persell, 1991).

Even with the enrollment of middle class families, there was very little access for minorities, especially Jewish and black families. In the early 1960s A Better Chance was started; the Rockefeller Foundation and Dartmouth College initially funded it with the goal of selecting talented minority children and helping them gain acceptance and scholarships to elite boarding schools. The prep schools that the students gained admissions to had never previously opened their gates to these students and their families. The program was successful at helping the cohort of students enroll in prep schools but at that time, as is true today, black students made up a much smaller percentage of the enrollment in prep schools than they did at public schools throughout the country. And the private prep schools are still predominantly filled with children of white, upper-class families (Cookson and Persell, 1991).

Gaining admission to a prep school is not always the hardest part of a student's journey. Once enrolled in a prep school, black students go through numerous "rites of passage" to become part of the prep school community. As Cookson and Persell argue, they first have to distance themselves from their home life, family and friends because they are put in a new location and are now accepted into this new school life. Because prep schools tend to be such small and exclusive communities and their student body studies, eats, plays and lives together, Cookson and Persell argue the prep school community makes a special effort to include and integrate its black student

population. Students within the community are encouraged to work together to further their communal goal of a good education, and the hope is that this sentiment overrides any possible divisiveness within the student body (Cookson and Persell, 1991).

The hard “act” that, according to Cookson and Persell, black prep school students have to perform means that, although they are close to an elite minority, they are not completely immersed because of racism. Similarly, although they are close to being integrated in an upper-class society, their lack of personal wealth prevents them from being fully in it. These differences influence the students’ “act,” to pretend as if they are in both of those positions. This is why Cookson and Persell coined black students at prep schools, “outsiders within.”

In short, the prep school “rite of passage” for African American students can be an arduous journey with a number of potential pitfalls, contradictory road signs, and possible wrong directions. (220)

Although their act may continue throughout the prep school experience and they may never feel as comfortable in the environment as their white counterparts, the experience does have the potential to elevate them because they have an increased chance of getting into an elite college and their connections in the upper-class world can help them secure better paying jobs. To many of the black students, access to these privileges after their hard work in prep school is the epitome of the “American Dream,” but as Cookson and

Persell argue, their white, upper-class classmates were born with access straight to the top of that dream.

### *Drop Outs*

Every day, throughout the United States, 7,000 students drop out of school for various reasons. Of the students who enroll in high school in ninth grade, only 53% of black students and 58% of Hispanic students will graduate in four years with a regular diploma. These statistics are jarring compared to the 80% of Asian students and 76% of white students who will graduate in four years with a regular diploma. Graduation rates are lower amongst low-income families and students on free and reduced lunch options (EPE, 2007). The statistics mentioned previously apply mostly to the dropout rate in the nation's public schools. These statistics are not representative of private and prep schools, but the research on why the students choose to drop out of high school correlate to problems New Heights Youth members face.

Most research done on high school dropouts seeks to understand the problems of the individual and why he or she can't perform well in school. Oftentimes, schools are seen as effective for the majority of the students and therefore the individual who is unable to adjust is viewed as flawed. This research has produced patterns highlighting the personal, family, and social characteristics of a dropout. Although students' grades, success at school, and tracking do influence their commitment to school and usually relate to their choice of dropping out, there are other important influences. There are

personal student issues such as depression, family problems, and lower levels of self-esteem that influence a student's choice to drop out. There are the interactions with the school that may lead one to drop out or be unhappy with his or her school. Research has also focused on school problems such as tracking, over-crowded classrooms, mislabeling and high expulsion/behavioral problems (Weis et al., 1989).

#### *Student Problems*

Student problems, such as grades, do have an influence on a student's choice to drop out, although a student's grade is usually reflective of the other influences. Problems at home such as depression, lack of support, or familial trouble can easily distract students. These problems are hard to recover from and if the student or family is not able to approach the school, many times the problems can go unnoticed or treated until the student has hurt their academic record. These issues can also result in the student being labeled as "hard to deal with" or "a child that misbehaves or slacks off," labels which can persist for the rest of his or her school career (Weis et al., 1989).

#### *Student/ School Interactions*

An important determinate of whether or not a student will drop out involves their interactions with the school and the relationship between the school setting and the individual. The interaction of a school and student can come in various forms and affect each individual differently. The following

adjustments will be discussed in this section: the workload of high school, academic engagement, the social culture of the school, the ability of a student to find their place and their ability to relate to the subject matter. These topics can be further discussed through the positive example of Coleman and Hoffer's study (1989) on Catholic schools and their success at keeping low SES students enrolled.

The adjustment process from middle to high school is a big change that can overwhelm and stress students, creating a bad transition, which is hard to overcome. When a student enters high school what is expected of them changes. They are now the youngest students in a more mature environment where teachers expect them to have greater responsibility for their schoolwork and behavioral actions. High school students also have more control of their academic choices and decisions, which adds to their responsibilities. At the same time that the responsibilities are increasing, the level of difficulty in the classroom increases as well. High school classes are often structured to teach more in depth subjects and give harder assignments. These changes to the academic environment can impact students' grades and their self esteem about school which often remains within them throughout freshman year and beyond (Weis et al., 1989).

After the initial adjustment, it is important for the student to be academically engaged. Engagement in the subject matter and the work teachers assign pertaining to the subject matter is important. A student



should be invested in their schoolwork, have a desire to come to school, and see their effort benefit them in some way. Engagement in the material oftentimes leads to participation in the classroom, creating a cycle in which participation engages a student even more (Johnson et al., 2001). Students' engagement and participation often directly impacts their grades and success in the class. Wehlage has found that students with higher SES status are more engaged in their schoolwork. This engagement can stem from parental influences or culturally relevant educational material relating to middle and upper class values. (Wehlage, 1989) Coleman and Hoffer found that Catholic schools were able to engage their student body by maintaining three qualities in their instruction: a belief that the work is extrinsically rewarding, restraint from overly restricting the type of work they reward, or avoiding covering mass amounts of topics without much depth, which creates a superficial understanding and prevents the students from feeling like they grasped the knowledge (Coleman and Hoffer, 1989, Lois et al. 1989). The Catholic schools wanted to make sure that the curriculum was reflective and rewarding to the student body they were teaching.

Each individual student gains attachment to school if he or she can find a niche in the school's social culture through the activities that are offered. School activities also offer students the chance to meet others who have similar interests or values. When a student is looking for an after school activity or group (that is culturally relevant or identity driven), it is important

that the school has it or has a space to create it. If a school is not able to offer safe space or the opportunity for a variety of activities, they are limiting students' opportunity to express or relate to others within the school. A big factor in a student's attachment to the school is his or her ability to engage in activities and subgroups that are accessible and easy to participate in.

Ensuring that the school culture has the ability to accept and make a place for all students is a challenge, but critical to successful attachment.

In Coleman and Hoffer's Catholic school study (1989) they found that the students could be more attached because the families and the larger school community believed in the value consistency of the Catholic school tradition. This was helpful because the functional interaction between the school, the student, and the family was reinforced. The values and lessons idealized and learned at school are seen as beneficial when rewarded at home. This may not be possible for public schools, as they tend to be more diverse and have various values that are emphasized in the home, but if they give safe spaces where all of these values, traditions, and cultures can be heard, their student body will have stronger attachment to the school.

#### *School Effects*

Besides the interaction between the student and the school, there are parts of school that specifically influence a students' decision to drop out. Schools face problems such as teacher quality and class sizes. These two factors impact the effectiveness of teachers and the amount of individual

attention and interaction a student has with a teacher. When students feel that teachers care about them and have invested interest they have increased attachment to school, which plays out in their choice to stay enrolled. The relationship is reciprocal because when the student shows investment and engagement towards the teacher and the material, the teacher feels rewarded and is able to perform better. It is also important that the teacher is supported by the administration. If a teacher is able to get active help and support for institutional standards and individual attention from the administration, they are able to have more time to build positive relationships with their students (Lois et al., 1989).

Systems within the school have large impacts on students' performance. Tracking within schools can cause students to lose interest or attachment to the school if they are getting poorer performing teachers and reduced (or no) access to challenging and resourceful classes. Problems with tracking and the difficulties to catch up or change tracks were mentioned previously in the black-white achievement gap section of this chapter.

Over-crowded classrooms affect a teacher's ability to make important and personal relationships with the students. Over-crowded classrooms also impact the variety and amount of activities that could be accomplished in the classroom. In the Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) study, from 1989-1992 it was proven that African American students benefited greatly from reduced classroom size (Finn & Achilles, 1999).

Mislabeled and high expulsion rates are overemphasized and largely impact black students. When all other factors are held constant, high expulsion rates cause higher-than-average dropout rates (Lois et al., 1989). The potential negative impact of mislabeling was also discussed previously in the black-white achievement gap section, which shows how correlated the two issues of dropouts and black-white achievement really are.

Success for a student is more likely to happen at a school where the average achievement level is high, there are fewer dropouts, and the school sustains an emphasis on academic success. The opposite is true for students who attend schools with low average SES statuses. Studies have drawn connections between these schools and a lack of resources and a lower average of achievement with higher rates of dropouts and absenteeism (Bryk and Thum 1989; Lee and Bryk 1989; Johnson, Crosnoe and Elder 2001).

In conclusion, all of these factors- the students out of school life and emotional stress; the interactions between the school, the student and the larger community; and school structural issues- all greatly impact a student's decision to stay enrolled. It is important to keep all of these factors in mind when studying students' adjustments to new schools and their decisions to stay.

#### *Student-Athletes*

After looking at the research on why students drop out or leave a school, it is easier to understand how being a student-athlete can be beneficial

to a students' engagement and academic performance. Although there are many ways a student can be an athlete, in this section I refer to organized sports, which are activities that mostly take place during out-of-school time (therefore the results/ benefits relate to the earlier section on out of school time) and relate to school. These activities tend to be adult-supervised and organized. Students are able to find teachers who are dedicated to them, peers who have similar interests, and spaces in which they feel comfortable. Nonetheless, many factors- lack of access, lack of interest, and stereotypes against girls participating in sports- keep many children from participating in sports. This next section speaks to the larger benefits and drawbacks of being a student athlete.

Organized sports are known to have benefits on a students' academic achievement. Sports have positive influences on memory and concentration as well as positively affecting classroom behavior. These influences translate to positive performance in the classroom (Rosewater, 2009). Organized sports help students develop numerous habits that are beneficial to the classroom environment. Habits such as time management allow students to excel at homework completion. Students' attendance improves and the drop out rates decrease when they are dedicated to an organized team. These results are not comparable to students who participate in unstructured sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 2001; Mahoney, Lord, & Carryl, 2005; Mahoney & Stattin 2000; Rosewater, 2009).

The structure of a team and learning how to work with others helps a student's ability to be a team player and part of the community at school. These benefits can translate into fewer behavioral problems and distraction with peers. Organized sports create places where students learn the work ethic of practice and persistence. These learning processes translate into the classroom and help the student achieve higher goals. These qualities also help the student learn helpful skills such as goal setting, which lead to a feeling of greater possibility for achievement in the school setting (Weiss et. al., 2006). Further, the more engaged in an activity youth become, the more robust the impact on academic measures (Rosewater, 2009). Because of all these benefits, being involved in organized sports makes a student more likely to attend college and attain a better job with more responsibility and higher pay.

For a student to perform well academically they have to be engaged in the school setting (Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder, 2001). Organized sports give students a great opportunity to feel better connected to the school and engaged in the community. Sports give students the chance to build relationships to other students, staff and teachers, while also giving a sense of pride in representing the school in athletic competition. If the sports take place at or near the school it may also increase the familiarity and comfort with the school (Rosewater, 2009). The engagement the student feels is likely to make the student identify and feel more committed to their school and school values, which will help with attendance and various factors that lead

to student achievement (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003).

Students' engagement is also related to their sense of belonging within the peer and social environment at the school. Sports provide a space for students to meet other students who have a shared interest. The ability to find others who share interests creates opportunities for students to find their sense of place and identity within the school. Sports also define the other young people with whom the student spends their time. Connection to a group identity can improve a child's sense of belonging and build self-confidence by reducing the feeling of marginalization (Rosewater, 2009).

Sports that take place at school are most likely to be run by school employees, giving those students more intimate time with school personnel. It also gives them a chance at a more personal relationship with a teacher or staff personnel than is usually possible in the classroom or school setting. These relationships give students the opportunity to feel more comfortable in the school setting and therefore engage more in the school. Parents of students who participate in sports have higher expectations for their children and encourage participation and engagement (Rosewater, 2009).

Gender can play a positive role in a student's athletic identity but can also be a barrier to participation for many female student-athletes. Both boys and girls reap the academic achievement benefits of participation in organized sports. It has been reported that African American and Latina female athletes reported better grades in high school than African American

and Latina female non-athletes. Sports can contribute to a girls' identity and be a place where they break gender stereotypes, while male student-athletes fall into traditional gender roles (Miller et al., 2002, Rosewater, 2009). But the gender stereotypes that do exist keep many females from participating in sports. Several researchers have studied the positive impact that sports participation play on increased desire to attend college. Even with these positive results, female athletic programs are still much smaller in size to men's programs (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Feltz & Weiss, 1984; Melnick, Sabo, & Vanfossen, 1992; Miller et al., 2005; Perry-Burney & Takyi, 2002).

#### *Barriers to Participation in Sports*

The benefits of participating in athletics have the strongest effects on low-income and at-risk youth (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). Studies link participation to increased grades and test scores amongst black and Latino students (Rosewater, 2009). Even though these benefits are reported, there is still a lack of access for many communities of color and families with low socio-economic status. Moregan et al. (2003) argue that Latino children have a lack of access to safe outdoor playing areas and are therefore less physically active than white children.

Female students, specifically girls of color, face cultural barriers to participation in sports. They also face restraints from families who need them to get an after school job or to take care of younger siblings. Many families support their male children in the pursuit of sports while females get less



support and fewer opportunities (Kimm et al., 2002; Place, 2004).

In one study, researchers found that 75% of children from white middle-class families participated in organized sports or activities compared to 40% to 60% of low-income children of color (Simpkins et al., 2005). Not only do more affluent families participate in more organized and structured activities, but also they are overly represented in activities that rely on financial investments. Sports that require expensive equipment or lessons are predominantly played by children of wealthy background, while families of lower socio-economic status have limited opportunity and access to them (Bouffard et al., 2006; Simpkins et al., 2005).

#### *Negative Side of Athletics*

A study by Miller et al. (2005) has shown that a student's development of a "jock identity" can reverse the positive impact of sports on academic achievement. Female and African American adolescents who identified as "jocks" reported lower grades and more behavioral problems than the other student-athletes. These students participated in misconduct such as skipping school, cutting class; often resulting in disciplinary actions by teachers and administration (Miller et al. 2005).

R. Patrick Solomon (1989) argues that black athletes are sometimes a different version of a drop out, by removing themselves from the academic realm of school. He argues that although blacks are less likely to drop out when controlled for SES and grades, their non-academic sports culture limits

their academic engagement and success within the school. Instead of dropping out from school, because they have no attachment, these student athletes are focused on school sports therefore they stay enrolled but don't do well academically. The rewards of sports, both from the spectators and the school, push and encourage the student in sports and not in the classroom, furthering this stereotype and possible trend. All of these factors contribute to a negative performance in the school setting for some black athletes.

Solomon (1989) argues that this happens because of the socialization of black students into sports from surrounding social networks and current media. Pedro Noguera argues this point in *The Trouble with Black Boys* when he says that black males are overrepresented in the media for their athletic performance (2009). Black students' over representation in sports, Solomon (1989) argues, has a negative impact on black-white relations because it keeps schools racially divided in after school activities, as blacks are socialized and encouraged into sports such as basketball, and whites are more often encouraged to other more academic after-school activities such as the debate team or newspaper.

Solomon argues that black students need other co-curricular activities "that seem academic" (1989, 83). He also highlights a change in the exposure to mainstream culture and having the black community reward academic success. Instead, what often happens is highlighted in Solomon's example of Humberville Vocational students:

Black students at Humberville Vocational move beyond aspirations and actively strategize to make their dreams a reality. The way to acquire athletic scholarships to U.S. colleges, they argue, is to be scouted by agents who travel around the city's collegiate seeking out talented athletes. Since agents do not scout vocational (low-track) schools, the boys embark on an "underground railroad" to higher-track schools. (86)

These students get brought to a new school and when things do not go well athletically, they have no academics to fall back on. Solomon argues that in the long term this will connect the star athlete to unskilled, generalized laborer.

### *Conclusion*

The larger societal issues that are outlined in this chapter help to better understand the success of New Heights participants at their previous schools and the success and transition of New Heights members into private and prep schools. Contemporary arguments for the causes of the achievement gap, such as economic and social inequality, social and peer pressures, schooling inequalities, family structure and testing biases, are important to understand when studying the lives of the New Heights participants and the possible reasons for New Heights to exist. As discussed, "scaffolding methods," or the tendency of schools to build upon what should have been learned previously, can alter the experience and success of a New Heights participant because they may not be able to build on prior knowledge.

New Heights has a summer academy to prepare student-athletes but are they able to catch up before they go to private school or once they are at their new school? Do they need to? Being academically successful in the beginning can determine the rest of the students' success.

The "summer slide" and out-of-school time learning loss was explained in great detail in this chapter. The free time that a student has over the summer and after school can contribute greatly to the academic achievement gap, specifically for low-SES students. Can the New Heights Youth programming alter this expected learning loss for low-SES students? Does New Heights after school time programming equal the preparation of a middle-class student and give their participants an equal chance of success?

Elite middle and upper class families built prestigious private and prep schools on academic and social foundations that would prepare and equip their students for future success. With benefits such as smaller classes and high-quality teaching, do New Heights participants succeed in the same way their classmates do? Do they feel accepted as part of the "elite" community? Are the larger goals of a good education overriding the differences within the community, as Cookson and Persell predict?

The research on dropouts and student success lays a broad foundation to understand what New Heights students need in order to succeed at school. Individual personal problems, interactions with the school and the larger

school community, engagement and attachment issues, and more specifically school and classroom characteristics all relate to a students' ability to be successful in the academic environment. Which one of these factors, if any, plays into the happiness of New Heights members? Are they able to engage and feel attached to the school and the work? The benefits outlined in the student-athlete section may greatly impact a New Heights student's attachment at the school. Are these attachments positive? Or are the students removed academically and just being pressured into the student-athlete role? It was also discussed that female athletes are less likely to participate in sports and this is further illustrated by the lower number of female New Heights participants. How do these gender stereotypes impact the New Heights female athletes and their ability to adjust to the school? Is there less pressure on their basketball career, therefore more pressure on academics?

The literature and questions presented here provide a backdrop to the challenges and opportunities for the New Heights participants and their path to possible success, in both the transition and overall academics, at their new schools. The following chapter looks at theoretical influences on the transition for New Heights participants.

## Chapter 2: Transitioning Theories

Many of the influences from the previous chapter, such as the achievement gap and academic engagement for dropouts, are related to the ability of a student to succeed. This chapter attempts to find common themes that influence student performance and success. Although New Heights participants are able to gain admissions to the school of their choice, they are not always successful at the transition to the new school environment. Success can be defined by a student's ability to adjust to the new school's culture and academics by maintaining the school's academic and behavioral standards. What are the components to ensuring a student's successful transition to a school and what are some of the aspects of the transition that are hard for students? This chapter will explore transitional influences of financial, human and cultural capital and social capital/ networks such as peer influences, "acting white," labeling, and stereotype threat and how they could impact the individual New Heights student.

If we are better able to understand the students' adjustment, there may be actions that New Heights can take in making future transitions go more smoothly. These adjustments are not unique to New Heights participants; high potential youth programs have been struggling with this issue in a variety of contexts. Prep for Prep, KIPP Academy, and A Better Chance are just a few of the programs offered in New York City that send their

students to independent, private and prep schools. These programs describe the chance to attend these schools as “superior education and opportunities.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Transitioning Theories*

Massey et al. (2003) have established a useful framework in their book *The Source of the River*, which can be easily translated to my research. They break down the “Theories of Minority Underperformance” as: Capital Deficiency, Oppositional Culture, Stereotype Threat, Peer Influence, Attachment Theory and Critical Theory, Segregation and School Effects. I have discussed some of these influences in the previous chapter but under the remaining broad headings I summarize my understanding of the topics. Massey et al. (2003) have detailed a great beginning exploration into the understandings of student transitions; I have included literature that focuses more on high school students as opposed to their focus on college students. This shift of focus is necessary because of the differences in developmental stages of the students. So under Massey et al.’s framework, I am able to discuss the transitioning theories in relation to high school and New Heights participants.

### *Types of Capital Influences*

New Heights participants are leaving their large inner-city public school to attend some of the most well endowed private and prep schools in the country. The difference in the capital availability from the public to

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<sup>7</sup> Prep for Prep Website. <http://www.prepforprep.org/>

private school is drastic, not only within the school but also personally between the New Heights students and their classmates. The first capital influence I will discuss is *financial capital*. The families who attend private and independent schools, which are filled with valuable resources, have access to even more at the end of the school day. They often have financial resources to pay for tutoring, further extracurricular training, healthy meals, and a productive studying environment. (Massey et. al, 2003) These services are not necessarily offered by the school, but are essential to school success. The students who do not have access to these resources may fall behind in the classroom and with extracurricular activities. Some students have the ability to get to and from school in a shorter time span; which gives them more time to prepare for the next day at school, while others have long commutes back to the neighborhoods they live in, which impedes on the amount of time they might have for homework or extracurricular activities. (Wells and Crain, 1997) Financial capital is also beneficial because it gives the child a chance to focus on schoolwork and not worry about whether or not they should help around the house or get a job on the side because of their family's financial difficulties.

Financial capital may have a large impact on New Heights students who will often deal with the stress of financial aid forms or making sure their family can keep up with the bills. On an individual level, the financial capital can influence their ability to participate in activities with their peers, due to a



restricted amount of spending money. Financial capital can be harder in the boarding school setting because the disparities can be seen between roommates or on weekends off from school. New Heights students, depending on their individual level of financial capital and access to spending money, may differ on how this affects their well being at school.

The second way that capital can manifest is in *human capital*. Human capital is one's possession of education and training and how it translates to economic gains. This is applicable to the students, not just through their desire to attain human capital, but also in their parent's human capital, which can pass knowledge and skills to the children (Becker, 1993). Parents with greater human capital often times have higher income jobs, which influences financial capital and so on. Human capital is debated amongst scholars because of how they view the benefits of education and its translation into the economic world. *Functionalists* view education as a means to gain knowledge and skills that can improve one's productivity in the workforce. They believe schools are built to teach students skills to enter the economic environment and be productive. In contrast *conflict theory* argues that schooling does not improve productivity but instead we have created a race for credentials and a hierarchy of who has access to them. These credentials convey information that is supposed to show how someone's productivity and abilities can be placed in the work place. They also look at how the increase in various credentials have pushed the desire and need for higher credentials in certain

jobs, although it has not necessarily resulted in more productivity. (Collins, 2007)

The way in which people view human capital influences how someone can use their capital. This is important for New Heights students because their parents' human capital can be used for or against them in the school setting. Many times parental involvement is extremely important in a student's success at school. Parents who have the human capital of a higher educational credential may be more respected at the school and have more influence when it comes to the administration or teacher decisions. A parent with less human capital may be patronized or possibly ignored in the school setting which could make them uncomfortable about speaking up and left feeling without agency.

*Cultural capital* is when a person is able to understand and be a member of a culture and to function within its' networks and institutions and to learn its' history and current characteristics. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital is the ability of specific cultural knowledge and skills to be passed down from generation to generation. (Bourdieu, 2007; MacLeod, 1995) Bourdieu sees cultural capital taking three primary forms: the embodied, objectified, and institutionalized state. The embodied state is an investment that the individual must make- it cannot be handed down or given- although certain economic or privileged situations allow for more time to obtain the capital. The appropriation of the cultural capital can take the entire time a

person is being socialized into a culture. An example of embodied cultural capital is the habit of looking someone in the eye when having a conversation. Different cultures have different meanings and emphasis on these traits, but members of the culture are socialized with these manners. But the essence of the cultural capital being valuable is the unequal distribution of capital and how it is reproduced. (Bourdieu, 2007)

The objectified state is how the cultural capital is developed materially, but not in economic capital. "Thus cultural goods can be appropriated both materially – which presupposes economic capital – and symbolically – which presupposes cultural capital." (Bourdieu, 2007, pg. 87) These cultural goods are things such as instruments, pictures, books, etc. They are the physical objects of the cultural capital that is learned in the embodied state, although they can be passed down more easily. The last form Bourdieu speaks about is the institutionalized state. This is how the cultural capital is recognized and valued by the institution. Bourdieu uses academic qualifications as an example and the possibility "to compare qualification holders." (Bourdieu, 2007, pg.88)

For New Heights students all three forms of cultural capital can be a challenge. Catching up with the embodied traits of peers who were raised in the "elite" culture can be a challenge. By attending private school, they now have more access to the objectified state of cultural capital, but understanding what to do with these resources and how they can benefit them is yet another

level of adjustment. Finally, if able to graduate from these private schools, New Heights students could have a piece of the institutionalized state through their private school diploma.

Annette Lareau, in *Unequal Childhoods* (2003), differentiates between cultural capital in class differences and how they influence a child's life through the development of this particular capital. Her exploration of the different childhood upbringings is another example of embodied cultural capital. She distinguishes between concerted cultivation, which she sees as upper and middle-class behaviors, and accomplishment of natural growth, which is attributed to low income families. Lareau observed these traits in the families she observed in her study. The families that used concerted cultivation organized their child's life with numerous extracurricular activities and leisure activities, usually run by an adult. Through this constant interaction with adults and parenting their children learned to reason, negotiate, and contest adults, which instilled the children with a sense of entitlement and a desire to intervene on their own behalf (Lareau, 2003).

The families that raised their children by "natural growth" tended to be from low-income neighborhoods. The parent allowed their child to foster and grow through mostly unstructured activities in which the child "hung out" with their own family and neighborhood peers. Lareau observed more use of directives by the parents and the child's unwillingness to challenge or question the adult. These parents did not intervene on behalf of their child

(like the parent's of middle and upper class families did) and often felt a sense of powerlessness and frustration with the institution. These factors influenced the child's struggle because of the lack of continuity between the home life and what was valued in the school life (Lareau, 2003). The differences argued by Lareau can also prove to be apparent in New Heights students. They will attend schools that again privileged the cultural capital of upper class families. The school will expect the student to flourish under concerted cultivation and have them and their parents advocate for their well being. If these things don't come naturally to the New Heights students, it will be difficult to adjust after fourteen years of natural growth.

MacLeod in *Ain't No Makin It (1995)* highlights, and I think it is true in the schools that New Heights participants are attending, that dominant and upper class values are rewarded and embodied in larger societal institutions while systematically devaluing lower class culture. Upper-class students are able to adjust easily into a school that values and upholds their cultural traditions. Without acknowledging it, the school creates the illusion that the hierarchy is actually based on merits and intelligence when it is really based on a culture that was passed down and then valued in the academic setting. For students who are not used to this culture, everything seems foreign. It is not something that the upper-class students have learned in a classroom environment; instead it was passed down from generation to generation. The students who did not inherit this specific cultural capital could feel less

intelligent because the school is dominated by the culture that they do not understand and feel comfortable in.

Another capital deficiency that can be discussed in relation to the students of New Heights Youth and other minorities, who are adjusting to school, is *linguistic capital*. As MacLeod argues in *Ain't No Makin It*, linguistic capital is best understood in relation to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Shirley Brice Heath and Basil Bernstein (referenced in MacLeod, 1995) are two authors who write about the theory of linguistic capital in relation to youth's school success. Bernstein argues that speech patterns usually relate to one's class membership and are learned through family socialization. Again, like the other forms of cultural capital, the linguistic codes of the upper class are valued in the education system, therefore the language patterns and habits of upper class children are rewarded by the educational system. Shirley Brice Heath looks at black families in the south and how parents speak to their children at home. White families tend to rely on interrogative questions when talking to their children as opposed to black families using statements or imperatives. These differences may seem minute, but the white students are able to practice answering their parents, which prepares them more for the school setting in which interrogative questions are used. MacLeod goes on to claim that students may blame themselves for being far behind, while students who inherited the capital may congratulate themselves (MacLeod, 1995). Again, these arguments highlight some of the difficulties the New

Heights students may face in schooling because of a lack of capital.

*Social Capital and Networks* are when a person is a member of a culture or group that provides members with support and backing of the collective. (Bourdieu, 2007) Once a member of the group, one has access to the group's networks and institutions. Social capital can manifest itself in numerous ways. Although, I will discuss literature related to social groups later on, social capital plays an important role at the private schools that these students attend. Social capital is "made up of social obligations ("connections"), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital" (Bourdieu, 2007, pg. 84).

Social capital can come in the form of the people who support and take interest in the educational outcomes of the child. For most students this comes from their parents expressing interest and trust in what they do at school. If a parent works extra jobs, or lives far away from the school, their investment and face value to the teachers and school is limited, which could negatively impact their students' academic achievement, as compared to students whose parents are able to volunteer or visit the school often. It is also helpful if the parent has attended the exact school or a similar school, so they understand and support the values and structure of the school but are also able to aid and understand what the student is experiencing (Noguera, 2008).

As soon as a student enters preschool or Kindergarten, peer

socialization begins. They are no longer amongst their parents and a mixture of adults but now spend a large part of their day interacting solely with their peers. As the students grow older they become more and more aware of what their peers think and it starts to influence various parts of their life. It is important to study the various effects and influences peers can have on each other socially and academically (Massey et al., 2003). The following theories look at how a student's social surroundings influence their school performance.

#### *Theory of "Acting White"*

John Ogbu, as summarized by Prudence Carter (2005), wrote about the theory of opposing identities. His theory, which has been scrutinized by numerous academics since, is that non-voluntary minorities (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, and African Americans) have developed an oppositional culture that equates academic success with "acting white" and therefore looks at it negatively. Due to the fear of being labeled as a traitor to their race or simply "acting white," Ogbu claims that black youth do not do well in school and reject mainstream "white middle-class culture" which is commonly seen as academic.

Prudence Carter (2005) challenges Ogbu's theory that blacks react to dominant culture negatively in her book *Keepin' It Real*. Carter first argues that students employ the terms "acting white" "acting Spanish", etc. for cultural reasons and in-group solidarity. Through these "acts" they promote



self-worth and cultural symbols of pride, not opposition to academic or school culture. She argues that the theory of “acting white” is an oversimplification and that the students of these groups have a variety of identities stemming from different experiences and social situations.

Through her study of low-income African-American and Latino youth living in Yonkers, New York, Carter discovered that students typically fell under three main categories: mainstreamers, straddlers, and noncompliant believers. Although they all went through their school and neighborhood differently (under Carter’s three distinctions), all the students professed a belief in education and the desire of the American dream: to one day own a home and car and to have a good job. This similarity is reinforced by findings of Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell (2002). They have argued that research shows black students subscribe to the values of education as much as whites do, sometimes even more.

Even though the students from Carter’s study had similar educational aspirations, their performance in school varied. First, Carter argues that it is partly the school’s fault at not connecting the dominant cultural expectations and styles of the students who attend the school, to the school rewards or curriculum. She argues that if the school rewarded the dominant cultural capital, that this would increase the students’ engagement and attachment to the school, which was argued in the previous chapter. Second she argues that the ethno-racial cultures that the students participate in give them a

positive sense of belonging and support to deal with outside inequalities. She also claims that the variation in school performance and engagement varies by the student's in-group membership and how they view social inequalities and hierarchies and the subsequent barriers for them. Carter also includes the argument that these students have multiple identities that intersect, including gender. Specifically she looks at the "feminization" of achievement for minority students.

The noncompliant believers in Carter's study are students who see the value in education and its relation to human capital, but because of their cultural identities they do not agree with the rules and restrictions that determine a good student. The cultural mainstreamers embrace the dominant culture that is privileged in schools. Even though their identity is still important they may see being black or Latino differently from other black and Latino students. These students can sometimes face ridicule from their black or Latino peers, but they see white culture as regular and risk being rejected by their own ethnic group to embrace it. The third group that Carter distinguishes is an in-between of the previous two. These students embrace school culture while not always following school rules. These students find a way to embrace their ethnic cultural styles while also following the dominant cultural styles of their school. Because the cultural mainstreamers and straddlers embrace the dominant school culture, they are able to do well academically.

Carter’s argument and breakdown of the three-student classifications defunct Ogbu’s theory of “acting white.” First off, Ogbu does not account for the variety of personalities and identities within the black and Latino student body. Carter also does a good job of exploring the student’s feelings towards school and their ethno-racial identity. Many of those who did not engage with the school (non-compliant believers) felt that their cultural capital was not valued and rewarded in the school system; they did not see it as beneficial. Unlike Ogbu’s argument, it was not because they associated the school with being “white.” She also touched upon the student’s abilities to code-switch between their community, ethno-racial peer groups and the dominant school culture. The ability to code-switch allowed the cultural straddlers to maintain both their friendships in the community and do well in school. Cultural mainstreamers proved that students have varying identities and abilities to adapt to the dominant school culture that Ogbu does not explore. The following chart helps to further explain where each of the cultural groups fit in.

<b>Table 1- Carter's Study</b>		
	Adults/ School	Peer
Non-Compliant Believers		x
Straddlers	x	x
Cultural Mainstreamers	x	

New Heights Youth participants might fall into one of these categories, leading to engagement and attachment to their schools for some

and dropout for others. Although there are a variety of factors, Carter gives a more complex argument to the theory of “acting white.”

*Theories of Stereotypes, Labeling, and Stereotype Threat*

The theories of prejudice, labeling and stereotype threat all have different impacts and influences on the students. As minority basketball players, the students from New Heights may face stereotypes and be assigned labels from administrators, teachers and students. These influences could impact their academic and basketball performance as well as their social interactions. Steele’s theory of stereotype threat, as told by Massey et al., relates to the performance of a student, who is aware of potential negative labeling and stereotypes, therefore underperforms. Stereotype threat, for example, is when a student is aware of a subject or skill their race notoriously underperforms in, they then get nervous that they might contribute to that stereotype, and therefore panic and underperform their own ability (Massey, et al., 2003).

The theory of stereotype threat is especially relevant in the work of New Heights because the organization helps low-income, minority youth get into schools that are culturally and economically different from what they have experienced. They also encourage the students to continue playing the game they love, basketball. But in the process there is a large “stereotype” to overcome, in both the academic and basketball world. The stereotype of a black athlete can negatively affect the teachers and students expectations of

their academic skills, while “positively” stressing their abilities and skills at basketball.

Pedro Noguera in his book *The Trouble with Black Boys* argues that there are “strong assumptions made in schools about stereotypes that affect both teachers’ expectations of students and students’ expectations of themselves” (Noguera, Pg 10). Noguera continues to talk about the repetition of these stereotypes in communities and popular culture, which handicaps the students who have the potential to “break the mold.” The stereotype has gone so far as to motivate Steele to claim that “because academic performance is not a central domain in which African Americans construct self-esteem: they have dis-identified with academic achievement as a metric of self-worth.” (Massey, et al, 2003; 11) The students who are able to “break the mold” usually have the ability to float in between the stereotype and outside of it, navigating the two.

The second stereotype that New Heights players have to deal with is the constant assumption and stereotype that because of their race they play basketball, especially because the majority of them are very talented basketball players. Noguera again highlights this dilemma in his book

It is important to point out that in certain contexts- predominantly White schools and colleges, for example- Black males occasionally encounter stereotypes that might be construed as positive. Among some classmates and instructors, there may be an assumption that Black males are inherently

gifted athletes, good dancers, and naturally 'cool.' (Noguera, 2008; pg 25)

Wells and Crain (1997) also discuss the stereotype that black students encounter by being good basketball players, but in their context they feel like it helps the students to transition to the school,

We believe, based on our interviews, that athletes and musicians or very outgoing students with good-to-adequate test scores and grades are more likely to succeed in the suburbs [predominantly white schools] than are the more introverted but high-achieving students. For the most part, the black students who remain in the suburban schools until graduation do so because they have a special talent- academic, athletic, or artistic- that is recognized and valued by whites. The most successful transfer students have both of these factors working in their favor. (Wells and Crain, 1997; 83)

Programs such as New Heights, because of the student's investment in the academic work, may counter these stereotypes. When a student is encouraged and told that they are special for what they are able to do, they show a higher level of investment (Wells and Crain, 1997). Massey et al argue that Steele's work shows that students are able to break the stereotype because they are "invested" in the work and have a smaller chance of dropping out or giving up on the academic side of things, proving that they were not just enrolled for the benefit of basketball (Massey et al. 2003).

## *Peer Influence*

The schools that the New Heights Youth participants are attending enroll the children of some of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the surrounding area (Cookson & Persell, 1985). This elite and wealthy student body makes up the surrounding *contextual peers* of New Heights participants. The influence from the rest of the student body can be large in a small school setting where there are not many subcultures. These influences can also be pervasive when the school is not very diverse and most of the student body subscribes to a particular culture that is valued in the school. The desire to fit in to the larger school culture could create rifts and hard adjustment periods for the student. The *proximate peer effects* are those that stem from the close group of friends. The group of friends that a student chooses at school can lead him or her in numerous different directions. The attitude and goals of immediate friends have enormous influences on the decisions of a teenager (Noguera, 2008). These influences are stated here to explicitly show the relation that friendships and peers can have on a child's experience in school. Carter's breakdown of noncompliant believers, cultural mainstreamers, and oppositional culture are all decisions that students make. Students usually surround themselves with friends who have similar goals and aspirations. When the contextual peers around the New Heights students are different (at white private school,) the choices of proximate peers are limited.

The students who participate with New Heights Youth have the

potential for at least three different sets of peer influences. They have the peers in their neighborhood, their peers at New Heights and their classmates and peers at the independent or private school they attend. Although the literature breaks down the influences into larger contextual and smaller proximate effects, it does not explore for the option of multiples of both of those environments. Below is a breakdown of the peer effects that could influence New Heights members and their relation to the schooling and neighborhood personnel, which can usually portray their ability to function in that setting. This breakdown will help to understand the influences New Heights participants have in their schoolwork, social skills or basketball game.

Table 2- New Heights Youth						
	Adults	Peer Influences				
	School/ Home	Community		New Heights	Prep School	
		Contextual	Proximate	Proximate	Contextual	Proximate
Non-Compliant Believers		x	x	x		
Straddlers	x	x	x	x		x
Cultural Mainstreamers	x			x	x	x

*Independent and Private Schools*

New Heights pulls their players out of the public school system and helps them gain admission to private schools and in the case of this study, boarding schools. This change to private school means a drastic difference



in the capital (social, cultural and financial) from their previous school and compared to their new boarding school. The following section outlines the type of differences the New Heights players may expect at the boarding school.

The philosophies, programs and lifestyles of boarding schools help transmit power and privilege to younger generations and help elite families maintain their social class. “One of the reasons there is so little research on the topic of elite schools is that the mere assertion that elite schools exist, especially socially elite schools, goes against the American grain—democracy is supposed to begin at the schoolhouse door.” (Cookson and Persell, 1985; 15) Cookson and Persell bring up the arguments of past theorists such as Ralph H. Turner and John Meyer who say that America is a society where public education is an opportunity for social mobility, while Cookson and Persell (1985) argue in reality private and prep schools are breeding grounds for social power and dominance. Cookson and Persell (1985) argue that there is no way to see private schools as anything more than elite alternatives to public schools. The majority of prep schools that New Heights students attend fall into these categories, as concentrations of privilege and elitism. This is one of the reasons that New Heights staff has encouraged children that private and independent schools are a better alternative to their public schools.

After looking at the various forms of capital that influence a student’s

ability to adjust and succeed at school it is more obvious why New Heights would encourage their students to attend these schools, but also why these schools might be more difficult to transition to. First in relation to human capital, these schools give their students more human capital for later in life. They equip them with the skills for critical thinking and prestigious qualifications. The cultural capital that is valued at these schools is of the highest classes. Although this will be a distinction between them and the rest of the student body, if they are willing to adjust and learn more about the cultural capital of their school, they can embody it and use the capital later on in life.

The private school structure also gives them access to the social connections in elite circles of society. Although it may be tough to break into these elite circles at first, a successful transition could gain New Heights participants acceptance into their networks beyond just the school. Within the school the small staff to student ratio and the intense attention and investment that goes into each student's development is rarely matched in a public school setting. These schools also have access to large amounts of financial capital; they have state of the art science and classroom facilities, well paid and high quality teaching, coaching, tutoring and advising, while also giving students access to computer labs and sometimes personal computers.

The private and independent schools can be tough to adjust to because

of the difference of capital that is valued by the school and what the student possesses. If the students are able to adjust and succeed academically, they can gain access to this impressive and extensive wealth of financial, human, cultural and social capital.

### *Conclusion*

I argue that New Heights Youth members will have a hard time competing with their classmates at the private and prep school when it comes to capital deficiency. The students at boarding school were often raised in upper or middle-class homes, where their social and cultural capital from childhood was valued and rewarded in the school setting. New Heights participants may feel the effect of capital deficiency in the way of financial capital and not being able to get the extra lessons or equipment; human capital from their parents' education levels; social and cultural capital because what they were taught at home may not be valued in the boarding school setting. These capital deficiencies can manifest themselves in a variety of influences that the New Heights program may or may not be able to make up for.

Carter's theories of oppositional culture and the three paths she saw, plus my additions of the contextual and proximate peer effects, seem applicable to the New Heights participants. Their adjustment to the private or prep school can depend on what path they take, the cultural mainstreamers may be able to make more friends at the prep or private

school, while possibly losing the friendships in their ethno-racial groups. Noncompliant believers may have a hard time adjusting or staying at the private/ prep school. And cultural straddlers may be able to adjust to the school and dominant culture, but keep their ties with their smaller ethno-racial group. These varying identities may make up for the variety of success that New Heights sees from their participants.

The specific transitioning theories in this chapter and the larger societal issues put forth in the first chapter, may all have great impacts on the participants of New Heights Youth. Hopefully understanding this literature and the social surroundings that are factoring into the student-athletes' transition will help to better understand what makes a transition successful and once adjusted to the school, how the student can succeed in the new environment.

Based on this research my hypothesis is that a successful transition will take a very dedicated and adaptable player. I think the hardest part for a New Heights player is going to be the difference of cultural capital. The private school structure is going to privilege those who can speak and take responsibility for him or herself or have parents who will do so. New Heights can provide some support in the way of school agency, but it will be limited as they are responsible for numerous students at a variety of private and prep schools.

I think having a successful transition will depend on the social peer

network that the participants surround themselves with. They will automatically have a small peer network and dedicated coach from the basketball team. If the team is close and the student athletes are encouraged to do well in school, this could have a positive reflection in the New Height's student's academic performance. If the team's overall mentality is the stereotype that athletes don't perform well in school, then this could make a drastically negative impact on the New Height's transition.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *Research Design*

In order to understand how the theories I had researched could influence the transition and success of the New Heights participants, I choose to conduct intensive interview with open-ended questions versus other methods such as a quantitative survey or ethnography. I decided against a quantitative survey because of the small amount of New Heights participants that were enrolled in boarding school, making it possible for me to have the opportunity to get to know each individual and understand the nuanced experience. I also saw the potential in my theories to overlap, which was later proved in my results. I was able to learn things about cultural capital through my questions on parental involvement, these opportunities seemed restricted by a closed question, survey methodology. I also considered doing an ethnography to deeply understand the complexities of a transition and adjustment to boarding school. But because I was interested in making my results generalizable to the larger New Heights community and possibly other programs, I wanted to get a range of experiences, especially at different schools, to see if that had an influence. Overall, I think New Heights could benefit from all three methodologies, but for the focus of this research and understanding the influences of transition, I saw open-ended interviews as the most promising way to collect data.

### *Questionnaire*

From my research question, I developed theoretical hypothesis that highlighted the many possible influences throughout the transition. I researched influences on New Heights participants, such as academic history and preparation from public school, being a student-athlete, cultural capital, and social networks. It was also important to understand the influences of the private school: the culture, possible differences in the student body, access to capital, and school structure. Finally, it was overwhelmingly important to understand what influenced a student to succeed versus dropout; the research highlighted such things as engagement and attachment. Based on existing theory and previous research, I developed an interview and study that would help me to understand and comment on the theories that influence New Heights students and possibly other student-athletes or high-potential youth programs.

My goal was to develop an interview script that flowed naturally and logically through the various theories and hypothesis. I asked the questions in general themes so I could get numerous perspectives on how each theory had impacted their transition and high school experience. These interviews were conducted over the phone because of the students' various locations. All of the students were currently enrolled in school; nine were in high school and four were in college. The interviews lasted from forty-five minutes to an

hour, depending on the student. Because of time constraints and different schedules of the students and myself, there were a few interviews that were stopped in the middle but resumed at a later time.

Once the first draft of my interview was completed, I pretested the questions with three *Prep for Prep* students that were currently enrolled at Wesleyan University. I was able to find them through *Prep for Prep's* promotional literature from their senior years of high school, stating where they would be attending college in the fall. After conducting the interview, the students gave me feedback on my question structure and order. One interviewee suggested a theory, parent's influence, that they felt was important but I did not have in my original interview script. For a final copy of my interview instrument, see Appendix A.

My first set of questions was intended to make the participant comfortable, allowing them to be the expert. I asked broad questions about the logistics of their high school and neighborhood and got to know their overall feelings on their adjustment and what their idea of a successful transition was. I next asked a series of closed questions, asking the students to rank their overall happiness from one to five: 1- strongly dislike, 2- dislike, 3- neutral, 4-like, 5- strongly like. I asked the students about their overall happiness with the academics, peers, staff and teachers, and basketball. Having them select numbers would help me compare their happiness between these aspects and generalize amongst them. If the student had left



their boarding high school or transferred to a new one, I asked them to rank both in order to compare.

My interview continued by asking questions that relate to the theories of capital that I referenced in Chapter 2. First, I asked the students what the highest level of academic completion was in their family and what their parents do for a living. This helped to get a better understanding of the human capital available in their family and possible financial capital available through their career. From there I asked the students a series of open-ended questions about the social capital and networks that were available to them while they were at school. I asked them who, if anyone, they felt like they could go to at their boarding school, New Heights, and at home. I asked about both adults and peers in each of these locations and whether or not they had similar backgrounds to the participant. This helped to draw conclusions on who they were surrounding themselves with and their comfort level at school, New Heights, and home.

I then asked a series of questions that I felt pertained to cultural capital. I asked them about the expectations, both for basketball and school that their parents have of them. I also asked if they or their parents felt comfortable arguing with the school or advocating on their behalf, I felt that these questions got at the agency both the students and the parents felt they had with the school. I also asked a series of questions about cultural capital in the classroom, to get a better understanding of the portrayal of cultural

capital in their everyday life. I asked questions on teaching style, cultural references, their comfort with expressing their culture and experiences, and about possible culturally relevant pedagogy. These series of questions gave me a better understanding of the classroom, the school and the comfort level of the student.

Next, I asked a few simple questions about how prepared the students felt for the academic work and then comparatively to their peers at the school. I also asked what specific subjects were hardest for them. If the students did feel prepared, I asked them what prepared them most: their previous school or New Heights. I also asked if there were places on campus they felt they could get help in subjects they did not perform well in.

After academic preparation I asked questions pertaining to the theory of acting white. I asked the students if they felt they needed to act a different way to fit in and how comfortable they felt with their friends or family from home seeing them in this setting. These questions explored if students felt like they had to change to fit in with the majority of the population and how this compared to the people whom they surrounded themselves with at home. After these series of questions, I asked the students about their peers at school and from home. I asked questions about where they felt most comfortable and if they felt like they could talk about their home environment to their friends. I also asked about the demographics of their group of friends and the larger school to see what sector of the school they

were friends with. I also asked specific questions about their friends on the basketball team and how much they enjoyed the team. I then asked the students to rank how important various things were to their friends, both from home and from school. I asked them to rank on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 being not important and 5 being very important. I asked them a series of social and academic habits within each of the following categories: academics, social life, community involvement, classroom behavior and at home study habits. These comparative questions again gave me the opportunity to look at the two different social groups in a qualitative way, which made it easier to compare.

My next set of questions was on financial capital. I kept this section separate from the other series of questions on capital because I wanted the interviewee to feel comfortable in the interview setting before I asked these questions, as they seemed the most personal and intrusive. I asked if they knew their total family income, if they had a campus or summer job and if they had access to study aids or educational materials at home and in their dorm. I initially had a few questions about their families' history with the criminal justice system, loss of heat and lights, and food stamps or free and reduced lunch. Those questions got eliminated once I started doing the interviews because, I felt that they were potentially too sensitive and I felt uncomfortable, the first few times, asking them. Because I did not want to run the risk of losing my interviewees' trust or comfort at that point, I

decided to take them out. Once I started doing the interviews I added in a few questions about spending money and possible familial stress or conflict over financial issues. I felt that these aspects of financial capital were most likely to affect a teenager at boarding school, their ability to have spending habits like their friends. It was also interesting to see how the families dealt with the potential financial difficulties at home, tuition bills, spending money and how much of the stress they relayed to the student, which could have hindered their success at the school.

My next series of questions was to understand the boarding school experience and how it positively or negatively affected the general success at school. I asked questions asking them to compare their experiences in schools and being away from home. I also asked if they felt it was easier or harder to be away from home. These questions helped me to get a better sense of the transition because I had them comparing two distinct spaces.

After I asked about the transition to the boarding school: what they missed about their old school and what was the hardest part of the transition, I asked their opinion on whether or not their academics and basketball skills have been affected, positively or negatively. I then asked about possible stereotypes and stereotype threats. These questions allowed the student a place to talk about issues of race dynamics within the school: with students, teachers, and staff. I aimed to understand the stereotypes the students faced by asking them directly and also asking about reactions to their achievement

in basketball and academics, so I could infer possible stereotypes they were unaware of. To understand if they were threatened by stereotypes, I asked if they felt that black or minority students could perform as well in school, this usually allowed them to get away from their individual performance and school and instead think about larger issues surrounding their race and possible stereotypes.

I ended the interview by asking the students to self report their grades, basketball statistics and behavioral problems. For those students who had dropped out of boarding school or transferred I asked them why they left and a few further questions about their new school. Overall my script allowed me to get at the larger themes that I researched and many times because of the open ended questions, these questions led the students to explore other possible influences in their transition and success.

### *Ethics*

It was important that my study followed the ethics of Wesleyan University's Institutional Review Board because I dealt with a vulnerable population, as some of the students were minors. The first step was informing the New Heights coaches and staff about my study and having them contact the students and parents and put together a list that agreed to be contacted. The coaches and I discussed that the study would be completely voluntary and the students would not be pressured on behalf of New Heights or myself to participate. When I contacted each student, I

explained to them the purpose of the study and possible risks and benefits. The risks involved were my study's sensitive questions and information possibly leading the students to say something that they regretted saying. If that was the case, they could tell me during the interview and I would be certain to delete the statement from the transcript. The benefits of this study were the possibility that based on their experience this study could discover ways in which New Heights could help future participants. The risk of a student being slightly uncomfortable when talking about these issues was outweighed by the potential to help future students in New Heights have an easier and more successful transition. I also explained the steps that would be taken in order to keep their anonymity. I would tape record the interview, if they agreed, and would transcribe it under a pseudonym. The data would be destroyed on May 1<sup>st</sup>, after the paper was written and there would be no traces from the paper to their real names. A copy of the Consent Form and Debrief can be found in Appendix B and C respectively.

### *Data Sampling*

The intent of my study was to collect a purposeful sample of New Heights participants; including students who had dropped out and those who stayed at their respective boarding schools. To obtain this sample, I met with Ted Smith, Program Director, who gave me the contact information for male participants and Rock Rosa, Women's Coach, who gave me the contact information for the female participants. The two staff members generated a

list of participants who were interested in being contacted for an interview. Because I obtained my contact list from staff members there was room for obvious biases: first, those students who staff members were still in contact with. Second, because Ted Smith is Program Director and obviously invested in the validity and continuation of the program, he may have contacted students, whom he thought, would have more “positive” things to say about New Heights and/ or would represent the program well. Rock Rosa gave me the contact information for all the females he had worked with that attended boarding school. There seemed to be very little bias to his selection.

From New Heights’ current records they have 27 males and 13 females that have attended or are currently enrolled in boarding schools through their program. I was able to get a contact list of 20 males and 11 females from the New Heights coaches and staff, I am unaware of why the other participants did not want to participate or were not contacted by the New Heights staff. Out of the 31 students on my contact list 8 had left their schools: six because of behavior or academic code violation and two because they were unhappy with basketball. Of the 13 students that I spoke with 9 were in high school students and 4 were in college; 7 were males and 6 were females.

<b>Table 1: New Heights Study Sample</b>			
M: males F: females			
	NHY Total	Contacted	Completed
Boarding school totals (drop outs included)	40 (m:27 f:13)	31 (m:20 f:11)	13 (m:7 f:6)
Dropouts	8 (m:5 f:3)	8 (m:5 f:3)	3 (m:1 f:2)

I used this contact list and called the first five names. After I received only one returned call, Coach Rock Rosa suggested I contact the students through Facebook, which is a medium New Heights Youth uses to stay in touch with their current players and alumni. Because I was able to find all the student contacts through Facebook, I saw no biases to this method and decided to use it to contact the remaining participants. I sent the students a brief message where I introduced myself, asked them if they would like to participate in the study through an interview, and if they could send me back times they were available (Read the message in Appendix D.) I received 14 responses to my message and was able to complete thirteen interviews.<sup>8</sup>

New Heights' programs attract mainly from low-income and communities of color in New York City. The players are recruited by New Heights through middle school coaches or at large neighborhood try-outs, which requires them to have been active members in the basketball community at a young age. Those who are selected and decide to enroll in the program must dedicate to New Heights through afterschool practice and tutoring, a travel basketball team and possible weekend and summer tournaments. By the time the students enter high school they are top basketball players and have participated in New Heights individual tutoring. The demographics (low-income, students of color) and influences of New

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<sup>8</sup> One student did not answer my phone call at our scheduled time and did not respond to my second message on Facebook. That was the only respondent I did not get to interview.



Heights (basketball coaching and academic tutoring) make my case study applicable to a small minority of students who come from these neighborhoods but have access to programs such as New Heights. Although the exact case study of New Heights may not reflect a large proportion of our society, my findings are applicable to larger communities of high-potential youth programs and recruited athletes.

### *Data Analysis*

The interviews I conducted over the phone and in person were tape-recorded. I transcribed each interview and went through with a coding method that highlighted the topics that were discussed in eight major categories or theories: social networks; athletics or basketball; capital (cultural, human, and financial); school or classroom structure; racial tensions and stereotypes; prior school/ preparedness; general transition; and treatment by school discipline. I looked through the interviews and highlighted answers that I felt, based on my research, fit into these larger theories. There were many times when these theories expanded and overlapped, allowing me to see the interconnectedness of the influences on the students. I coded the interviews in this way so I could later go back and draw them together for the analysis and discussion.

As I coded my interviews, I recognized my bias in looking for causal validity and connections for relationships and why these influences have caused the student to be successful or drop out. I acknowledge the fact that

many of the topics I have interviewed New Heights participants on could be attributed to spurious correlation: factors and relationships my theories do not acknowledge and a lack of familiarity and trust between the interviewee and myself, which could limit what the participant would want to share. Even though I have limited information on each individual student, I am confident in my measurement validity and the theories I have pulled from the coding of these interviews. Throughout my results and discussion section, I am cautious in making causal claims and recognize the opportunities for it to be spurious correlation.

### *Limitations*

I am confident in the value of my findings, but also acknowledge the weaknesses in my study design and implementation that may have biased my results.

First, after the low response rate from voicemail messages, I sent Facebook messages to the participants. As mentioned earlier I was able to find all the participants Facebook page, so I saw no selection bias with this contact method. The only possibility would be a lack of access to a computer to check their Facebook regularly, which could have posed an issue but I am unaware of how many students this influenced, if any. Once the student's received the Facebook message, I asked them to respond with times they were available to talk. Because of their busy schedules as student-athletes, this time commitment could have limited the responses I received from the

players.

Second, I acknowledge the complications that accompany the use of any self-reported study. My findings hinge upon the presumed honesty and accuracy of the interviewees. Because of the sensitivity of the issues I was talking about and a high schooler's lack of experience with being interviewed it is likely that they could have been less than truthful. Because the student-athletes were aware of my connection to New Heights, my results may be skewed. If the interviewees were worried about my involvement in New Heights it could have influenced them to respond in a way that they thought would be best for New Heights. The interview was anonymous but the students may have felt they needed to draw more conclusions to New Heights programming or they possibly didn't want to talk negatively about their school because New Heights helped them get in to their respective schools. At this point, I am unaware of how much of an impact this could have had on my study.

I also recognize that conducting phone interviews creates different biases because of the dynamics of the phone and how comfortable someone feels talking over the phone. Because it was on the phone I was not able to pick a neutral space for the interview. I am not sure where the applicants choose to receive my phone call. Many of them could have been in their dorm room or a common space where they may not have felt comfortable talking about the issues that I brought up. Because the interview was done

over the phone, the participant did not explicitly know my race, age, and gender, except through my Facebook profile picture. I am unsure how this dynamic could have impacted my results. Some students may have felt more comfortable with the anonymity while others held back comments about race relations because they did not feel comfortable over the phone or the uncertainty of my alliances or race.

My results should be reviewed with these dynamics and imperfections in mind. Despite my study's limitations, I believe that I accurately present important information that has been previously unexplored.

## Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

After coding and analyzing the interviews of the New Heights students, there were many common themes in their experiences. I looked for themes that I discovered through my literature review and attempted to code and find them in the interviews. Some themes were less prominent than I expected and other factors had a strong influence, but in a different way than expected. The following themes were most prominent and I will discuss them in this chapter: prior school preparedness, basketball influences, boarding school structure, social networks, financial capital, cultural capital, school discipline, and racial tensions and stereotypes.

### *Basketball Influences*

As expected the influence of the basketball team had both positive and negative influences on the players' transition. Many of them found close friendships through the team, although not all their teammates had similar backgrounds. The athletic team had to work together towards a similar and unified goal, which created a small peer community. This space is also where students could find many of their friendships. Eleven of the respondents, out of 13, said a few of their teammates had similar backgrounds to them and four even had fellow New Heights members on their team. Even though a few students of color or low-income students were on the team, a majority of the team was made up of the average boarding school student. The diverse

community within the team allowed the students to build friendships that they might not otherwise have made and create bridges to other communities on campus. Their “team bonding” experiences allowed them to have a small community early on in the transition. This allowed them to have a group to fall back on and help develop friendships.

This community was also something that felt familiar to them. When asked, “Where they felt most comfortable when at school,” a majority of the participants responded with the basketball team or gymnasium. This similar setting from the city to the boarding school helped make things seem familiar, therefore helped the student feel at ease and comfortable in the transition.

The biggest change in the basketball that the students cited was the level of competition that they had at the boarding schools compared to the city league New Heights participated in. Although some of them were aware that this would happen, they all seemed to agree that it both helped and hurt their basketball career. Some claimed that the low level of competition made the basketball less of a challenge therefore they were not able to grow as much as they may have in the city. Others cited this as an opportunity to stand out within the team and league because their basketball skills were of a higher level than their teammates. The less competitive league also meant that many of them had less stressful basketball schedules, which allowed them to join other sports teams, clubs, or activities. Boarding schools tend to encourage a well-rounded student body and the less time intensive basketball team

allowed for the New Heights students to develop as such.<sup>9</sup>

Because of the competitive nature of New York City's basketball leagues and New Heights' program, the participants all responded that they were one of the top players on their boarding school team. Due to their success on the court, many players talked about the popularity they gained amongst their peers. Sports were a big part of the school pride and culture, often times being a major part of the weekend entertainment at the boarding schools. The players said they felt rewarded by their peers and the school personnel for their contributions to the team. This reward structure and popularity may be one of the factors that encouraged all of the players to continue their basketball or other sporting career<sup>10</sup> throughout high school and into college.

The social networks that basketball fostered will also be discussed in the social network analysis, but are important to understand the influence of basketball in forming ties with adults at their school. The student-athletes were able to have a small intimate peer group and also have a one-on-one relationship, in a non-academic environment with their coach. Their basketball coaches could also potentially serve as advocates and liaisons to

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<sup>9</sup> One player stated that his school required all students to play on a sports team, so he had non-athlete players on his team, making it less formal.

<sup>10</sup> There were two players who ended up quitting basketball but continued to play a different sport. These players cited injuries when explaining why they did not continue with basketball. Even though they stopped playing basketball, New Heights continued to work with them throughout their high school years.

the school administration on behalf of the student, similar to the role of the advisor. These relationships were unlike those of teacher-student relationships because they were inherently less formal and could bridge more personal connections, but not be tied to academic performance. When asked whom they could trust, almost all of the students mentioned their basketball coach. Because, as mentioned above, these schools had less competitive basketball programs and New Heights players tended to be one of the best players on the team, it seemed the relationships they built were strong. The coach trusted them with the lead of the basketball team, both in terms of dedication and skills. Because they were recruited athletes to the school their dedication to the sport and team was probably greater than the students who were at the school because of family or academic background and just so happened to play basketball. Therefore, New Heights players added a lot to the team with their dedication and skill and in return were able to build adult allies in their coaches and administrative fans.

This close partnership between a New Heights player and the coach at their high school could also prove to make or break their adjustment and happiness to the school. Desire felt she couldn't trust and was often used by her coach. This unhealthy relationship spoiled her entire time at St. Ann's Bielfield and she ended up transferring because of it. She ranked her happiness with basketball at STAB a 1 out of 5, explaining "It was mostly about winning when I was at STAB. If I had a really good game, he [the



coach] would like me a lot but if I didn't have a good game, he would ignore me." (Desire) Desire's relationship with her coach shows how intense a relationship between a coach and player can be and how much it can effect not only their relationships with other adults but their happiness with the school overall. Her coach's impact on her relationships with others, punishments, and self-esteem greatly diminished Desire's ability to perform in other aspects of school life.

Because of New Heights athletes' intense dedication to basketball it can be all or nothing when it comes to their school choice and happiness. As seen through Desire, the coaches had the ability to ruin their basketball career and for many of the New Heights players, basketball was the main reason they chose the boarding school in the first place and instead of quitting the team, but staying at the school, they transferred. Although New Height's mission statement is to encourage and shape well-rounded student-athletes, these athletes are passionate about the game (as shown from the athlete's dedication until college) and possibly to an unproductive level. From the list that I obtained from New Heights, I was able to see that two New Heights players left the school because they were "unhappy with basketball." The average student at these boarding schools was there because of academic reasons and would most likely just stop participating in the activity because they did not enjoy the team or coach or structure, they would not leave the entire school. Because of the basketball heavy focus, the players may be

overlooking the academic and full potential of the school.

New Heights players are extremely dedicated to basketball and they saw it as their ticket to be at boarding school; this may influence them to over look other opportunities available to them. Varsity basketball is a large time commitment and students might not have had time to take on other responsibilities or hobbies. Even if they had the time they may be too focused on basketball and might not look for other ways to be involved with the school. These influences can hurt their chances to find other hobbies and become more “well-rounded” for college applications, etc. A majority of the New Heights students did mention becoming involved in other activities on campus, some mentioned theater clubs, being prefects and a few joined other sports teams. New Heights seemed to encourage the development of their interests and talents, as it was not a requirement that they stay on the basketball team to continue their relationship with New Heights services and staff. For example, 2 of the 13 interviewees- Mahdi and Hasan- that I spoke with had quit basketball in high school because of injuries and were still at their respective boarding schools and in good contact with New Heights. The variety of opportunities offered by the schools allowed the students to find other connections to the school and help them build a wide range of skills. Those who were able to find the time and commit to other activities seemed to greatly benefit from it, “I am happy I have the opportunity to deal with a lot of things that I am interested in and are important to me and still maintain

decent grades and perform well athletically.” (Kendria) Interestingly, I did not have a question in my interview about other activities, but many times the students brought up other hobbies while answering another question. The students who brought up hobbies or activities, also tended to be enrolled or about to enter elite colleges. It seemed that the more activities the student participated in beyond basketball correlated to their acclimation to the school and success.

The time commitment of a sports team could also impact their academic achievement. As they all mentioned the academics were hard to get used to at first and with their commitment to the basketball team, they could have found it difficult to balance and find extra time to work on homework or to get extra help. It seemed that although the team had daily practice, the school structure allowed ample time for the students to study (in mandatory study hall) and ask questions (having free periods during the school day.) This made the issue of balancing their time less of an issue at boarding school compared to their public school schedule.

Another possible influence the basketball team had on the athletes was the connection of their race to an athletic stereotype. Although none of them stated that this was a negative influence on their performance and happiness at the school and only a few said it existed, I will discuss the possible impacts it had in the section on stereotype threat.

### *Prior School Preparedness*

New Heights recruits students from low-income neighborhoods in New York City that attend the local public school, and from there, they help them gain access to high-quality education through private schools. The difficulty in the transition academically, could be the initial shock and change in the classroom structure and the level of difficulty in the work assigned. Even though the New Heights players did mention these changes and difficulties, they all seemed to have adjusted, it either took them extra time while doing homework or they sought out help from a tutor.

When I asked if the classroom style was different from their previous school, all of the New Heights students mentioned at least one or two things that were different from before. Most of the answers related to the change in classroom dynamic, more discussions and classes with fewer students. As Dontrell put it, "Classes were tough at first... I got there and I was from a setting where I was used to being able to do the homework assignments and just do real good on the homework but then I moved to that small classroom environment where you need to participate." The focus on participation was not normal in their previous classrooms due to the large amount of students, so the New Heights students had to adjust and learn how to participate, as it was suddenly an aspect in their grade. Another large change in the classroom structure was the analytical aspect of classroom discussions. A lot of the students, as portrayed by Mahdi said "I used to be able to memorize

what was going to be on the test, but at my new school we discuss and debate the homework that we're reading."

Because of these changes in the school structure, the students had to be aware of how this was going to effect their grades and performance. When talking about their academic work, 8 out of 13 of the students mentioned how their grades went down because of the difficulty of the school work, as Diego says, "I knew my grades might do down but that didn't matter because it is tougher here, I was going to challenge myself more." There was also some action taken on behalf of the institution, sometimes having the student repeat a year or take remedial classes until they caught up. The 3 students who repeated a year when starting at the private school, all confirmed that it helped them adjust to the academics. In contrast, when asked if their peers seemed better prepared for the academics, all stated similar responses to Jamil saying "the students who came from private school before seemed better prepared or at least knew how to discuss the topics."

Overall, the school structure and difficulty of the work was a change for the New Heights students. But the private school seemed to make up for it with extra tutoring or having the student repeat a grade. The students were also aware of the change in the difficulty so were not defeated by the lower grades, understanding that they were at a tougher institution.

### *School Structure*

Although the shock of the new campus and cultural environment can take a while to adjust to, once the student is able to acclimate they have access to a top quality education. The structure of the boarding and private school experience, although overwhelmingly white and privileged, was beneficial to the students and their academic pursuits. The students cited numerous reasons as to why their boarding school had such great academic features, mostly in comparison to their previous schools. They discussed changes such as class size and structure, teacher quality, high expectations, the expansive resources and the campus lay out. These influences were all positive aspects to the student's experience at the boarding school.

Most students commented on the drastic decrease of class size from their previous school to the boarding school. Many of them drew the conclusion, which research has proven (Finna & Achilles, 1999), that this benefited them because they were able to receive more individual attention and instruction. The smaller classroom led to a different classroom teaching environment and structure. Dontrell brings up a point that was reiterated throughout the other interviews, "Its pretty hard to teach a kid how to break down a Shakespeare poem and certain things like that when you have 30 kids in a class because not everyone can participate." (Dontrell) These smaller classrooms demanded that the student participate in class discussions and assignments more often. The students expressed the difference of this

compared to their other schools, explaining that before they were able to get good grades by doing limited amounts of work. The boarding school classroom environment is not only beneficial to the effectiveness of teaching but also prepares the student for college style discussions and classes.

Private and prep schools also tend to recruit some of the most highly qualified teachers and administrators to work with the students, and the students greatly benefited from this. Not only are high quality teachers recruited but they also have access to impressive and updated equipment and facilities. The students mentioned such things as endowments and facilities at the school being extremely nice in comparison to their urban school setting. Students described the gymnasium, libraries and science labs. Having access to these resources allowed the students to get even more from their teachers and classes. These resources and teachers also offered more opportunities for educational exploration than the average public school. "I took an engineering course, a CSI course, none of that stuff was ever offered at public school." (Dontrell) The opportunity to pick from a wide range of classes again made the education a more personal experience and produced better results. Diego explained, "you had classes that you got to choose from and classes that interested you" which he saw as a positive influence on the classroom because students were choosing to be there.

Although I discuss the social networks that the student gains from the adults at their school later, it is important to mention it here because it is a

more general school characteristic that comes along with the school structure. The small classrooms and learning environment that the schools create allow students to build and access personal relationships with their teachers and administrators. A lot of the students mentioned office hours or consultations that were required of all teachers, which allowed extensive time to get feedback and help from them.

This teacher quality is portrayed in the success rate of the school. Private and prep schools have been successful at helping students gain admission to top universities for generations. Because of this high standard, expectations for this tradition to continue put extremely high expectations on the students. These higher expectations stem from the schools alumni, administration, and parents, which raise the bar for the classroom, facilities and staff, resulting in higher success for all the students at the school, including the New Heights student-athletes. There is also the critique, by J.S. Coleman (Gamoran & Long, 2006) that success is due to the high quality of the student body, and schools don't make much of a difference. In this case that would mean that the student body creates the high-expectations and high caliber educational standards. Although I see the case for high quality students, I think that the caliber of the boarding school is due to the teacher quality and the overall expectations of the school.

The student-athletes also found being on campus of a boarding school helped them concentrate and allowed them more time to devote to school



related activities. A lot of them commented on similar issues to Kendria when she said, “coming to boarding school it really helped me because if I was in the city then my hours would be crazy trying to get to and from practice and like having to finish my work...” (Kendria) The students talked about having access to the classrooms, library, dorm and gym all on campus and how much time they saved not having long commutes that they were accustomed to in the city. The students also answered that it was easier to do work when they were at boarding school, away from their house. They proposed reasons such as noise distractions, family and friend distraction, and environments that were not conducive to getting work done at home. The boarding school environment surrounded the students with peers who had similar work ethics and similar workloads and spaces that encouraged a productive work environment. All of this allowed them to get more work done when they attended boarding school.

Overall the teacher and facility quality, the small class size and discussion format and the boarding school environment positively influenced the student’s academic outcomes at the boarding schools.

#### *Social Networks: Neighborhood and Prior School Friends*

Previously when I discussed the social networks that influence New Heights students, I looked at Prudence Carter’s *Beyond Acting White*. From her breakdown of non-compliant believers, straddlers, and cultural mainstreamers, I argue at the very least New Heights participants would

have the following peer social groups and therefore influences: their neighborhood and hometown friends (both proximate and contextual), their New Heights teammates and friends, and their peers at boarding school (both proximate and contextual.) After asking questions about each of these groups, it seemed that although they all had an influence, the peers at the boarding schools had the largest influence on their performance and happiness at the boarding school.

The New Heights students had a lot to say about their friends from home, both positive and negative. The New Heights students talked about their home environment and how their friends from home had similar upbringings. The main difference of the New Heights students and their friends, was that the New Heights students had decided to leave their neighborhood school and go to boarding school. The New Heights students all dealt with it in different ways, some stayed close to their friends while others lost touch. Clearly the friendships they had before they left for boarding school influenced and shaped who they were and how they approached the next stage of their lives, but once they adjusted to the climate at the boarding school, many talked about losing contact or strong bonds to their friends from back home, which is to be expected given the distance.

When I asked if “it was easier to get work done at home or at boarding school” all but one person said it was easier to get work done at school. As I stated previously, the students often mentioned the distraction of friends

when they were back in the city. This sentiment was reiterated when I asked them to rank how important it was for their friends from home compared to friends from boarding school “to study hard” and “ask challenging questions in class.” There were large differences in how their friends from home approached academics and social life compared to those who were in the boarding school. They stated that their friends weren’t as focused on academics and that lead to a non-productive work environment when they were at home with these peers.

Although they claimed that their peers from home were not as academically engaged or focused, the students all spoke highly of their close friends who they had stayed in contact with. Although they all responded that they would like to have their friends from home visit and they felt comfortable mixing their two environments, only one student had actually hosted a friend from their neighborhood. Others claimed that they were too busy or it was too far for their friends to see them at boarding school. These excuses could be true, but it is important to understand other possible factors that could be at play. The New Height’s players could be embarrassed of their new school environment and therefore not want friends from home to visit. Or vice versa, they could be nervous/ embarrassed of how their friends from home would act and react to the boarding school environment, so they don’t invite them to visit. Because their friends did not come to visit, a few mentioned seeing them on breaks or keeping up with them through social

networking sites, such as Facebook. Busy schedules and limited access to these sites or telephones could limit their ability to keep in touch with their friends from home, which lowers the impact and influence their peers from home could have on their academic and social performance at school.

Although there was limited influence on their academics a lot of them mentioned their friend's attitudes towards boarding school when they first decided to go. Some mentioned that their friends and family didn't understand what boarding schools were all about, "some people still have an idea of boarding school as like, sending troubled kids away to get discipline" (Kendria) and others talked about their friends thinking they were going to change when they went away. Their home friends' outlook and stereotype of the boarding school experience obviously did not stop them from matriculating at the school. So even if the stereotype or negative connotations about boarding school were expressed to the New Heights players, the boarding school experience was important enough, to them, to continue.

As many of them enter their senior year or reflect back from college, they all talked about the difference of where their friends from home ended up in comparison to themselves.<sup>11</sup> Most of them did not credit their individual personality or those of their friends when talking about the difference in educational goals or attainment; instead they referenced the differences in opportunities and structures that were available to them.

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<sup>11</sup> Besides Kendria, whose friends from home were at similar private schools and college-bound.

Dontrell highlighted the difference, “I definitely feel like if a lot of the kids from back home were able to experience what I did in private high school, I’m not saying everyone would be at Amherst [where he attends], you know, a lot of them would be in college, at least.” (Dontrell)

Most of the students acknowledged in the interview the unique opportunity they had by gaining admission to a private boarding school and participating in New Heights. Their understanding of the difference in educational opportunity they had in comparison to their friends back home possibly influenced them to work harder. As seen when I asked Desire if she would want her kids to go to boarding school,

I would want them to go to my boarding school after a couple of years of high school in the Bronx, because I feel like if you, if I was to send my kids straight to boarding school, they wouldn’t appreciate it, as much as they would if they saw what they were having in the Bronx and then came over here and realized all the new opportunities that were here (Desire).

Although I did not ask a specific question about how this influenced them, a few of them mentioned how valuable the education was and how easily it could be taken away from them. This acknowledgement and possible guilt made their friends from home have a larger, positive influence than a negative or distracting one. The friends from home did not distract the New Heights players because of the distance, but the acknowledgment of the difference between the public school their friends attended and that of their

boarding school only encouraged and furthered their dedication to success at the boarding school.

*Peer Influences: New Heights Youth*

I was unsure what influences the other New Heights participants would have on the individual students I interviewed. Overall their dedication to basketball and participation in New Heights made the peer group very similar. Six of the participants I interviewed attended boarding school with a fellow New Heights participant.<sup>12</sup> Those that had the companionship talked about how much easier it was to adjust and how it helped to have a teammate and a friend that was going through similar things: with academics, basketball and socially. Just like the success of New Heights participants varies, so do the influences that they have on their fellow teammates. In most of the cases the two teammates had similar experiences in the adjustment: in two of the cases both were successful (Diego and Jose; Mahdi and Hasan) and in one case both were kicked out (LaShawn and teammate). In two instances they had pretty different experiences: Dontrell and his teammate and Desire and New Heights male players.<sup>13</sup> In Dontrell's experience it seems to be attributed possibly to the difference in age. Dontrell went to boarding school when he was older and had already had academic success at his high school. His goals, once he got to boarding school, was to

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<sup>12</sup> Only one was not a teammate because it was a boy and a girl- Desire at STAB.

<sup>13</sup> In the case of Desire she left because of a coach that she did not share with her male teammate, because he only coached the girls team.

play basketball but also to keep up his high academic achievement and get into a top college. The younger New Heights player that enrolled in Suffield Academy the same year was a couple years younger. Dontrell explained that he was an amazing but flashy basketball player. He talked about their strong relationship during the transition, but also how his teammate teased him for arriving at school and selling out, "Man you switched it up, your mad into school and stuff like that, he still had to be the bad ass from the Bronx, he was kind of shocked that I was the opposite." (Dontrell) Although they had different paths once they got to the school, Dontrell seemed more focused on academics, they were able to support each other in the transition.

Students who do not have a successful transition and those who do could potentially influence the New Heights students who come after them at their respective schools. Their reputation with the basketball coach, admissions, and school administration could influence stereotypes and expectations for future New Heights players. Unfortunately my study did not examine different cohorts of students in the same school and I was not able to observe the extent of those influences.

All of the players that shared the experience with another New Heights student talked about it in a positive light. They referenced how it made the experience more comfortable, having someone to travel home with, someone on campus who you can relate to easily, and having someone to hang out with on the breaks, who understood both worlds.

Although they were not always the same year at school or even that close, the similar backgrounds gave them comfort, specifically in the initial adjustment. Overall, New Heights peers were a positive influence, both at the specific school and for the larger New Heights community back in New York.

#### *Peers at Boarding School*

The peers, both proximate and contextual, at the boarding school played a large and sometimes predictable role in the transition of the New Heights Youth participants. I found that the New Heights students tended to have proximate friendship groups that were made of predominantly students of color, which do not represent the larger student body, while the contextual peers still influenced their transition.

When I asked “how many of their friends had similar backgrounds or were students of color” like them, all but one of the respondents had a majority of close student of color friends. One student explained that as he met more and more people and adjusted to the school he had a majority of white friends, not because he lost any of his close friends who were students of color, but because the school was predominantly white. It seemed that having friends of similar backgrounds, especially in the beginning, was very important to the New Heights students. They talked about having someone to talk to who understood their home life or the struggles they were going through.



My research agreed with Cookson and Persell's argument that the culture of the school and the attitude of the larger student body (therefore contextual peers) is so focused on success and educational attainment that minority groups are just appropriated into the mass culture of the school. Overall, from the New Heights students' perspective, this seemed to be true. The players talked about the support of their classmates for their athletic ability and involvement with the basketball team. It seemed to create school pride through the larger student body. Some pointed out that they would often times be the only black student in their class, but overall they didn't feel they were stereotyped about their academics, but instead were encouraged to contribute to the learning community.

A lot of them commented on how, overall, their peers were very academically focused. They talked about being around motivated individuals who "were all the best at whatever they do." (Kendria) The classroom structure allowed for the students to learn from one another and the study hall and academic dorms seemed to be focused and motivated, which helped the New Heights students. As Cookson and Persell argued, it seemed that the New Heights students were just brought into their culture and once they made the transition into the academically driven environment they were able to make friends with the majority of the student body. Although they were able to join the larger student body in pursuit of its educational goals, the New Heights students were still, as Cookson and

Persell put it “outsiders within.”

When students talk about their friends who were more representative of the larger student body, they spoke about the difference of wealth and background. A few of them talked about visiting their friend’s houses and seeing how nice they were in comparison to their homes in New York City. They also mentioned how welcoming the families were, to let them into their lives and how they spent many weekends visiting friends. When I asked if they had their boarding school friends visit them at their house in New York, they responded with very mixed answers. Some claimed that their friends would definitely come and understand that although it was different, it was their home, like Diego says here “In a small apartment in the city, in Washington Heights, I know it was a lot for him [his boarding school friend] to adjust to, vice versa on the weekend when I would be at GS, you know when I wouldn’t have a game or anything I would sleep over his house and that would be, you know, a big adjustment.” (Diego) Others had a different idea, claiming their friends wouldn’t be able to fit in their apartment or wouldn’t understand their neighborhood. When I asked if they would like their kids to attend a school like that, one student answered that he wouldn’t want his kids to go to private school their whole lives because he wouldn’t want them to be “soft and naive.” This statement seems to describe what many of the student’s overall perceptions of their peers were. That although they were academically well prepared and had large amounts of wealth and

privilege; they seemed oblivious to the real world and the world that many of these New Heights players were coming from.

Unfortunately, in my questions about peer influences, I did not ask whom the respondents were not friends with and why. Asking the question of who they were not friends with at boarding school, would have given me a better look into the social dynamics of the school. I would have learned of possible rifts in the student body or cliques that may have formed because of race or class tensions. I did ask what the average student was like and then more specifically what their friends were like. If I compare those two groups, I can conclude that the New Heights students' close friends were not representative of the larger student body; but they did have many periphery friends, which showed they had acclimated to parts of the larger school culture but still wanted close friends who they could relate to.

#### *Adults at School*

Similar to the many different effects of their peers on the student experience, the New Heights players were influenced by a variety of adults. The adults, who were a part of their life at school, seemed to have an overwhelming positive influence on their educational experience. All those who stayed at their original school ranked their happiness with teachers and staff 4 or 5 out of 5, saying that their teachers were engaging and very supportive of their academics.

As I mentioned earlier, a majority of the positive influence that the

adults at the school had on the students was due to the structure of the school. Because they had a small staff to student ratio the teachers were able to have small advisee groups, small classes, and structured office hours where the students could visit and ask questions and the adult could get to know each individual student. All the students I interviewed talked about at least one adult, many times two or three, that they felt they could really trust at school. The students felt comfortable to approach these adults, who were often their coaches, advisors, or dorm parents, with personal, academic or family problems. This support network seemed to make a large difference in the student's adjustment to school. They served to create yet another attachment to the school and potential advocate for the student. These adults could also serve as an ally for the parents of the New Heights student. Because a lot of the schools maintained communication with the parent, no matter how the child was doing, the advisor or contact would have a personal relationship with the family if anything were to come up later on. When I asked Marcus about his athletic advisor at school he said, "she is practically like family now, she knows everything about me. She talks to my mom almost weekly." (Marcus) This also made it easier for the parent to feel comfortable when reaching out.

This personal attention carried into many different aspects of the schools' advisory system. The students had more personal help with college counseling and some students had specific athletic counselors. Again when

Marcus was talking about his counseling, “my advisor had helped me so much in my transition and academics, she knew what type of learner I was and when it came to college, she knew the type of school I would do well in.”

(Marcus) This on top of small classrooms with personal attention from teachers allowed for the student to excel academically, as well as feel close to a variety of adults in the school setting, which helps the student to feel attached and engaged in the school culture.

Similar to the negative influence of a bad coach, which was mentioned earlier in the athletics section, having a negative relationship with an advisor, dorm parent, or teacher could really hamper the entire educational experience at boarding school. Because the school is so small the expectations and reputations could follow the student to other aspects of their schooling career. Desire talked about this problem when she felt her basketball coach and dorm parent had influence on her punishments and were egged on by each other. “I think because the dorm parent and my basketball coach were really close, when I was on my coaches’ good side I was basically on my dorm parent’s good side, but if I was on his bad side, she wouldn’t have a lot of patience.” (Desire)

Overall boarding and private schools have high expectations of their students, it is what they are well known for and market to their future students. As Kendria said “I think teachers expect the best, so, if you give something that is less than that or less than those other people, they will be

the first ones to tell you to step it up.” (Kendria) The New Heights students all responded similar to Kendria, that their teachers had high expectations of them, which was similar to the rest of the class and student body. Because of the limitations of my study, I am not aware of the teacher’s expectations of the rest of the student body (besides the New Heights students’ views) and if the teachers had different expectations for the New Heights students.

A few of the students talked about repeating certain subjects when they entered boarding school, some ever repeated grades. I am unaware if this is standard procedure for students who are transferring from public to private school, but it was something that influenced and sometimes held back the New Heights students.

While I do not know what teacher’s expectations were of other students, the differential performance of New Heights players in math might provide some insight into differential treatment at the school. Among the New Heights students 11 out of 13 responded that they had trouble in math. One reason for this trend may be that student from New Heights students, coming from public schools, entered below grade level. This would correlate with the black-white achievement gap statistics presented previously. Or because the administrators had low expectations of their math skills, they were not encouraged to take the higher-level math courses. As Desire suggests “When I got to school they put me back in math because I wasn’t from a prep school and when I went to prep school they made me repeat a lot

of classes.” (Desire) A lot of the students had given up on their attempt to tackle math or science, “I struggle with math and science but I have learnt to accept that those aren’t going to be my strongest points.” (Kendria) Of the four current college students and one graduating senior, only one is potentially interested in a math related field (economics.) These influences could possibly come from the stereotypes that the adults have at the school or the influence of a stereotype threat, of which I will talk more about later.

Similar to how the students are directed to remedial math, it is also important to speculate whether or not the adult influence and/or reward structure of the basketball program pushed the New Heights students too heavily into basketball. Adults could do this by supporting the students in the basketball endeavors and never offering them opportunities for more academically focused extra-curricular activities, like a debate team or Model U.N. The teacher could pressure other students to join these types of clubs or to be well rounded while encouraging the New Heights member to stay focused on the things they are good at or are succeeding at, like basketball. Although these are not proven by my interview, as I did not ask questions specifically pertaining to this theory, the students did mention the pride they felt though basketball and the recognition they got from adults about their success on the court. It is important to consider who is pushed to academic extra-curricular activities, as opposed to basketball or athletics.

Another possible negative influence of the adults at the boarding

school was the limited culturally relevant pedagogy. When asked if the students felt like their culture was well represented in the academic work, they all said they did not read much about blacks or things by black authors, except when celebrating Black History Month. Although they were an overwhelming minority, in the schools they attended, the lack of culturally relevant pedagogy could be a possibly negative influence to their transition to the boarding school. Being able to relate literature and current events to the students individual life can help them engage and build an attachment to the material, helping them have higher academic performance. The virtual absence of such a curriculum at these schools could be explained by the possible lack of dedication to make a minority group at the school feel comfortable or a dedication to teaching what the school highlights as the classic or standard curriculum.

#### *Adults from New Heights*

My results on the relationships between New Heights students and adults may be biased because of my connection to New Heights. The students may have been reluctant to complain or say anything negative, because I was contacting them through New Heights' connections. With that being said, my information on New Heights and the influences it had on the students was overwhelmingly positive. The participants talked very highly of their connection to various New Heights coaches and staff members and how frequently they keep in contact. New Heights coaches kept close contact with



the individual student, the coach at their high school, and their parents. These connections reaffirmed to the student that people back home were checking in on them and it gave the student yet another ally with the school, especially because an organization like New Heights might have more capital, collectively, than the family of a New Heights participant. It also gives another layer of support to the families and a familiar face to connect with the experience of their child. New Heights opens more opportunity for communication, from all parties involved.

Although boarding school students do not need their services during the school year, New Heights does offer extensive programming for basketball and academic support. A few students mentioned getting New Heights tutoring when they were still attending school in the city or help with their financial aid forms and discussions with the boarding school. Summer opportunities through New Heights gave the students another advantage to stay up to par with their peers at the boarding school. New Heights' basketball teams are all very successful in the competitive New York City leagues, but their coaches also stress the importance of a good education and being a well-rounded student. New Heights does a great job of fostering the importance of both education and sports early on. New Heights also expects complete dedication and good sportsmanship conduct from the players, this allows the student to build positive and healthy athlete-coach relationships and basketball habits.

When I asked the students about their experience with New Heights or when they told unprompted stories about New Heights, I realized how personalized New Heights was with each of its players. They all had a favorite coach or a cell phone number they felt they could always call, "Rock is my coach, he would be one of the first people I would call if I was ever to need a hand or a talk" (Kendria) The few students who had behavioral problems or wanted to transfer schools, referenced the support and help of New Heights staff members, as an advocate on their behalf, sometimes even calling on personal connections at schools. New Heights is also dedicated to the individual student and does not push a certain image, they have encouraged their students to go to Division I, large, and competitive basketball programs and to Amherst College, a small, Division III school. They also continue to work with students who decide they enjoy football more than basketball or theater instead of sports; their commitment to all students is reflected in the positive influence they have on the student's adjustment to the boarding school and whatever comes after.

I acknowledge there could be more that New Heights could do to prepare the students for the transition to the boarding school culture but it is hard to pinpoint where or what to teach. At this point, New Heights is trying to make up for education inequalities but sending the students they work with to private and boarding schools. When they do this, they also have to make up for the deficiencies in financial, cultural, and social capital that the

students will face, as well as prepare the students academically. This is a hard task for New Heights to take on, as they have numerous students and the students are already far in their educational career. New Heights is influencing the students in a positive way, but as my analysis highlights, they are not completely at par with the average boarding school family.

#### *Adult Influences from Home/ Community*

The parents of the New Heights students played a complex role in the student's success at the school. Similar to that of the friends from home, the students did not have much pressure from the parents because of the distance between them and their parents. Obviously the family had an influence on them due to their dependence in relation to financial capital, support and constant contact; but it was still less influential on academics than it might have been if the student was at a day school. The parents or guardians were negative influences when it came to knowledge of the private schools system, advocating on behalf of the child, and financial pressures. But at the same time they were supportive of their child and all the students seemed to have maintained positive relationships with their parents.

When understanding the influences that the New Heights parents had on their child, it is important to understand what a typical parent of a boarding school child would do. In most cases a child's decision of high school is not up to them, the average student at boarding school did not choose to go to boarding school but rather were pushed to apply by their

parents. Therefore, when that child is admitted to the boarding schools the parents are supportive of the child. This seemed opposite of New Heights students. A lot of the students, when I asked, "how did your parents react to your choice of school?" said that their parents were uncertain if it was a good choice and questioned the necessity to leave home. Diego answered, "At first my mom was a little skeptical about it. She worried about me leaving home, about me being so far away. In the back of her head she thought, you are doing well in high school now, why do you need to go so far to do well." (Diego) Because the families were unfamiliar with the concept and culture they were unaware of the possible benefits they could have. This general unfamiliarity could potentially hurt the student when they need help or guidance from their family.

A lot of the parents had misconceptions of why a student would want to go to a boarding school; this was similar to the peers from their neighborhood. As Diego described above, it was hard to convince his parents that he needed to go so far away from home to get an education. Dontrell's mother thought that boarding school was for "parents who didn't know how to parent and needed to send their kid away." (Dontrell) Although, their parents' influences in the application process clearly did not have an affect (since they all matriculated at respective boarding schools) it did give a sense of unfamiliarity and disconnect between their families and their daily life.

When the families were not huge supporters in the decision to go

away, it was easy to question if the parents were able to be a support network when the students were having trouble. When I asked the students if they were able to talk to their parents about having trouble at school and things that were going on, they were mixed on their answers. Some said that their parents were always supportive and that they talked to them often. But as I speculate, due to a lack of cultural capital, the parents may have been supportive in their communication with the student but they might not have been able to give advice on how to approach a conflict or problem on campus. The parent could also more easily suggest coming home or transferring back to a school in New York, as they were uncertain of the benefits to begin with. Because of the inability to relate, the parents could have put a negative influence on the child's ability to navigate the school or seek advice, in comparison to the other boarding school students who possibly had advice on things that their parents did in boarding school.

Desire mentioned not talking to her mom when things were tough at school "My mom was going through a rough spot so I didn't want to mention anything to her, and I didn't want her to worry about me being so far away." Many of the students I interviewed were aware of their families' financial situation and spoke of parents who were unemployed or hit hard by the financial crisis. The drastic difference of what the child was dealing with on a day-to-day basis and what their families back home in New York were dealing with might have caused a rift in their communication and in the

parents' support for the student. Like Desire said and other students reiterated, they didn't want to worry their parents with school issues and instead kept them to themselves. These worries could have caused larger issues of stress and guilt because they were not able to help their parents; they were away from home, and the wealth of the school and students that surrounded them.

As mentioned earlier, adults' expectations of the student can have a big influence in how the student performs. When a teacher has high expectations of the student, they are often pushed and encouraged to succeed on higher levels than students whose teachers have low expectations. The same holds true of parents' expectations of the students. In my interview, I asked students "what their parents' expectations were of them at boarding school and possibly after." A majority of the students answered that their parents just expected them to do the best they could. With the lack of goals or expectations from the parents, it seems that most of the pressure to go to college or to do well academically would come from the student and their school. Besides the expectations of whether or not the student will go to college, compared to the average student, the New Heights students may have been missing the pressure from the parents on qualities that are deemed for "college acceptance." Things like being involved in more activities or getting into certain classes that colleges look for. The average boarding school student may get advice not only from the social networks on campus

but also informally from their parents, this was virtually non-existent and a negative setback for New Heights members.

All of these parental influences, have in some way, correlated to the parents' cultural capital. As I move into the cultural capital section, I will first continue my discussion on parents and their influences on the New Heights students. Another form of adult cultural capital that can influence the success of the child is through the amount of agency a parent thinks they have over the child's situation at school. Usually a parent that is not comfortable with the setting or is not aware of the ways in which it works (from personal or cultural experience) does not feel comfortable arguing or contesting the adults who run the school. The discomfort is possibly reinforced by the administrators and staff having stereotypes of the parents, of them not being good parents or not understanding what is going on at the school. In my interviews I had examples of two of these situations. First, when Desire was having trouble with her coach, whom she felt was untrustworthy and possibly using her, her mom "has occasionally [called the school because she was having problems] but it wasn't often because after a while, when she was to call, nothing really changed, so, I decided to stop calling her because it wasn't working effectively." (Desire)

The second incident happened to a student named Jessica<sup>14</sup> who was also having trouble with her coach. Jessica's parents complained and met with the school but nothing was done to meet their needs. Her parents decided to meet with other parents to see if they were having the same problems. As a group they decided to protest the coach by having the players not show up to a game; in total about 7 other girls on the team did not show up. After the parents had written numerous letters and met with the administration, the school punished the students who participated in the protest and suspended them from the team for the rest of the season. The punishment to the kids seemed unfair, Jessica had to sit out the rest of the season, and nothing of the coaching staff was changed. Jessica is currently on the same team, playing with the same coach. Although Desire's mother stopped trying to contest, it is shown in the example of Jessica's parents that sometimes demanding things of the school does not always work in the parent's favor.

#### *Financial Capital*

All of the New Heights Youth students are on some form of financial scholarship, although it differs by student and by school. This large decrease in the cost of the boarding school makes a huge difference in the area of financial capital. First, the boarding school experience in some cases is a

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<sup>14</sup> Jessica's name was given to me before I decided to focus on boarding schools. When I called and interviewed her, the differences were apparent of a day school and boarding school situation. This is the only time in my thesis where I use her as an example because of the school difference.



positive experience for the finances of the student. If they are on full scholarship, that could include not only their school fees, but food, room and board, which takes away a lot of stress from the parents, especially those who were paying for Catholic schools or at least supplies in the city. It also changes the dynamic of the student's relationship with spending money as it possibly allows extra money for their spending.

Dependence on the school for this large factor of financial capital could not always be positive. If the parent and student feel too reliant on the institution, it might make them feel like they have even less agency. The fear of a scholarship being taken away or somehow financial aid being diminished because of complaining, could keep many families silent. If the scholarship money is based on basketball the student could be making extra concessions to please the basketball coach, sometimes to an unhealthy level. The student could feel an overwhelming reliance to the basketball team, which could influence them not taking on any extra hobbies. If the coach has power over if they are on the team or not, therefore linked to money, the student becomes somewhat of a commoditization, which makes the coach-player relationship unhealthy.

When I asked the students about financial capital and the state of their families' finances back home a lot of the students did not know of specifics and seemed to have distance between their parents finances and how much it affected them day-to-day. When I asked if there was any time in which their

parents had trouble paying their bills, a few students expressed that there had been possible stress. When I asked if the students were able to have spending money, quite a few of them expressed guilt when talking to their parents about possible spending money or asking them for anything else. This dynamic of wanting spending money to fit in with their peers on campus but also understanding the stresses of finances back home, could add a lot of extra stress to the New Heights player. The spending money debate could also create a rift in the parent-student relationship and how they dealt with it, there could be possible resentment towards the student from the parent and vice versa. When asked if money was a source of contention between him and his parents, Diego replied,

No, I understood a lot was going on back home and that financially I was in a different position than most of my friends were. I think it bothered me at times, just mentally I was like, I just want... I just wanted better for me and I wanted to have more opportunities. ... It helped me push myself more. I want to be able to do this for my kids... I used it to my advantage. (Diego)

Based on the setup of a boarding school and the amount of free time around peers and also the shared living space, I thought spending money would be a bigger issue than it was with New Heights members. When asked where they get their spending money from, they all talked about modest allowances from their parents or savings from birthdays or summer jobs. When I asked if that caused a rift between them and their parents or

them and their friends, they mostly answered that they just didn't ask for it, "I didn't have much spending money, just because I knew things back home were, were rough." (Diego) A few of them said they were too busy on the weekends with sports to really have time to go out with friends and spend money, otherwise everything was provided for on campus. Diego stated that when he was hanging out with friends and was short of cash, he used to make another excuse and leave, "at first I definitely found myself like really frustrated because I was getting invited to go places and financially I knew I couldn't afford to pay for it and I didn't feel comfortable saying that." (Diego) This stress of not wanting to ask their parents for money, but feeling limited by not being able to go out with friends, could have changed the friendship dynamic for a lot of New Heights players. Instead of being friends with the people who they couldn't go out with on the weekends, they may have made friends with people who were in similar financial situations as them. For Diego, he continued to be friends with students who had spending money and slowly it became a more comfortable issue,

I just started being real with my friends and it came to a point where it was like, you know what, Diego, are you good? And if not they would look out for me and pay for it and I would get them back whenever I had the chance. (Diego)

Although many of the New Heights members talked about financial stresses in the family or struggles for spending money, none of the student-athletes held steady after-school jobs. They almost all mentioned having a job

at one point in their high school career, from dining hall services to babysitting faculty's children, but they all said it was too difficult to balance. This is especially true because a very small minority of the student body holds part time jobs, so the campus and the structure of the school is not set up to allow for those opportunities, especially as a basketball player.

A positive influence of the boarding school experience on the New Heights students' financial capital are all the perks that come with going to a boarding school. Aspects of financial capital that usually harm a student's success at school seemed to be covered by the boarding schools. They had access to an array of educational resources through the library, extensive tutoring programs and at some schools they were provided with personal laptops. Diego was the only student who I interviewed who did not have access to a personal computer. For the rest of the New Heights students, the school supplied their laptops. He talked about the struggles of trying to borrow friends' laptops or using the library. This is an example of how financial capital could negatively affect a student's schoolwork. He couldn't have as much time to work on papers as his peers did, because he did not always have access when it was a convenient time for him to work.

Another place that it seemed there was still a divide was on out of school activities: things such as summer programs or trips abroad. These opportunities can give the average boarding school student a possible advantage when it comes to cultural capital and how it translates in

application processes, but overall the boarding school experience fills a lot of holes left by financial capital in other more traditional school settings.

### *Cultural Capital*

New Heights students had both positive and negative influences when it came to cultural capital. The cultural capital that was privileged in the school setting was not always what they were used to. For Desire, it was knowing that at Quaker school, teachers do not use Mr. or Mrs., but instead go by their first names. In another case, LaShawn talked about frustrations of trying to adjust to the cultural capital of the new school, “there is this one teacher, I never made eye contact in my life, but she pressured me to make eye contact with her and I really didn’t want to. So, I got in trouble for it.” (LaShawn) These forms of cultural capital were important for the student to learn early on in their adjustment because they were things that were used daily.

A sense of knowledge or entitlement, similar to Lareau’s (2003) concerted cultivation, could have allowed the New Heights students the chance to get ahead. As Lareau pointed out, the interaction with adults in concerted cultivation could have trained the New Heights students to know when to approach teachers or in the case of Desire, to know that she had a right to complain about her coach to the administration and voice her concerns about his treatment. The lack of agency and knowledge of these issues could harm the students’ transition and success without them or their

parents even knowing. Again, as mentioned previously, when talking about parental influences, it is important to know what tracks lead to college or what admissions officers are looking for. A lack of knowledge of this cultural subject could drastically impact the student's ability to move ahead or gain admission to a top school.

Even within the smaller communities that students' built at their schools, there was a change in behavior when at school, which could be considered cultural capital. For example when talking to Dontrell about having to "act differently" at school he responded, "yeah definitely, just because there were certain things/ ways that I could joke around before, just being at home I would use the N-word, I had to cut it out, a lot." The pressure to act differently in the school atmosphere, he claimed, were both the influence of the maturity and the school environment, but also he felt pressure to not have that representation of his race, "not because of the fact that it was to fit in but because I didn't want to represent my race and my people as ignorant in that way." (Dontrell)

As the students adjusted to the new school environment, they may not have known all the cultural capital references the average boarding student knew, but they definitely learned a lot. When I interviewed some of the older New Heights students they were clearly better versed in the boarding school cultural capital; they referenced schools that their friends had gotten into and senior projects, where they were going to volunteer back in their community

(one specifically at New Heights.) This boarding school slang and knowledge puts the New Heights students within an elite minority of people who attended boarding schools.

There also seemed to be a unique trend in the larger student body taking interest in the cultural capital of the New Heights students. When I asked about possibly changing the way the students acted in class or around school, besides a few anecdotes, they all responded that they did not feel pressure to change. Diego answered quite the opposite, claiming, "I think if anything, I found my friends saying things, little slangs that I would be saying. I found them into learning more about my culture, like little Spanish things... I don't feel like I had to adjust at all." (Diego) This trend may be because youth culture has more of a desire to "understand," be world citizens, and have the ability to know cross-cultural references. This trend is often called "cultural omnivores," students who are interested in taking parts of all different cultures to make them self appear more well rounded. All in all the students seemed to adjust culturally and fall along the lines of a straddler. There were still key aspects of cultural capital they had not acquired, but overall it didn't make as large of an impact as expected.

### *School Discipline*

The difference in treatment by school discipline had a large effect on the student's ability to transition and succeed. I also see the school discipline problem as being a combination of the various influences that I have already

explained, such as social capital and parents' cultural capital. If a student or their parent has certain cultural capital to know how to talk with or exert their authority, there could be a difference in the way New Heights students deal with authoritative figures. Kendria, a New Heights student at Deerfield Academy, had a very successful transition from her middle school to Deerfield. She is very involved with the athletic and music scene on campus while being a senior prefect at the dorm. Next year she will be attending Williams College. When I asked her if she ever got in trouble or argued with an adult over something, she seemed to feel confident that her voice and reasoning was legitimate when raised against the schools policies, "we are in an AP system [punishment system], if there are flaws about them, I have no problem speaking up about them... there have been a few occasions where I kind of argued my way out of them for when I feel I didn't deserve them." (Kendria)

In other cases it seems that New Heights students were not comfortable contesting the rules or making their voice heard on discipline problems, for example when Desire told me she "had a lot of problems at STAB because I felt like I was treated unfairly a lot." (Desire) Desire ended up transferring from the school because of the coach; which shows that she was not confident her complaints were important enough for him to be punished, instead she just escaped the situation.

There were a series of thefts that occurred at LaShawn's school at the



end of her junior year. She was away for the weekend visiting her mom when a student reported that they had received a stolen item from LaShawn. When she returned back to campus, she was held by the administration and was accused of stealing the items. Scared and under pressure for 9 days, LaShawn took the blame and was kicked out of school. Weeks later, they found the stolen items in another student's room and the school rescinded LaShawn's punishment. Her ability to crack under the pressure of the administration and for them to get a confession out of someone who had not done anything shows the unfair connection between the school discipline and cultural capital.

#### *Racial tensions and stereotypes*

Overall the New Heights members did not seem greatly affected by issues of stereotypes or racial tensions. When prompted with what types of racial issues had happened on campus, if any, a lot of the students said that they felt comfortable on campus and things were dealt with, through classroom discussions or in one case a screening of the movie "Prep School Negro." A lot of the schools seemed to have opened places for discussion and allowed students to discuss their differences in a classroom environment.

Unfortunately, for LaShawn, this wasn't true. When I asked her about racial tensions on campus, she talked about numerous incidents of racist acts that had occurred on campus between the student of color community and teachers, students, and town residents. This negative environment could

have been brought on by stereotypes of the black students at the school. LaShawn talked about the stereotype that “everybody that was black did sports and did bad in classes. And a lot of us, some of us, try to make that not true, at all, because we are more than just some athletes. I am a good athlete that doesn’t mean I’m not good in the books.” LaShawn’s school seemed to be the only one, out of 13, where when asked if people had similar backgrounds to her she said, “only on the basketball team.” This could affect how stereotypes and racial segregation played out at the school. I am unable to say if the two are linked, but her story was the only example of both negative racial incidents and blatant stereotypes.

On the other hand, some players viewed the stereotype that basketball players or black students are not good in academics positively. Dontrell answered, “I definitely feel like I had a little upper hand in the sense that a lot of people are shocked when the African-American athlete, that is kind of quiet ends up opening his mouth and saying something in class.” (Dontrell) Dontrell goes on to talk about how that probably helped him because no one was expecting it, so they were pleasantly surprised. Although Dontrell was able to make that into a positive experience, for the most part, those stereotypes negatively affect the students from New Heights. Like Steele (in Massey et. al, 2003) argues, when things get tough and the student then needs to work harder, the stereotype of them doing poorly in school could distract or discourage them. Although none of the students (besides LaShawn)

alluded to a stereotype negatively affecting them, it is important to note the possibility of stereotypes that they were unaware of, and due to the limitations of my study, so was I.

Some of the students were nervous of stereotypes at the school and tried to avoid them or at least not fall into that image. For example, Kendria said she “didn’t want to be that girl who just sits at the table with all the black kids and always had black friends. It was important to me that I kind of got out of the, stereotype circle.” (Kendria) Because Kendria saw the way that black students were stereotyped as a group and the school seemed to self-segregate she wanted to be different and fit in with the larger school community, “When I was a freshman I was kind of, I hate to say this because sounds pretty bad, not racist, but towards black people, like I would be more reluctant to make black friends than I would white friends.” (Kendria) Kendria’s story was unique in comparison to the other New Heights members whose close friends were predominantly black.

Because the interview was completed over the phone, the students were unaware of my race, unless they made assumptions based on my voice. It is important to understand how this could have affected my results: students could have felt uncomfortable talking about race relations and stereotypes with me and could have downplayed their feelings in relation to them.

## *Conclusion*

The interviews presented me with a deeper understanding of the various theories that I had researched and predicted would influence the students. Being a recruited athlete and transitioning to the school on the basketball team was a positive aspect to the transition of the New Heights players, mostly through social networks that were formed through the team. The lack of academic preparedness was a setback for the New Heights students, but the school structure of the private school provided them with resources to succeed in the academic environment. The social networks influenced the students in a variety of ways, their friends from home had limited contact and therefore impact, their friends from school and New Heights were positive influences on academic attachment and engagement because they tended to be motivated students. The adults played supportive roles and brought varying degrees of cultural capital to assist the students in navigating the transition and subsequent years at boarding school.

The students seemed to navigate the difference in cultural capital in social settings, but had a little difficulty when it came to contesting rules or having their voice heard. Financial capital had a limited role in the transition and success of the students, because the school covered most expenses. Stereotypes and stereotype threat may have had an influence on the student, but due to the limits of my study I was not able to argue as to specifically how it influenced the New Heights students.

## Conclusion

I remember being at Mocon Dining Hall in the fall of my freshman year. It was the night before my first response paper was due in my Slave Religion Course and I was panicked. It was my first writing assignment at Wesleyan and I didn't know if I would be able to find an argument that was both critical of and insightful about the book we had just finished reading in class. How was I supposed to argue with *a book*? I couldn't imagine how I would know more than the author did. As I listened around the table, hoping to hear my classmates having the same struggle, I noticed that they were engrossed in dialogue. They were talking about something called "Friends schools" and the books they read in Gay and Lesbian Literature their senior year of high school. I was eager to get back to my room where I could Google the authors and the schools they were talking about; perhaps that would be the boost I needed to begin my own response paper. However, before I made it back to my room or started my response paper I had a realization that would impact me for the remainder of my college career: graduating at the top of the class from Cooper City High School had not prepared me for Wesleyan. In that moment I was curious to know if there was anyone else that felt the same way.

As I learned that night, and many times since, the transition to a private school is anything but easy. In this research, I analyze interviews

with New Heights participants and find five major factors that explain the success of this transition: (i) prior school preparedness and the private school structure, (ii) stereotype threat, (iii) financial capital, (iv) social capital, and (v) cultural capital.

*Prior school preparedness and private school structure:* My interviews suggest that New Heights students were not able to perform as well because of their initial shock from the difficulty and caliber of the private school education. In addition to the structures in place for them, the New Heights students seemed to need assistance more than their peers who had attended private school previously. They indicated to me that they had extensive networks of tutors that they relied on for help at their school, although they noted that their classmates didn't typically need or use the services. Overall, my findings on the New Heights participants' low level of preparedness were consistent with previous research on the black white achievement gap. Furthermore, their lack of access to high-quality teachers and good schools left them ill-prepared for private school. However, I found that most of them were able to succeed by utilizing the resources available to them. In fact, many New Heights students ended up performing well at their respective private schools and gained admission to college.

At the end of Chapter 1, I explored the possibility that the classroom and structure of a private school would benefit New Heights students. This notion was confirmed through my interviews and analysis wherein the

students attributed their school success to the small classroom environment and school support. My interviewees often spoke of the importance of the private school structure. In particular, they discussed the improvement of facilities and highlighted the extensive library, the well-equipped weight room, and the opportunities available for social networks to form within the small school. They felt that the nice equipment and tight-knit community had a positive impact on their ability to succeed. The students benefited from the supportive environment that was likely created by the small student body and, as Cookson and Persell note, “the dedication to the academic environment”. In addition, all of the participants talked about their close relationships with advisors, teachers and coaches and the large impact these relationships had on both their transition and continued success at the school.

*Stereotypes and Stereotype Threat:* Prior research would suggest that stereotype threat was likely a factor affecting the success of transitions for New Heights students. I predicted that their involvement in the basketball team would stereotype them as a black-athlete, thereby negatively affecting their ability to perform academically as well as boosting their performance and dedication to athletics. The interviewees indicated that they did not feel they were stereotyped and, in fact, they all felt their chance of success was equal to that of their peers. Although these findings contradicted my hypothesis, there is still potential that stereotypes existed, but because of the limits of my study I was not able to gather that information.

*Financial Capital:* Contrary to my expectations, my results showed that the prep/boarding school setting seemed to make up for the lack of financial capital. My findings suggest that the extra amenities provided on campus resulted in a minor discrepancy between the New Heights students and their classmates. For example, the school provided sporting equipment and educational resources such as laptops. In addition, an immense amount of resources were built into the schools' structure such as tutoring or access to study aids. Furthermore, the school provided all New Heights students with scholarship money, which further reduced any financial stress. As such, I found that the school did a good job of making up for potential negative influences by providing financial capital. Without access to these resources, the students would have been incredibly disadvantaged.

*Social Capital/ Networks:* I found support for the importance of social capital as evidenced by the role of the basketball team community in school engagement and achievement. The New Heights students were able to adjust more seamlessly into the social scene at the school because they had the small community within the school where they could make friends with both the larger student body and students with similar backgrounds to them. This connection to other students was important for social adjustment and school attachment. In addition to students, the basketball team gave the student-athletes an opportunity to form relationships with adults within the school such as basketball coaches or athletic-academic advisors. These social



networks also brought them closer to the school.

Basketball has often been written about negatively. For example, there are reports of poor graduation rates amongst top March Madness teams, there are indications of basketball having a negative impact on black male identity, and *Hoop Dreams* the popular documentary about high school basketball recruits highlights further poor images of basketball culture. Although these reports have validity and shine a light on an important issue within basketball culture, my findings suggest that these negative influences do not largely impact New Heights players. It is likely that the New Heights players are able to escape the negative aspects highlighted above because of their attendance at boarding schools. In fact, the New Heights players highlight a different positive side to basketball: a gain in social capital.

My results provide a more nuanced version of Carter's analysis of social networks and how they impact a student's success. The students I interviewed from New Heights all had many social outlets and distinct social networks. These networks all varied in influence and importance at different times in the student's education. At the time I interacted with the students, I found their academic influences to be based mostly on the boarding school culture that surrounded them, including both their proximate and contextual peers. Their parents/ families seemed supportive but had limited impact on their academics due to the geographic distance. Similarly, their friends from home seemed to have a slight emotional impact but did not seem to play a

large role while they were away at school. The social networks of both students and adults created through the New Heights program seemed to have a positive impact. Those networks helped the students have an advocate at both school and home- bridging the gap between the two prominent components of their lives.

Judith Blau (2003) suggests that close black friends who are academically engaged and motivated are a positive influence on black students. Blau's argument was expanded through my study. I found that black students, or in my sample New Heights students, benefited from being surrounded by motivated and academically engaged friends of diverse races and classes. If Blau's results are an argument for segregation of students based on performance, my results expand that and conclude that friends and peers with high aspirations and expectations (no matter their race) are a positive influence on an individual. This argument is similar to Cookson and Persell's (1991) that the motivation of elite boarding schools dominates the culture, which in turn positively affects the performance of minority students.

*Cultural Capital:* I also hypothesized that cultural capital would play a large role in the students' adjustment. In particular, I expected that their ability to navigate the social structure would predict their success at the school. My results found that the students had the ability to code switch; many of them talked about balancing both their boarding school friends and friends from home. In my interviews the students seemed to be able to

navigate the cultural capital that dominated the boarding and prep schools. For some that meant a majority of black friends with similar backgrounds, while others made friends with predominantly white students. Overall, New Heights students seemed confident and proud of their own cultures. This was exemplified by Manny when he noted that a few of his friends wanted him to share some of his New York and Spanish sayings. I believe the students' ability to code switch at and adjust to the culture at school was likely aided by either the overall school culture or a select group of students who were more "accepting" of other cultures.

When it came to issues of disciplinary actions by the school, deficiencies in cultural capital were most apparent. Cultural capital played a key role in students or parents contesting disciplinary decisions. The individuals that felt they had more cultural capital and understood the system also felt that they had more agency and the school should listen to them. For example, as mentioned earlier Kendria claimed that she felt comfortable talking to the administration when she felt she was unfairly disciplined or wrongfully scolded. LaShawn had the opposite reaction. When LaShawn was scolded for stealing laptops and ipods she confessed to the offenses even though it was later proven that she had not done it. This dichotomy of level of comfort with contesting disciplinary action had a drastic impact on the ultimate success of the students at the school. As evidence, LaShawn was expelled and never returned to boarding school

whereas Kendria, who contested the rules, continued her boarding school education.

In sum, my study resulted in several interesting and insightful findings. In particular, I believe the main highlights are my findings regarding the roles of prior preparedness and private school structure, the stereotype threat, and financial, social and cultural capital on the success of student transitions. While these findings are important to New Heights and their subsequent partners and participants, I continue to see a need for further research in this area.

#### *Future Research*

It continues to be important to understand the particular difficulties and successes of student transitions including those similar to the transition to boarding school by the New Heights students. An additional opportunity for research is to understand the potential positive function of black athletes exchanging their basketball skills in return for human and cultural capital in settings similar to these. One manner to explore this research idea is to observe and interview other members of the student body to identify how those students perceive and stereotype the transition students. This perspective on the transition would be interesting because my study was limited to the New Heights students' responses, and there is fruitful opportunity to realize if there is a discrepancy between the two perspectives. It would also be interesting to get more information and feedback from other

members of the students' social networks. For example, future researchers could interview teachers and administrators to better understand their perspective on the experience of New Heights students. Furthermore, it would be incredibly insightful to interview the parents of the students to see if the parents' cultural capital is impacting the transition. As a whole, future research can build upon this study and continue to comment on the larger social issues surrounding these programs, including issues such as the black-white achievement gap and out of school time programming.

#### *Critiques of High-Potential Youth Programs*

During this research process I learned a lot about the inequalities of the educational system in this country and the lack of access to the top high schools, both private and public, for some students. While I admire the work that New Heights Youth and other "high-potential" youth programs are doing, I understand that it is not without flaws and possible shortcomings. Indeed, we cannot solely rely on these organizations as "cures" for the larger societal issues we face in education. I highlight some of the challenges these organizations face.

First, the ability of a project like New Heights or Prep for Prep to reach the masses of the basketball community or larger neighborhoods is limited. As such, these programs are just a band-aid because they only allow a few "high-potential" students to elevate to success while leaving behind many others. For example, in 2008 Prep for Prep had 4,066 students who qualified for the

programs' testing standards and yet it has just a 6% acceptance rate because there are only 150 spots in the program.<sup>15</sup> These small numbers show the large percentage of the community that is still being underserved. The mission of New Heights is to help those who could possibly fall into the sports mentality of New York City youth. However, by limiting their admission to basketball players they neglect a large majority of their population.

Another important critique of the high-potential youth programs is their elimination of a significant amount of culturally relevant pedagogy by prioritizing middle-class values and focusing on predominantly white private schools. During New Heights' Summer Academy, the staff promotes applying to prep schools and the sportsmanship and good ethics of a basketball player. Although subtle, it is important to be aware of the message it can send to the students: in order to succeed you must attend a school that is predominantly white and wealthy, that is not located in your neighborhood, is not attended by your friends, and is unlike anything you are accustomed to. While I am confident that New Heights does not explicitly say it, these messages are still communicated through the extensive promotion of prep schools and their "elite" education. In my experience, I observed the challenge this created for New Heights students; they were confused. After discussing the different emphasis placed on school by

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<sup>15</sup> Wikipedia. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prep\\_for\\_Prep](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prep_for_Prep). Visited March 29, 2010.

Desire's friends from home versus her friends from boarding school she acknowledged "I feel like I have been bashing them, but it was just different." (Desire) The difficulty of having to face the contrasts between their two worlds can result in negative reflections on their home environment and bitterness about not being raised in a different setting.

Finally, it is important to consider the role of the New Heights, other high-potential programs, and students in the schools they attend. Who is benefiting most from the high-potential minority students? Based on the discourse of programs such as New Heights or Prep for Prep, it appears that the school is being generous by pledging spots for the students. As New Heights celebrated: "\$30 million in approximate total scholarship and financial aid dollars awarded to New Heights students- athletes from the country's top high schools and colleges."<sup>16</sup> This commentary often creates a situation where the student participants feel compliant and grateful. Furthermore, the student even can feel indebted to the institution because they believe the institution's self-interest was not served but instead it graciously allowed the student to attend. Almost all of the students at one point in the interview talked about how thankful they were for the opportunity to both participate in New Heights and attend boarding school. However, it should be noted, that the boarding schools also benefited from the enrollment of the players. Such programs create diversity in the school

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<sup>16</sup> New Heights Youth website. <http://www.newheightsnyc.org/program-model.html#success>. Visited March 29, 2010.

and therefore an opportunity for their white student body to learn about and interact with other cultures. One of the critical concerns related to such forced interactions, however, is the potential for reinforcing negative stereotypes of New Heights players, students of color, or scholarship students.

### *Looking Forward*

Although there are critiques of high-potential youth programs and out of school time programs, it is important to discuss what was learned from this study that could help address the problems of the black-white achievement gap and suggest new ideas for programs that are aimed at developing students. My study puts forth a good argument for incorporating engagement with a hook and strong mentorships because of the benefits of peers and social capital.

The findings from this study suggest that programs in the future would benefit from including a hook or engagement tool. In particular, other similar, high-potential, youth programs could include a sport connection or other activity prior to the adjustment period for the student. The smaller, more secure, social network helped the students adjust and feel a greater connection. Basketball was also important for their self-esteem, which can contribute to their success at the school. A lot of the students talked about the joy of being successful on the court and the positive attention that brought from their peers and teachers. This type of positive reinforcement about



belonging to the community and succeeding in a role that is valued by all of the community contributed to their successful attachment and subsequent success at the school. Basketball seemed like an important hook for New Heights because it allowed the students to use their basketball skills to gain cultural and human capital for the future. These results argue that programs should incorporate a hook that both attracts students and gives them positive recognition when they succeed. This could also be incorporated in the school setting by making sure there are things on campus (clubs, sports, etc.) that can reward each individual student and give them further attachment and engagement to the school.

The New Heights students had many strong mentors. Basketball coaches, the New Heights staff, and academic mentors all provided strong and consistent support. What was particularly unique is that this group of mentors was connected. In some cases the students talked about their academic advisor being assigned to them because of their connection to the athletic department. This connectivity helped form more cohesive bonds and helped the students adjust and learn how to handle balancing their academics and extra-curricular activities. Programs or schools in the future can benefit from making sure each individual student has a connection to the school through an adult or mentor. These connections are likely to increase the student's attachment with the school setting.

Another important aspect I would encourage programs and schools to

incorporate are ways to promote engagement with peers that would benefit the overall academic engagement of the student. The participants in my study reflected favorably on their friends' engagement, motivation, and dedication to academics. My study found that these social networks at school helped to increase success of the New Heights students. This concept would be difficult to incorporate in a large setting but a more manageable approach might be to encourage students in numerous fields and develop systems that engage them with academics and each other. It is also important to encourage reward structures that highlight student achievement in multiple ways, therefore students have many avenues in which to feel engaged and rewarded.

I think my findings and the ideas I have presented are valuable lessons to take away and implement in future programs. However, I have a suspicion that even with all these important qualities in a program, the quality of the school may still be the most important. The New Heights students did have a hook, strong mentorship, and motivated and engaged peers, but it is likely that the quality of the private boarding schools they attended was the largest factor impacting their success. The school's access to financial capital and high quality teachers is likely to make a large difference. Because my study did not focus on the teachers and the academic quality of the prep school relative to other schools, I cannot confidently say what is the largest factor; the answer will have to wait for an additional study.

## Appendix A: Interview Script

Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

Year started at school \_\_\_\_\_ Previous School \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

*Opening Questions: Get them talking...*

What high school did you attend?

What are some opening thoughts on your transition to this school?

What is your idea of a successful transition? Did you succeed at this?

What are your educational goals/ expectations?

Where are you from? Neighborhood?

*Overall happiness:*

*Circle one: 1- strongly dislikes; 2- dislike; 3-neutral; 4-like; 5-strongly like.*

Overall how do you feel about the academics at this school?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Overall how do you feel about the social atmosphere and our peers at this school?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Overall how do you feel about the staff or teachers at this school?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Overall how do you feel about the basketball at this school?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

*Human Capital*

- What is the highest level of Academic completion in your family?  
Parents? Siblings?
- What do your parents/ guardians do for a living?

*Social Capital/ Networks*

- Do you feel there are adults at your school you can trust? If so, who are they? What are their positions? How many are there? Position, race, age?
- Have you ever gone to a teacher or staff member at your school about a problem at school?
- Have you ever gone to a New Heights staff member about a problem at school?

- Have you ever gone to a family member about a problem at school?
- Have you ever gone to a peer/ classmate about a problem at school?
- Do you feel that you have the support of your friends and family at home? What do they think of your school choice? How many people do you stay in good contact with back home?
- Do you have friends with similar backgrounds? How many?
- Do you have friends with different backgrounds? How many?

*Cultural Capital---*

- What expectations does your family have of your educational and or basketball future?
- Do you feel comfortable arguing or contesting with adults in general? Those at your school?
- Do you parents feel comfortable, when they hear of a problem at school, calling and advocating with the school on your behalf?
- Do your parents agree or have opinions on the way your school is structured and the general goals of it?
- Do you feel that the teaching style or culture at this school is different than previous schools?
- Are there references in your classes to cultural figures you do not know?
- Do you feel your culture is valued in the classroom? Or How is your culture portrayed in the classroom? Via academic work?
- Do you feel comfortable bringing up your life experiences in the classroom or in academic work?
- Do you feel you need to have a “classroom language” that is different than how you speak at home?

*Academic Preparation*

- Do you feel you were well prepared for the academics at this school? If so, did you learn it at NHY or at previous schools?
- Are there certain subjects that are more difficult for you at this school?
- If you were having difficulties with the academics at this school, did you feel you could ask for assistance? Where from?
- Do you feel your peers were better prepared for the academics at the school?

*Theory of Acting White*

- Is the school you attend all white? Do you feel the need to act a different way?
- Would you want your friends/ family from home to see you in the classroom at school? Afterschool? In the dorms?
- Would you want your brothers/ sisters/ friends to attend this school?

*Peers*

- Where do you feel most at home, when at school?
- Do you enjoy your basketball team at school?
- Are most of your friends on the basketball team?
- Can you talk to them about your home environment?
- Race breakdown of friends?

- What are the educational expectations that your friends have of you? Is it different between your friends at home and your friends at school?
- How important would your friends say the following things are?  
(Massey, et. al 2003)

Uncool/ Not important: 1, Somewhat uncool/ Maybe important: 2, Neutral: 3, Somewhat cool, pretty important: 4, Very cool, very important: 5

Friends from home: Friends from NHY: Friends from school:

#### Academics

- Attend class regularly:
- Study Hard
- Get good grades
- Go to college/ finish high school

#### Social Life

- Be popular/ well liked
- Party/ Get Wild
- Have a steady boy/ girlfriend
- Play sports

#### Community Involvement

- Participate in religion
- Volunteer in community
- Have a job

#### Classroom

- Ask challenging questions
- Volunteer information
- Answer teacher's questions

#### At Home

- Study outside of class
- Help others with homework
- Solve problems creatively

#### *Financial Capital*

- Do you know your total family income? If so, would you mind sharing it?
- Did you have a campus job or afterschool job? How did this effect or hinder your schoolwork?
- Has your family had any interaction with the criminal justice system?
- Did you have access to study aides or educational materials at home? Such as reference books? Computers? Internet?
- Was there any point in your high school career that you didn't have heat or lights?
- Were there any point your family had difficulty paying bills?
- Was there any point that you were on food stamps or free/ reduced lunch?
- How did you get your spending money? Did this cause fights between you and your parents? Were you able to do things your friends did or was your spending money limited?

*Boarding School*

- Is it easier or harder to be away from home and do work?
- What do you miss most about being at home?
- Would you want your children to go to a similar school?
- What are the benefits of attending a school like this? Compared to your previous school? Is there anything that students are missing out/ lacking at this school?

*Transition:*

- What do you miss most about your old school?
- What is the toughest part of coming to this school?
- Has anything at this school made your academics suffer? Benefit your academics?
- Has anything at this school made your basketball suffer? Benefit your basketball?

*Stereotype*

- What were the expectations your teachers had of your academic achievement? Was that similar to other students in the class? Same race?
- How do your peers react to your involvement in basketball?
- Do you feel your peers stereotype you? If so, what do you think they think of you? Does this bother you?
- Do you feel you are stereotyped or looked down upon as a basketball player?
- Do you feel you are stereotyped or looked down upon as a minority?

*Stereotype Threat*

- Do you think an African-American can perform as well as a white student in these schools?
- Do you think you have to work harder to get the same grades as students in your class?

*Academic Performance:*

- Self reported grades.
- Self reported basketball statistics
- Self reported behavioral problems

*Those who dropped out:*

- Ask why they left. Similar questions above, but ask in context of school they left and school they currently attend.

## Appendix B: Statement to Interviewee and Consent Form

Interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Start: \_\_\_\_\_ Time End: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note: If recording, check to see if tape works before you begin.**

### **Introduction:**

Thank you for meeting today. The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of your experience in your current school and with New Heights Youth, Inc. In particular, I would like to hear about your experience with the academic work, adults and peers at your school and your transition into the school. The information you provide will be used to identify strategies to help other New Heights Youth, Inc. participants transition into these schools. This interview should take approximately forty minutes. Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw or refuse to answer a question at any time throughout the interview.

If you have any questions after we complete the interview, feel free to contact me at [ASturdy@wesleyan.edu](mailto:ASturdy@wesleyan.edu), or by phone at 954-512-3003. If you have any problems or concerns with the interview, please contact my advisor at Wesleyan University, Professor Daniel Long at [dalong@wesleyan.edu](mailto:dalong@wesleyan.edu).

### **Confidentiality:**

Your name(s) will not appear anywhere in the written report of these findings. I will ask you to record your name and school at the beginning of the discussion for transcribing purposes. I will be the only one with access to this interview transcription and tape. After the transcription process I will randomly assign a number to your tape and transcription, a file with your name and number correlation will be stored separately. If your answers are used in the final report, I will change your name to keep anonymity. The interview tapes and transcriptions will be destroyed May 1, 2010.

**Risks:** You may say something that contains sensitive information. If during our discussion you say something that you wish you had not said, let me know and I can erase the statement or make a note to not use that statement in any documents written for this project. The chance that you may say something sensitive is a risk of this project.

**Benefits:** A benefit of this study is that your interview may help others like you learn more about how to effectively transition into independent high schools. In addition your interview may help target patterns and strategies that could help New Heights Youth, Inc. better understand what their participants are going through at school and how to provide services to help support them.

**Academic Performance:** At the end of the interview, I ask you for your self reported performance both academically and behaviorally at your high school. If you give me permission I can obtain these records from New Heights Youth, Inc. Again, these records will be assigned the same random number as your interview and will not be linked to your name. I will be the only person with access to these grades and they will not be linked to your name in anyway during the analysis or writing process. Using academic and behavioral grades will help me to control for adjustment in relation to performance at the high school.

Would you be willing to allow NHY to disclose this information to me?

Parent/ Guardian	Yes	No
Participant	Yes	No

Signature of Participant or Oral Agreement

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent/ Guardian or Oral Agreement

\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix C: Debrief to Interviewee**

### Debrief to Interviewee

Thank you for your time participating in my study. If you have any questions about the use of this research please feel free to contact me. My email address is [asturdy@wesleyan.edu](mailto:asturdy@wesleyan.edu) or phone at 954-512-3003.

This research will be used to analyze how students have success and difficulties in adjusting to high school with New Heights Youth, Inc. If you would like a copy of the report or analysis please contact me with your information and I can email you a copy of the report.

## Appendix D: Facebook Message

Hi BLANK,

I got your name from Ted Smith and Rock Rosa at New Heights, that you have agreed to take part in my study. I am writing my Senior Thesis on NHY and the transition of their players to independent and private high schools. Hopefully the results and trends that I notice will help NHY better prepare future players.

To do this I am conducting interviews with NHY players and alumni and I was hoping that you would be willing to be interviewed? Since I am at school, it can be done over the phone. Please let me know when you are available and at what phone number. I would really appreciate it!

Hope to hear from you soon.

Best,

Lexi Sturdy

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