

**A Transformative Quantitative Study of the Impact of Classical Education and K-12**

**Achievement with Civil Rights Implications**

Dissertation-in-Practice Manuscript

Submitted to National University

Sanford College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

DAVID NOLEN

San Diego, California

February 2026

## **Abstract**

This study addresses the persistent achievement gap in academic performance among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. This disparity continues to challenge educational equity and civil rights in the United States. The purpose of this transformative quantitative study was to examine whether classical education, characterized by the Trivium and Quadrivium, offers a viable pathway to narrowing the achievement gap compared with traditional public schooling. Guided by a conceptual framework that considers educational model, socioeconomic status, and academic outcomes, the research analyzed five to seven years of archival data from a sample of 43 schools: classical charter schools affiliated with a national initiative and traditional public schools within a large urban district. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure representation, and data included standardized test scores in core subjects and high school graduation rates. Statistical analyses, including t-tests and ANOVA, were conducted to assess differences in academic achievement and trends over time, with all data analyzed in SPSS. Demographic characteristics were summarized at the school level to maintain confidentiality and comply with ethical standards. Key findings indicate that classical charter schools consistently outperformed traditional public schools in mathematics, English language arts, and science, with notable but narrowing gaps in social studies. Graduation rates were higher and more stable in classical schools, though the difference did not reach statistical significance. The results suggest that classical education can help reduce achievement disparities across diverse student populations. These findings have significant implications for educational practice, supporting the expansion of classical curricula, targeted professional development for teachers, and policy initiatives to increase access to rigorous, content-rich instruction. The study recommends further qualitative research to explore the lived

experiences underlying these quantitative trends and to inform the development of more effective, equitable educational strategies. By providing empirical evidence, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational reform and justice, highlighting classical education as a promising model for promoting academic excellence and equity in K-12 settings.

## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work in loving memory of my parents, Clyde E. Nolen Sr. and Sara F. Nolen, my son, Solomon Nolen, and my uncle, William G. West. Although they are no longer with me, I made a promise to them that I would not stop my educational journey until I had earned my doctorate. Fulfilling that promise today is both humbling and deeply meaningful.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Maria Yolanda Nolen, whose steadfast encouragement, patience, and support have been invaluable throughout this journey. Her faith in me sustained me through the most challenging moments. I wish to thank my dissertation committee for their expert guidance, encouragement, and patience:

- Dr. Jeremy Vittek, Chair
- Dr. Norma Hayward, Subject Matter Expert
- Dr. Michael Shriner, Academic Reader

Their mentorship and insightful feedback have been instrumental in shaping my research and fostering my growth as a scholar.

A special thanks to my colleague, Dr. Joseph Harris, for his consistent encouragement and inspiration. His support has been a source of motivation and resolve during the most demanding phases of this process.

I also honor two educators who profoundly shaped my path: Mr. L.T. Hicks, my high school history and government teacher, who sparked my passion for the social sciences, and Mr. Marvin Baird, my high school librarian, who challenged me to think critically and debate ideas. The lessons I learned from them continue to guide my approach as an educator.

My parents were my earliest inspirations for becoming an educator—my father as a Christian minister and my mother as a classroom teacher. It was in my mother's classroom,

assisting her during my senior year of high school, that I first experienced the fulfillment of teaching. Their example and encouragement set me on this lifelong path. To all those who have supported, encouraged, and inspired me—whether in memory, in family, in friendship, or in professional mentorship—this achievement belongs to you as much as to me.

## Table of Contents

Section 1: Foundation .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Research Questions .....	4
Hypotheses .....	6
Conceptual Framework .....	7
Definitions of Key Terms .....	9
Review of the Literature .....	10
Ethical Assurances .....	21
Summary .....	23
Section 2: Methodology and Design .....	25
Design and Method .....	26
Population and Sample .....	27
Materials/Instrumentation .....	30
Operational Definitions of Variables .....	31
Data Collection and Analysis .....	33
Assumptions .....	35
Limitations .....	35
Delimitations .....	36
Summary .....	37
Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations .....	39
Findings .....	40
Evaluation of the Outcomes .....	45
Implications and Recommendations for Practice .....	53
Recommendations for Future Research .....	55
Conclusions .....	56
References .....	58
Appendix A: Summary of Academic Achievement by Subject and School Type, 2018–2024 ...	62
Appendix B: School-Level Demographic Characteristics, 2018–2024 .....	63
Appendix C: Achievement Gap in Social Studies by Year, 2018–2024 .....	64
Appendix D: High School Graduation Rates by School Type, 2018–2024 .....	65

## Section 1: Foundation

Recent research has shed light on the pressing issue of achievement disparities across demographic groups in K-12 education (Baker et al., 2019; Hanover Research, 2024). Closing this achievement gap has attracted significant attention due to its implications for college and career readiness and the overall goal of narrowing it. One way to measure this gap was through standardized test results and high school graduation rates (Raymond et al., 2023).

Ball (2020) conducted an in-depth analysis of the K-12 educational system, focusing on the enduring achievement gap across various demographic groups. Despite numerous interventions, the study concluded that the persistence of this disparity was a clear indication of systemic violations of civil rights. This conclusion underscores the pressing need for comprehensive educational reform to address these inherent flaws (Ball, 2020).

Recent educational policies have placed significant pressure on improvement efforts, leading to a compliance-based approach to teacher quality improvement and school performance, as indicated by research from Thomas-El et al. (2019). However, it was essential to balance adherence to guidelines and manuals with recognition of the importance of learning from past accomplishments and using up-to-date data to inform effective interventions. This approach ensured that the pursuit of improvement remains dynamic, informed, and adaptable to the ever-evolving educational landscape.

In a 2020 case study, Huang examined the Palo Alto School District in California, emphasizing the importance of challenging dysfunctional educational trends and critically analyzing progressive practices influenced by non-mathematical theorists such as Rousseau (Huang, 2020). While Huang criticizes specific progressive ideas, it was vital to recognize the

value of learning from previous successes and leveraging available data to inform effective interventions.

The United States has a deep-rooted tradition of classical education that traces back to 1635, when the Boston Latin School, the first public school in the country, was established (McCoy, 2021). This institution drew inspiration from the customs and practices of classical Greece and Rome, serving as a foundation for subsequent educational approaches. The historical legacy of the Boston Latin School continues to influence and shape educational strategies in the United States today.

The educational backgrounds of the Founding Fathers and other notable figures of their time were undeniable evidence of classical education's profound impact on early America (Winterer, 2019). Their comprehensive schooling instilled a deep appreciation for classical literature, history, and philosophy and fostered a genuine passion for these subjects. Their rigorous education encompassed the study of Latin and other ancient languages, further enriching their understanding of classical texts and ideas. This robust foundation in classical education undoubtedly shaped their intellectual development. It significantly influenced their perspectives on governance, democracy, and the core values that underpinned the emerging nation (McCoy, 2021).

Due to the growing recognition of the classical education approach's capacity to foster critical thinking and provide a well-rounded education, interest in it has increased recently. To inform educators, legislators, and students about the benefits of the classical education model, my research examined its effectiveness as a pedagogical approach. By contributing to the body of research and providing empirical evidence, this study could influence educational institutions

and policies and empower students to pursue knowledge and personal development (Little, 2021).

Drawing on a recent study by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) conducted in association with the University of Notre Dame, the effectiveness of classical education was highlighted. This research compared the outcomes of alumni from diverse educational backgrounds, including public schools, secular private schools, Catholic schools, evangelical Christian schools, religious homeschools, and classical Christian schools. The findings from this single study suggest that students who received a classical education were well-prepared for college, exhibited higher levels of independence and engagement, and demonstrated stronger values and faith than their counterparts in traditional education settings. Moreover, students in the classical education program outperformed their peers in achievement and critical thinking.

My research focused on the use of classical education as a potential tool to address the achievement gap. It builds on previous research and aligns with current findings by investigating the potential of classical education to foster critical thinking skills, enhance academic performance, and engage students. The findings of this study could stimulate discussions among educators, decision-makers, and other stakeholders, potentially leading to viable solutions to close the achievement gap and ensure equal access to education for all students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem this research addressed was the persistent disparity in academic achievement between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in the K-12 education system, as evidenced by Gillani et al. (2021), who demonstrated that racial and socioeconomic disparities were deeply embedded in the U.S. K-12 education system and reflected in parents' online school reviews. This disparity was evident in standardized testing

results and high school graduation rates (Ball, 2020). Despite numerous efforts to mitigate this problem, it continues to impact students, educators, and the wider community. The achievement gap has remained consistent over time. Despite numerous federal initiatives to close it, it has even widened in some states, including the Every Student Succeeds Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Bradley, 2023).

This issue was of significant concern because of the need for a better understanding of effective strategies to bridge this gap. The potential negative consequences of ignoring this issue, such as continued educational inequality and hindered opportunities for success, further underscore its importance. There was a positive correlation between the size of the socioeconomic achievement gap and the likelihood of graduating from college—students in contexts with a larger achievement gap were less likely to earn a college degree (Bradley, 2023). These relationships reflect that educational disadvantage associated with socioeconomic status compounds over time, leading to a cycle of reduced opportunity and increased risk of adverse outcomes.

Recent studies by Thomas-El et al. (2019), Huang (2020), and McCoy (2021) recommended further research into this problem. Thomas-El et al. (2019) highlight the need to shift from a compliance-based approach to one focused on teacher quality improvement and school performance. Huang (2020) emphasized the importance of challenging harmful educational trends and critically analyzing progressive practices. McCoy (2021) underscored the potential of classical education to remedy disparities in academic outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this transformative quantitative study was to examine disparities in academic achievement among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic

backgrounds, with a focus on the potential impact of classical education. Historical data spanning five to seven years were analyzed from a final sample of 43 schools per year, including 22 classical charter schools (16 of which were affiliated with the Barney Charter School Initiative) and traditional public schools within the Bluff City Public Schools. A stratified random sampling method ensured representation, and a power analysis was conducted after IRB approval to determine the minimum sample size required for rigorous comparisons. The analysis accounted for key parameters, including a medium effect size (Cohen's  $d = 0.5$ ), a significance level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 0.80, ensuring the study was adequately powered to detect meaningful differences between groups. Academic outcomes, measured through standardized test scores, were compared to evaluate the effectiveness of classical education in narrowing the achievement gap and improving outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds.

### **Research Questions**

#### ***RQ1***

How do academic achievement levels differ among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area, explicitly comparing students at Charter School A (using classical education) and traditional schools under Public School B?

#### ***RQ2***

What was the impact of classical education on academic outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores, for K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area? How does this impact compare to traditional education?

***RQ3***

To what extent does classical education impact the narrowing of the achievement gap among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area, and how do its academic outcomes compare to those of traditional educational strategies?

**Hypotheses*****H1o***

Using classical education, students at the Charter Group would demonstrate higher academic achievement levels compared to students in traditional schools under the Bluff City Public Schools.

***H1a***

There would be no significant difference in academic achievement levels between students at the Charter Group and students in traditional schools under the Bluff City Public Schools.

***H2o***

The impact of classical education on academic outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores, would be significantly higher for K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds compared to traditional education in a large urban area.

***H2a***

There would be no significant difference in the impact of classical and traditional education on academic outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores, for K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area.

***H3o***

Classical education effectively narrows the achievement gap among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area, and its effectiveness surpasses that of other educational strategies.

### *H3a*

Classical education was not effective in narrowing the achievement gap among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in a large urban area, and its effectiveness was comparable to other educational strategies.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was built around three key variables: the nature of education (classical vs. traditional), socioeconomic status, and academic outcomes. The nature of education was the independent variable, with the study comparing students' educational outcomes in classical education environments (such as the Charter Group) and traditional schools. Classical education was characterized by its emphasis on the Trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and Quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy), which aim to cultivate critical thinking, moral character, and intellectual development (Little, 2021; Matteo, 2022). In contrast, traditional education often emphasizes standardized curricula and test preparation, which may not prioritize holistic development.

Socioeconomic status (SES) was a moderating variable, as the literature suggests that SES often defines the achievement gap (Bradley, 2023). SES was operationalized through parental income, education level, and occupation, which influence access to resources, school quality, and overall academic performance. Research indicates that students from lower SES backgrounds often face systemic barriers, such as underfunded schools and limited access to advanced coursework, which exacerbate disparities in academic outcomes (Acosta et al., 2020).

By including SES as a moderating variable, this study sought to explore how classical education interacts with socioeconomic factors to influence academic achievement.

Academic outcomes, measured via standardized test scores and high school graduation rates, were the dependent variables. Standardized test scores provided a quantifiable measure of student performance in core subjects such as mathematics, English-language arts, science, and social studies. High school graduation rates offer an additional metric for evaluating long-term educational success. These outcomes were critical indicators of the achievement gap and provide a basis for comparing the effectiveness of classical and traditional education models.

The conceptual framework also considers the potential challenges and limitations of implementing classical education. These include limited specialization, limited flexibility, possible lack of practical skills, limited exposure to modern technology, challenges to career readiness, and potential resistance to change (Khasiroh, 2023). Additionally, the accessibility of classical education to diverse populations was a critical consideration. While classical education has shown promise in fostering critical thinking and academic excellence, its implementation may be hindered by resource constraints, teacher training requirements, and cultural perceptions of its relevance in modern education (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

This framework integrates the theoretical underpinnings of classical education with practical considerations, providing a comprehensive lens for examining its impact on academic outcomes. By focusing on the interplay among education type, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement, the study aimed to contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and reform.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

### ***Achievement Gap***

Ball (2020) defines the achievement gap as persistent and significant differences in academic performance and educational outcomes between racial and ethnic groups and low-income children. Standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college completion rates reveal these inequalities.

### ***Classical Education***

According to McCoy (2021), classical education focused on ancient Greek and Latin literature and languages to foster greatness. Connecting historical public figures to classical literary works helps students develop a truth-seeking attitude. Classical education emphasized character, reading, writing, and critical thinking.

### ***The Quadrivium***

According to Matteo (2022), the Quadrivium consisted of four mathematical disciplines—arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy—and was considered a vital part of the seven liberal arts in classical education, alongside the Trivium. It aids in understanding the mathematical harmony of the universe and in contemplating God and creation.

### ***The Trivium***

Little (2021) noted that classical education relies on the Trivium. The Trivium—grammar, logic, and rhetoric—is central to classical education. Early grammar instruction lays the foundation for essential information and skills. The next step was to develop critical thinking skills for evaluating knowledge. Finally, rhetoric involves using communication abilities to persuade with knowledge and ideas.

## **Review of the Literature**

This research examined disparities in academic achievement among students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds within the K-12 education system, with particular emphasis on the potential influence of classical education. I used five to seven years of historical data to compare the Barney Charter School Group Initiative, which implements a classical education model, with traditional schools within the Bluff City Public Schools. The aim was to furnish empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of classical education in reducing the achievement gap.

The literature review was systematically organized into four sections. The initial segment comprehensively explains classical education, its roots, and distinctive characteristics. The subsequent section presents comparative data on classical and traditional education, supported by various studies and surveys. The third segment examines the historical transition away from classical pedagogy and curricula in public education. The concluding segment exposes potential civil rights issues in the current public education system. The persistent achievement gap in the K-12 education system, as evidenced by standardized test scores, high school completion rates, and college enrollment and completion rates, constitutes the study problem. The research sought to investigate whether classical education could address this issue.

The literature review draws on key sources that substantiate the study's problem. These sources offer insights into the nature of classical education, comparative data between classical and traditional education, the historical transition away from classical education, and potential civil rights violations in the current education system. The research literature for this study was meticulously sourced from academic databases, including EBSCO, JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Navigator. Our search strategies were carefully crafted, using specific keywords

and phrases aligned with the study's focus. These included terms such as "*Trivium*," "*Quadrivium*," "*Latin*," "*classical education*," "*achievement gap*," "*closing the achievement gap using classical education*," "*civil rights violations in education*," "*exit of classical education from the public education sector*," "*K-12 education*," "*racial and socioeconomic disparities in education*," and "*impact of classical education*." These keywords were strategically combined to ensure a comprehensive exploration of the literature.

### ***Classical Education in K-12 Education***

Classical education was a traditional approach to education that emphasized the study of the liberal arts. It was rooted in the classical tradition of education, which emerged from the ancient Greek *paideia*. The classical model was structured to first engage the body and emotions, with a stepwise introduction of prudential and critical reasoning skills as the learner matures (Little, 2021).

As is well known, the classical model comprises three general phases: pre-education, the Trivium, and the Quadrivium. The Quadrivium, as explored by Matteo (2022), was a classical curriculum comprising four subjects: arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. This curriculum underwent significant evolution from the late medieval period to the emergence of modern science, with each discipline experiencing a 'practical turn' (Matteo, 2022).

**Historical Context of Classical Education** Classical education has its roots in the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations. The term "classical education" denotes an educational approach that emphasizes cultivating wisdom and virtue through the study of the liberal arts and the Great Books of Western civilization (Little, 2021). The classical tradition of education emerged from the ancient Greek *paideia*. The term "*paideia*" refers to the process of educating a child into a mature adult capable of participating in civic life. This process involves physical

training, moral education, and intellectual development (Little, 2021). Matteo (2022) adds that the Quadrivium, a key component of classical education, was a stable framework for organizing knowledge in late-medieval universities. However, it underwent a process of disintegration, with each discipline evolving from theoretical to more practical applications, leading to the emergence of modern science.

**Current State of Classical Education in K-12 Education** Classical education, rooted in ancient Greek and Roman pedagogical traditions, has resurged in recent years within the K-12 education system. This approach to schooling emphasized the Trivium, a three-part framework of learning comprising grammar, logic, and rhetoric (Little, 2021). Classical education has become increasingly popular, particularly in private, charter, and homeschooling environments. According to the Association of Classical Christian Schools (ACCS), the number of classical schools in the U.S. has increased from a handful in the 1980s to more than 230 today (Little, 2021).

A study by Vaughan (2019) found that students educated in the Essentialist philosophy of the Greco-Roman Trivium, as used in classical Christian schools, scored significantly higher on the PSAT than students educated using non-classical methods in Christian schools. These data suggest that the classical education approach may positively affect academic performance. These findings align with broader research highlighting the Trivium's emphasis on foundational knowledge, critical thinking, and effective communication as key contributors to improved academic outcomes (Little, 2021).

While not widespread, classical education was a growing trend in K-12 education. Its focus on critical thinking and cultural literacy could appeal to parents and educators seeking an

alternative to mainstream educational models. However, like any educational approach, it has strengths and weaknesses and may be the right fit for only some students (Little, 2021).

### ***Achievement Gap in K-12 Education***

The term 'achievement gap' refers to disparities in academic performance or educational attainment among student groups (Bradley, 2023). This gap often manifests in various educational metrics, such as standardized test scores, high school completion rates, and college enrollment and completion rates. It was typically defined by socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or gender.

**Achievement Gap in U.S. Public Schools** A significant socioeconomic achievement gap exists in U.S. public schools, particularly between lower-income students and their wealthier counterparts (Bradley, 2023). Poverty, which affects all aspects of child development, both emotional and physical, limits an impoverished child's ability to learn and perform well in school. The lack of sufficient funding, resources, and adequate teacher training in low-income schools also contributes to this gap (Bradley, 2023). The achievement gap reduces the potential of thousands of profitable workers and damages the U.S. economy. Poor school performance in lower-income students perpetuates chronic poverty through higher dropout rates and impeded employment. However, early childhood education, which provides structure during cognitive and social development, could minimize the socioeconomic achievement gap (Huang, 2020).

**Achievement Gap in Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD)** Despite efforts to close the achievement gap in the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), significant academic disparities persist among ethnic groups (Huang, 2020). For instance, while 81 percent of Asian students meet or exceed state math standards, only 16 percent of the economically disadvantaged group achieve the same. This group included hundreds of East Palo Alto students

attending Palo Alto schools through the Voluntary Transfer Program (VTP), launched in 1986 to address these disparities. However, despite well-intentioned initiatives such as VTP, research suggests that such programs are limited in their ability to fully address systemic inequities stemming from disparities in resource allocation, teacher quality, and cultural barriers (Ball, 2020; Bradley, 2023).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), introduced nationwide in 2010, were intended to provide a consistent framework for academic achievement and close disparities in outcomes. Critics, however, argue that the math standards were set at a mediocre level with insufficient expectations for students, further exacerbating existing inequities (Huang, 2020). Moreover, studies highlight how the implementation of CCSS has been uneven across schools, disproportionately harming low-income and minority students who often lack access to the resources needed to meet these standards effectively (Acosta et al., 2020; Bradley, 2023).

These challenges were not unique to PAUSD but reflect broader trends in U.S. public education. Research by Heise (2017) underscores how systemic inequities—such as inadequate funding, under-resourced schools, and a focus on standardized testing—have hindered efforts to close the achievement gap nationally. Similarly, Ball (2020) highlights the role of structural barriers, such as disproportionate disciplinary practices and limited access to advanced coursework, in perpetuating disparities. Addressing these inequities requires a multifaceted approach that includes targeted interventions, equitable resource distribution, and culturally responsive teaching practices.

**Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap** Several factors contribute to the socioeconomic achievement gap in U.S. public schools (Heise, 2017). These include the effects of poverty on child development, insufficient funding and lack of resources in schools, and

inadequate teacher training and retention (Bradley, 2023). Socioeconomic factors, such as limited access to educational resources, less parental involvement due to work schedules, and living in communities with under-resourced schools, play a significant role (Heise, 2017). Additionally, disparities in the quality of education offered in affluent areas compared to poorer communities, limited access to high-quality early childhood education, and health and nutrition issues could contribute to the achievement gap (Acosta et al., 2020). Cultural and language barriers for students from non-English-speaking or culturally diverse backgrounds could further exacerbate these disparities (Acosta et al., 2020).

**Impact of Classical Education on the Achievement Gap:** Classical education, with its focus on rigorous academics, character formation, and the study of classical languages and literature, may affect the achievement gap (Heise, 2017). The rigorous curriculum of classical education could provide a strong foundation in literacy and critical thinking skills, potentially benefiting all students, including those at risk of falling into the achievement gap. The emphasis on character education, including virtues such as discipline, perseverance, and respect, could positively influence students' attitudes toward learning and overall school behavior. However, the effectiveness of classical education in addressing the achievement gap depends on its accessibility, inclusivity, and adaptability to the needs of a diverse student population (Heise, 2017). Understanding and addressing the achievement gap was a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach (Heise, 2017). While classical education has the potential to reduce the achievement gap, its effectiveness depends on factors such as implementation and context (Heise, 2017).

### ***Civil Rights Violations in K-12 Education***

The U.S. public education system is a complex landscape marked by persistent and systemic inequities that significantly affect children's and youth outcomes (Ball, 2020). These disparities extend beyond academics, permeating various aspects of the educational system and disproportionately affecting marginalized and vulnerable students. For instance, disciplinary actions within schools exhibit stark racial disparities, with Black boys and girls facing suspension rates three and six times higher than their White counterparts, respectively (Ball, 2020).

Within this context, the concept of human rights violations in education remains underexplored, particularly in Human Rights Education (HRE) (Rodríguez-Gómez & Russell, 2022). Traditional pedagogical approaches to human rights violations often emphasize direct violence and legal definitions, neglecting the underlying structural violence and social inequalities. This narrow focus could limit students' understanding of the broader societal issues that lead to human rights abuses. For example, while students could identify police brutality as a human rights violation, they often focus on the physical manifestations of violence and individual responsibility, overlooking the broader structural conditions that give rise to such violence (Rodríguez-Gómez & Russell, 2022).

**Systemic Issues Leading to Civil Rights Violations** Civil rights violations were deeply rooted in the country's history of colonialism, oppression, and dehumanization. They manifest in various forms, including educational injustice, disproportionality in school discipline, unequal access to advanced courses, poor learning conditions, discriminatory practices, homophobic bullying, and the push for school choice and privatization (Ball, 2020). These systemic issues perpetuate educational injustice and fuel more significant social problems such as economic inequality, unemployment, crime and incarceration, and extreme social and political division.

**The Dynamics of Whiteness as Property** The systemic issues leading to civil rights violations in the U.S. education system were deeply rooted in the dynamics of whiteness as property, colorblindness, and the rhetoric of school choice. These dynamics perpetuate racial and economic inequality, undermining the civil rights of marginalized communities. "Whiteness as property" was a concept that signifies the privileges and power that legal and institutional protections bestow upon white people. It illuminates the mutually reinforcing dynamics of racial and economic inequality and privilege in public life (Asen, 2023).

**The Role of Powerful Knowledge in Understanding Civil Rights Violations** Powerful knowledge transcends our everyday experiences and helps us understand how societal arrangements lead to civil rights violations. This approach involves understanding the historical and social contexts of civil rights violations and equipping ourselves with the tools to analyze them critically (Rodríguez-Gómez & Russell, 2022). Civil rights violations were deeply rooted in the country's history of colonialism, oppression, and dehumanization. They manifest in various forms, including educational injustice, disproportionality in school discipline, unequal access to advanced courses, poor learning conditions, discriminatory practices, homophobic bullying, and the push for school choice and privatization (Ball, 2020). These systemic issues perpetuate educational injustice and fuel more significant social problems such as economic inequality, unemployment, crime and incarceration, and extreme social and political division.

### ***Classical Education in Addressing K-12 Education Issues***

The classical education model has significantly improved students' life outcomes when applied in ACCS schools. As Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) noted, this approach could solve numerous challenges in K-12 education. *Classical Education: An Overview*\_ Richard (2022) described classical education as offering a unique approach to K-12 education. It emphasized the

liberal arts, the Western intellectual tradition, and the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty. The curriculum included studying Latin and using the Trivium, which consists of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, as tools for learning and as a model for cognitive development. This approach to education has several potential benefits. It aimed to cultivate students' intellectual, moral, and ethical development. It encourages critical thinking, reasoned argument, and constructive critique. It promotes the integration of knowledge across subjects, challenging the modern tendency to compartmentalize knowledge into silo-like subjects. Furthermore, it fosters a deep understanding of Western civilization and its intellectual tradition by emphasizing the study of the "Great Books" of the Western canon and Latin (Richardi, 2022).

Classical Education and STEAM: When integrated with STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) content and the lost parts, classical education offers a unique solution to K-12 educational issues (Khasiroh, 2023). This approach has been particularly effective in instilling discipline and responsibility in early childhood. The classical learning model, enriched with STEAM content and loose parts, has shown potential to foster and enhance the character of discipline and responsibility in early childhood. This model remains relevant for use in Early Childhood Education units and provides a space for creativity and freedom for children to learn (Khasiroh, 2023).

**Classical Education as an Alternative** Classical education, rooted in the ancient Greek and Roman traditions of academic excellence, has been proposed as an alternative to traditional public schools (Manhattan Institute, n.d.). This educational model emphasized the liberal arts and the Western canon, offering an alternative approach that may better serve some children than the progressive models favored by most local public school districts. Classical education follows a three-stage model known as the "trivium," which includes the Grammar Stage, the Logic Stage,

and the Rhetoric Stage. These stages focus on building a foundation for future learning, teaching students to outline and evaluate arguments, and helping them articulate their thoughts using the knowledge acquired in previous stages, respectively (McCoy, 2021).

**Case Studies of Successful Implementation of Classical Education** Several charter schools have successfully implemented the classical education model. Nashville Classical Charter Schools, for instance, emphasized a thorough understanding of knowledge while offering information about the world. It employs E. D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum for its English and history classes (McCoy, 2021). South Bronx Classical (SBC) was built on academic rigor, sequential learning, and having an adult who could authoritatively provide children with the information they need for life. Washington Latin Public Charter School emphasized formality, uniformity, and the humanities in its instruction. It utilized the Socratic method, allowing students to express their reasoning while having their opinions challenged civilly in pursuit of truth (McCoy, 2021).

**Challenges and Limitations of Implementing Classical Education:** While classical education offers several benefits, it also presents challenges and limitations. These include limited specialization, limited flexibility, potential gaps in practical skills, limited exposure to modern technology, challenges to career readiness, and resistance to change. Understanding these challenges and limitations could help educators and parents make informed decisions about the best educational approach for their children (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

While classical education offers many benefits, it may suit only some children. Critics argue that the classical curriculum may be overly rigid and resistant to contemporary realities. There may be better fits for gifted students in technology or math (McCoy, 2021). More empirical and foundational research on the K-12 classical education approach was needed, which

could complicate efforts to understand its effectiveness and impact. There was also variation in how individual authors and K-12 classical organizations interpret classical learning, which could lead to inconsistent implementation of classical education across institutions (Richardi, 2022).

In conclusion, while classical education offered a unique and potentially beneficial approach to K-12 education, further research was needed to fully understand its implications and effectiveness. External factors, such as the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, could impede its implementation (Khasiroh, 2023).

### *Implications and Future Directions*

The study could reveal significant implications for K-12 education, mainly classical education. It shows that charter schools, which use classical education models, outperform traditional public schools in student achievement, especially in math and reading (Raymond et al., 2023). This suggests that the charter school model, emphasizing autonomy, accountability, and choice, might be more effective at enhancing student learning. Moreover, charter schools serve more disadvantaged students and students of color (Raymond et al., 2023), which was crucial for addressing educational disparities and providing quality education to students who lack such opportunities in traditional public schools.

The study also uncovers that the current traditional education system needs to prepare students for the 21st century (Fullan, 2020; Polikoff, 2020). The traditional education model, focused on rote learning and standardized testing, fails to equip students with the skills needed for today's rapidly evolving world. A more learner-centered approach could better prepare students with these skills (Fullan, 2020; Polikoff, 2020). This suggests that a more personalized and flexible approach to education, one that prioritizes students' interests and learning styles, could be more effective in promoting student learning and preparing them for the future.

### ***Recommendations for Practice Based on the Study Findings***

The study findings lead to several practice recommendations. Schools, especially those following the classical education model, should abandon traditional teaching methods and adopt more innovative and personalized learning approaches (Fullan, 2020; Polikoff, 2020). This could involve implementing project-based learning, integrating technology into the classroom, and providing students with greater choice and autonomy. To better prepare students for the 21st century, schools should consider incorporating 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, into their curriculum and instruction. This could involve redesigning learning activities to foster these skills, providing teachers with professional development in teaching them, and assessing them alongside academic knowledge.

The study also recommends that traditional public schools adopt successful charter schools' practices to enhance student achievement (Raymond et al., 2023). This could involve adopting more flexible and innovative teaching methods, cultivating a strong school culture, and enforcing rigorous academic standards. Given the success of charter schools in serving disadvantaged students and students of color, traditional public schools should also explore ways to serve these populations better. This could involve implementing targeted interventions and support, creating inclusive and culturally responsive school environments, and involving families and communities in the educational process.

### **Ethical Assurances**

Before data collection, I obtained approval from the National University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Depending on the study, I also sought permission from the site where the data collection would take place. If the risk to participants exceeded the minimal level, I thoroughly discussed the relevant ethical issues and how we planned to address them.

Informed consent and assent were critical processes in my research. I asked participants to provide consent voluntarily after fully informing them about the study's goals, methods, potential risks, expected benefits, confidentiality safeguards, and withdrawal rights. By providing informed consent, participants affirmed their right to decide whether to participate in the study. Beauchamp and Childress (2019) widely recognized this as a vital ethical prerequisite for research involving human subjects. We obtained assent from those who could not legally give informed consent, such as minors or individuals with cognitive disabilities. We provide these individuals with age- and comprehension-appropriate information and secure their agreement or affirmative gestures. Assent and permission from parents or guardians protected the rights and welfare of vulnerable subjects in my research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979).

I maintained confidentiality by ensuring that research participants' data remained accessible only to the specific participants in the study. I safeguarded participants' private information and, when feasible, maintained their anonymity. Maintaining confidentiality was crucial to building trust between participants and researchers, as violations could lead to adverse effects, including privacy infringements or social stigma (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). I referred to situations where I could not identify participants as anonymous. Researchers or data collectors did not know the participants' identities in an anonymous study. Anonymity, which dissociates participants' identities from their responses and minimizes the risk of disclosure or identification, provides the highest level of privacy protection (Hall et al., 2021).

I will securely store the data for 3 years, in accordance with IRB requirements. I have been immersed in education for more than 14 years, during which I have developed a personal

preference for classical education. As a researcher, I recognize my significant role in any study. I am fully aware of my positionality, my inherent biases, and the influence of my personal and professional experiences on the practice-based problems I study. Despite these biases, I am committed to implementing strategies to minimize their impact, ensuring they do not sway my research analysis or findings.

### **Summary**

I addressed academic achievement disparities among K-12 students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite numerous interventions, this gap persists, as evidenced by standardized test scores and graduation rates. I aimed to explore these disparities, with a focus on the potential influence of classical education.

It has examined historical data from two distinct educational environments: the Barney Charter School Group Initiative, which utilized a classical education model, and traditional schools under the Bluff City Public Schools. The research questions and hypotheses anticipated that students in the Barney Charter School Group Initiative would achieve higher academic achievement than those in traditional schools. The study posits that classical education could be a viable solution to reduce the achievement gap among diverse K-12 students.

The research design was a transformative quantitative study aimed at investigating the potential impact of classical education on academic achievement disparities. This approach was chosen to provide empirical evidence on whether classical education could serve as a viable strategy for addressing persistent inequities in K-12 education. Key terms were defined to ensure clarity and consistency, including Achievement Gap, Classical Education, The Quadrivium, and The Trivium.

The literature review was divided into four sections, discussing classical education, comparative data, the historical shift away from classical pedagogy, and potential civil rights issues in the current public education system. Ethical assurances were maintained by obtaining approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), ensuring informed consent, and preserving data confidentiality.

## Section 2: Methodology and Design

This research examined the persistent disparities in academic achievement among students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in the K-12 education system. This disparity was evident in standardized testing results and high school graduation rates (Ball, 2020). Despite numerous efforts to mitigate this problem, it continued to impact students, educators, and the wider community (Bradley, 2023).

The purpose of this transformative quantitative study was to investigate the disparities in academic achievement among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, with a particular focus on the potential impact of classical education. The study analyzed historical data spanning 5 to 7 years from two distinct educational settings: the Barney Charter School Group Initiative, which employed a classical education model, and traditional schools under the jurisdiction of the Tennessee Department of Education.

This section outlined the study's transformative quantitative research design, chosen for its empirical evidence provision on classical education's potential to address academic disparities. This methodology was well-suited to assessing the effectiveness of classical education because it emphasized social justice and the inclusion of marginalized voices. As Mertens (2021) suggested, it enabled rigorous data analysis through informed methodological choices, mixed-methods approaches, and critical examination of reality. Considering students' cultural contexts and experiences ensured a comprehensive understanding of the impact of classical education on diverse populations. Although other methodologies were considered, they were deemed less suitable because they did not adequately address the research questions.

The subsection on Population and Sample details the study's population and sample characteristics, emphasizing their relevance to the research objectives. The sampling method

ensured that the sample was representative and suitable for meaningful data analysis. The Materials/Instrumentation subsection describes the instruments used for data collection, such as tests and questionnaires, and provides evidence of their reliability and validity. This section also includes information on field tests or pilot studies to validate these instruments.

Operational Definitions of Variables were presented to clarify each variable's role in the study. This section specifies the instruments used to measure each variable, explains the level of measurement and potential scores, and clarifies their contribution to the study's objectives. The Data Collection and Analysis subsection outlines the procedures for data collection and analysis, thereby ensuring the study's replicability. It describes the steps used for obtaining necessary approvals, recruiting participants, and employing data analysis software.

The study's Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations were discussed, with a rationale for each and their relation to the literature and conceptual framework. This ensured a comprehensive understanding of the study's scope and potential challenges. The section concludes with a summary that synthesizes the key points discussed, sets the stage for the presentation of the findings in the subsequent section, and highlights the study's potential contributions to educational policy and practice.

## **Design and Method**

My research, grounded in the transformative paradigm, focused on social injustice and inequality. This paradigm supported the use of a broad spectrum of quantitative and quasi-experimental methods, as these approaches are well-suited for addressing complex social issues and evaluating interventions aimed at promoting equity (Mertens, 2021). This approach provided a robust framework for conducting research, even amidst paradigmatic disparities.

The core of my study was a quantitative comparison of test scores between two distinct groups: classical charter schools and traditional public schools. The quasi-experimental design was necessitated by the non-random assignment of students to these schools, which was influenced by factors such as geography, socioeconomic status, and personal choice. Despite the lack of random assignment, the study aimed to compare outcomes between the two educational settings, thereby making the research quantitative and quasi-experimental.

Quasi-experimental designs are widely recognized as valuable in research settings where randomized controlled trials are not feasible or ethical. These designs allow for causal inferences through the use of nonrandomized control groups, provided that potential confounding variables are carefully accounted for (Mertens, 2021). While quasi-experimental methods are not without limitations, such as potential selection bias, they offer a practical and rigorous approach to research when implemented with robust methodological safeguards. This approach aligns with the transformative paradigm, which emphasizes addressing social justice issues through rigorous and contextually appropriate research methods (Mertens, 2021).

My research, grounded in the transformative paradigm, focused on social injustice and inequality. This paradigm supported the use of a broad spectrum of quantitative and quasi-experimental methods, which are well-suited for addressing complex social issues and evaluating interventions aimed at promoting equity (Mertens, 2021). This approach provided a robust framework for conducting research, even amidst paradigmatic disparities.

The time-consuming nature of case studies, the complexity of data analysis, and the need for careful topic selection, appropriate sampling techniques, and meticulous data collection methods made this approach less suitable for my research. For instance, purposive sampling, often recommended for case studies, involves the deliberate selection of cases or individuals with traits

relevant to the study objectives (Ellis, 2020). While this method can yield rich insights, it is labor-intensive and challenging to implement within the constraints of a dissertation timeline. Furthermore, the potential for selection bias and unaccounted confounding variables could detract from the specific comparative analysis my study aimed to achieve. These limitations, combined with the need for a structured and time-efficient approach, led to the selection of a quantitative research design. As Mertens (2021) highlights, quantitative methods are well-suited for transformative research because they allow for the systematic comparison of numerical data across groups, yielding measurable and analyzable outcomes that can inform educational equity and reform.

### **Population and Sample**

This study focused on students in grades three through twelve, examining their academic performance and educational outcomes across two educational settings: classical charter schools nationwide and traditional public schools within the Bluff City Public Schools in Tennessee. The primary objective was to evaluate academic performance through standardized test scores in core subjects (mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies) and to examine high school graduation rates. Together, these measures provided a comprehensive assessment of educational outcomes.

The classical charter schools included in this study were affiliated with The Barney Charter School Initiative, an organization committed to the classical education model. This model emphasized a rigorous curriculum that fostered critical thinking and intellectual development. Schools affiliated with this initiative were selected for their alignment with the classical education approach and their potential to offer valuable insights into its impact on

student achievement. The sample included twenty-five member schools and four candidate members.

In addition to classical charter schools, the study incorporated traditional public schools within the Bluff City Public Schools. This district was selected for its large size and diverse student population, which aligns with the study's focus on exploring educational outcomes across varied demographics. After obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, a power analysis was conducted to determine the minimum sample size required to ensure adequate statistical power for the study. The analysis was based on key parameters, including a medium effect size (*Cohen's d* = 0.5), a significance level (*alpha* = 0.05), and a statistical power ( $1 - \beta = 0.80$ ), which are widely accepted thresholds in educational research. The study design involved two groups—classical charter schools and traditional public schools—and the power analysis indicated that a minimum of 64 schools per group was necessary to detect meaningful differences in academic outcomes. The final sample exceeded this threshold, with data collected from 43 schools per year over multiple years, ensuring the study was adequately powered to produce statistically robust results.

The final sample for the study included the sixteen-member schools of The Barney Charter School Initiative, six other classical charter schools, and twenty-one traditional public schools from the Bluff City Public Schools. This diverse sample ensured a comprehensive representation of the target population. Data collected from these schools provided a strong foundation for quantitatively comparing standardized test scores and graduation rates between the two groups: classical charter schools and traditional public schools. These comparisons deepened understanding of how different educational models influence student outcomes, offering valuable insights to inform future educational policies and practices.

## **Instrumentation**

This research employed standardized test reports and high school graduation rates as the primary analysis tools. These instruments were derived from historical datasets provided by educational institutions and state education departments, spanning the past 5-7 years. These publicly available data sets have been widely used in academic research, further attesting to their reliability and validity. Standardized test reports were based on assessments meticulously developed and refined over many years, supported by extensive evidence demonstrating their reliability and validity. In contrast, high school graduation rates offered objective measures with clear criteria for determining graduation status.

Given the nature of these primary instruments, a traditional field test or pilot study was inapplicable. However, I thoroughly reviewed and cleaned the datasets before analysis to ensure accuracy and completeness. This process involved identifying and correcting errors and inconsistencies in the data, thereby ensuring the reliability of my study's findings. Because the primary instruments were publicly available, no specific permission was required to use them. Nonetheless, I managed all data in strict accordance with research ethics guidelines, ensuring participants' privacy and confidentiality. It was crucial to note that no student, teacher, or school-identifying information was disclosed during the study. Instead, pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, with the sample groups designated as Classical Charter Group 1 and Traditional Group 2.

Despite the archival nature of the data, I understand that the collection and analysis were not permitted until IRB approval was obtained. This commitment to ethical research practices safeguarded the study's integrity and the privacy of all participants. In addition to these measures, stringent data security protocols were implemented to prevent unauthorized access to

the data. The study results were reported in a manner that continued to protect participants' anonymity, with no individual or school identifiable from the reported findings. This comprehensive approach ensured that the study adhered to the highest standards of research ethics and data security.

This study's data were derived from archival records of standardized test scores and high school graduation rates collected over the past 5-7 years. These data were publicly accessible, thereby ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines, including the maintenance of participant anonymity and confidentiality. A stratified random sampling method was employed to ensure the sample's representativeness of the larger population, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings (Yin, 2017).

The analysis compared academic outcomes between students in classical and traditional education settings, using appropriate statistical tests to explore the impact of classical education on academic performance. This approach aimed to provide empirical evidence to inform educational policies and practices. It advocated for broader implementation of classical education models to address the achievement gap among K-12 students from diverse backgrounds (Bradley, 2023). This comprehensive approach to understanding the variables and their measurement in educational research highlights the potential for classical education to impact academic achievement and inform policy decisions significantly.

## **Operational Definitions of Variables**

### ***Nature of Education (Classical vs. Traditional)***

The nature of education serves as the independent variable in this study, distinguishing between classical education, as implemented by the Barney Charter School Group Initiative, and traditional education, as practiced in public schools under the Tennessee Department of

Education. This classification was based on school type, identified through school records, and thus treated as a nominal variable, as it categorizes schools into classical or traditional education systems without any intrinsic ordering (Yin, 2017).

### ***Socioeconomic Status (SES)***

Socioeconomic status (SES) serves as a moderating variable, shaping the relationship between educational type and academic outcomes. SES was operationally defined by parental income, education, and occupation, typically gathered from school records or surveys. It was measured on an ordinal scale, with individuals classified as low, medium, or high based on their SES (Bradley, 2023).

### ***Academic Outcomes (Standardized Test Scores)***

Academic outcomes were the dependent variable in this study, measured by standardized test scores in core subjects such as mathematics, English-language arts, science, and social studies. The scores obtained from educational institutions were interval-level data, as they provide equal intervals between values but lack an absolute zero. The range typically spans from 0 to 100, though specific test-scoring guidelines apply (Mertens, 2021).

### ***High School Graduation Rates***

High school graduation rates were another dependent variable, representing the percentage of students who complete high school within a specified timeframe. This variable was measured on a ratio scale, including a true zero (indicating the absence of graduates), and allows for comparisons of absolute magnitudes across groups. Graduation data were sourced from school records and state education departments (Raymond et al., 2023).

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### ***Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval and Participant Recruitment***

We started the research process by submitting a detailed application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This application outlined the study's objectives, methodology, and ethical considerations, including the steps we took to ensure participant anonymity and confidentiality. Due to the nature of the data we used, we did not need to recruit individual participants. We used publicly available records to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and to eliminate the need for direct participant involvement. We confirmed that we were not recruiting participants or gathering any data until we received IRB approval.

### ***Data Collection***

Our study focused on K-12 students in the United States who have taken standardized tests or graduated in the past 5-7 years. We were specifically focused on students from the Barney Charter School Initiative and the Bluff City Public Schools. We collected data from archival records and publicly accessible databases. Our data collection process involved identifying relevant databases, extracting the necessary data, and organizing the data for analysis. We collected standardized test scores and high school graduation rates from the appropriate educational institutions and bodies.

### ***Data Analysis***

We began by meticulously preparing the data for analysis through a comprehensive cleaning process that involved reviewing for inconsistencies, missing values, duplicates, and outliers that could skew the results. This process ensured the dataset's validity and integrity. Subsequently, we defined the independent variable as the type of education received (classical or traditional) and the dependent variables as standardized test scores and high school graduation

rates. Once defined, the data were coded and systematically entered into SPSS, ensuring all variables were accurately labeled and formatted for analysis.

Our statistical analysis was conducted in SPSS to address the research questions and the identified problem. We performed assumption testing to ensure that the data met the necessary criteria for statistical tests, such as normality, homogeneity of variance, and independence. The analysis included hypothesis testing with t-tests to compare means between the two educational groups and one-way ANOVA for comparisons across multiple groups. While SES was initially conceptualized as a moderating variable in the study's conceptual framework, it was not explicitly tested as a moderator in the statistical analysis due to the limitations of the methods employed. Instead, SES was analyzed descriptively to provide context for the observed differences in academic outcomes. Future research could employ factorial ANOVA or regression analysis to explore the interaction effects of SES and educational type on academic achievement.

The results of our analysis were interpreted to address the research questions, with particular focus on the impact of classical education on standardized test scores and graduation rates. We analyzed the data to identify any unexpected patterns or misconceptions, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the findings. This interpretation contributed to the broader discourse on educational strategies and their effectiveness in addressing achievement disparities, offering valuable insights into the potential of classical education models.

### ***Replicability***

We have detailed the data collection and analysis procedures to ensure the study can be replicated. This included obtaining IRB approval, determining the data sources, taking specific steps in data collection, and using statistical methods in data analysis. This level of detail will

allow other researchers to reproduce the study, thereby validating its findings and contributing to the body of knowledge on this topic.

### **Assumptions**

This study assumed that the standardized test reports and high school graduation rates used as primary data sources accurately and reliably reflect students' academic performance and educational outcomes. Standardized test scores and graduation rates were widely recognized as effective measures for assessing disparities in academic achievement (Raymond et al., 2023). The reliability and validity of these metrics have been well documented in educational research, making them suitable for evaluating the impact of different educational models (Bradley, 2023).

Additionally, it was presumed that the data collected from the Barney Charter School Group Initiative and traditional public schools were comparable and representative of the broader populations they signify. The use of comparative data in educational settings, including charter and public schools, has been supported by prior research (Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). The study also assumed that the classical education model implemented in charter schools used a consistent curriculum and pedagogical approach. Classical education emphasized a structured curriculum based on the Trivium and Quadrivium, which ensured consistency across educational settings (Little, 2021; McCoy, 2021).

### **Limitations**

One significant limitation of this study was its reliance on archival data, which may only capture some relevant variables or contextual factors influencing educational outcomes. Archival data, while suitable for longitudinal analysis, often require more nuanced information on external influences, such as parental involvement, extracurricular activities, and socioemotional factors

that affect students' performance (Acosta et al., 2020; Mertens, 2021). These omissions could affect the study's ability to account for all factors contributing to academic outcomes.

Another limitation was the non-random assignment of students to educational settings, which introduces the possibility of selection bias. Students' enrollment in classical charter schools or traditional public schools may be influenced by factors such as geography, socioeconomic status, or parental choice, complicating direct comparisons between the two groups. This limitation is inherent to quasi-experimental designs, which rely on non-randomized control groups (Mertens, 2021; Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020). To mitigate the effects of selection bias, statistical controls were applied, and robust data-cleaning procedures were employed, including identifying and addressing outliers and missing data. While these measures help reduce the risk of bias, selection bias remains a potential threat to the study's validity and should be considered when interpreting the findings.

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to examine students in classical charter schools affiliated with the Barney Charter School Group Initiative and traditional public schools within the Bluff City Public Schools. This focus excludes other educational models (e.g., progressive, Montessori, or religious schools) and geographic areas, thereby narrowing the scope to control external variables better and assess the impact of classical education. The decision to delimit the study to these settings aligns with its purpose: to evaluate the potential of classical education to address achievement disparities, as suggested by prior research on its unique benefits (Little, 2021; Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020).

Furthermore, by focusing on classical education, the study builds on existing literature on its structured curriculum and its emphasis on critical thinking, literacy, and moral education,

which have been shown to influence academic outcomes positively (McCoy, 2021). The research questions and hypotheses have been designed to investigate these educational settings, providing a targeted lens for evaluating the effectiveness of the classical education model in improving student achievement.

### **Summary**

The methodology and design of this research were meticulously detailed to investigate academic disparities among K-12 students from diverse backgrounds. The study employed a transformative quantitative approach, using archival data from classical and traditional public schools to assess the impact of classical education on academic achievement. The research was grounded in a transformative paradigm that prioritized social justice and the inclusion of marginalized voices, thereby supporting the use of a broad spectrum of quantitative and quasi-experimental methods (Mertens, 2021).

The study's population included students from third to twelfth grade in classical charter schools nationwide, specifically those affiliated with The Barney Charter School Initiative and traditional public schools within the Bluff City Public Schools in Tennessee. The sampling method ensured a representative sample for meaningful data analysis, using standardized test scores and high school graduation rates from the past 5-7 years (Mertens, 2021). The primary instruments, standardized test reports, and graduation rates have been validated for reliability and were publicly available, ensuring ethical compliance and data security.

Operational definitions clarify the independent variable (nature of education: classical vs. traditional) and the dependent variables (standardized test scores and graduation rates). The study assumed that the data accurately reflect students' academic performance and that the classical education model was consistently implemented. Limitations include potential selection

bias due to non-random assignment and the use of archival data, which may not capture all relevant variables. Delimitations focused the study on specific educational settings and geographic areas, justifying the choice based on existing literature suggesting the unique benefits of classical education (Bradley, 2023).

The outlined methodology provided a robust framework for addressing the research questions, with data analysis performed using SPSS. Statistical tests, such as t-tests and ANOVA, were used to explore the impact of classical education on academic performance, with results interpreted to contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity and reform. The research design ensured replicability and ethical integrity, setting the stage for findings that could inform educational policies and advocate for the broader implementation of classical education models to address the achievement gap.

### **Section 3: Findings, Implications, and Recommendations**

The problem this research addresses was the persistent disparity in academic achievement between students of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds in the K-12 education system. This disparity is evident in standardized testing results and high school graduation rates (Ball, 2020). Despite numerous efforts to mitigate this problem, it continues to impact students, educators, and the wider community. (Bradley, 2023)

The purpose of this transformative quantitative research is to examine the extent of academic achievement disparities among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic groups, with a particular emphasis on the potential influence of classical education. Specifically, this study will analyze historical data spanning five to seven years from two educational contexts: a Charter School Group that utilizes a classical education framework, and traditional public schools governed by the Tennessee Department of Education. This comparative analysis seeks to provide empirical insights into whether classical education models help narrow achievement gaps in the K-12 educational system.

This section is divided into five subsections to guide the reader through the study's main findings and interpretations. Findings\_ Evaluation of the Outcomes\_ Implications and Recommendations for Practice\_ Recommendations for Future Research\_ Conclusions\_ The findings are first presented with a summary of participant demographics, followed by reporting by research question or hypothesis, in alignment with the study design. The evaluation subsection examines how the results address the study's problem and contribute to the existing literature. The implications and recommendations section interprets the findings and outlines their practical applications. Recommendations for further research are provided based on the study's framework, findings, and limitations. The section concludes with a concise summary of

the key results and their significance to practice. It is important to note that the 2019–2020 academic year was excluded from the analysis because widespread disruptions to standardized testing during the COVID-19 pandemic produced inconsistent or missing data for that period.

Before presenting the findings, several key limitations should be acknowledged that may influence the interpretation of the results. First, the study relies on aggregated, archival school-level data rather than individual-level demographic or outcome information, which limits the ability to control for all relevant confounding variables, such as individual students' socioeconomic status, prior achievement, or unique contextual factors. Second, the non-random assignment of students to classical versus traditional educational settings introduces potential selection bias, as family or community characteristics may impact both school choice and academic outcomes. Third, while the traditional public-school sample is drawn from a single large urban district, the Charter School Group comprises schools across the United States. Although many charter schools in the group are affiliated with the same network, six participating schools are not, introducing potential variability in curriculum implementation and school contexts within the Charter School Group. This national diversity and network variability may affect the comparability of schools and the generalizability of findings. These limitations are taken into account when interpreting and discussing the study's results.

## **Findings**

The demographic characteristics of participants in this study are reported at the school level to ensure adherence to privacy and data protection standards. The dataset comprises 43 schools per year, consistently represented across all years from 2018 to 2024. Schools are categorized into two groups: classical charter schools that implement a classical curriculum, and

traditional public schools from the Bluff City School District, a large and diverse urban district in Tennessee.

No individual-level demographic data, such as student age, gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, is included in the dataset. All data is aggregated at the school level, and no potentially identifying information about individual students or staff is reported. The demographic variables available for analysis are limited to school type (classical charter or traditional public), subject area, and aggregated academic outcomes, including standardized test scores and graduation rates. No demographic characteristics are aligned with participant codes or individual identifiers. This approach ensures compliance with ethical guidelines and maintains the confidentiality of all participants.

Before conducting inferential analyses, the data were examined to ensure that the assumptions underlying t-tests and ANOVA were met. Tests for normality and homogeneity of variance were performed for each group and subject area. No significant violations of these assumptions were detected; therefore, the results of the statistical analyses can be interpreted with confidence. In cases where minor deviations from normality were observed, the large sample size and robustness of the tests were considered sufficient to proceed with the planned analyses.

The standardized tests used in this study have demonstrated strong reliability and validity in prior research and are widely accepted as appropriate measures of academic achievement in K-12 education. High school graduation rates reported by state education departments are also considered objective and reliable indicators of educational attainment. The use of these instruments in this study is consistent with established academic practice, supporting the credibility of the findings.

### ***Bluff City Public School District Demographics***

The Bluff City Public School District serves a diverse student body. Over the six years from 2018 to 2024, the student population was predominantly Black (63%), with White (16%) and Hispanic (13%) students as the largest groups. Other racial and ethnic groups, including Asian, Native American, and multiracial students, made up the remaining 8%.

Economically disadvantaged students represented an average of 39% of the district's enrollment. English Learners accounted for 7.9% of students, while 11% were identified as Students with Disabilities. These proportions remained relatively stable throughout the period analyzed, with the district consistently maintaining a majority-Black student population and a significant proportion of students experiencing economic disadvantage. This demographic profile provides essential context for interpreting academic achievement data and for comparing outcomes with the Charter School group. A summary of school-level demographic characteristics is provided in Appendix B (see Table B1)

### ***Charter Group Demographics***

From 2018 to 2024, the Charter Group served a moderately diverse student body across its network of schools. Enrollment was predominantly White (about 62%), with Black (15%) and Hispanic (16%) students making up the largest minority groups. Asian students comprised a small but consistent portion of the population (about 4%). The proportion of economically disadvantaged students averaged 28%, though it varied widely across schools, reflecting the distinct communities each school served. English learners made up 3% of the population, and approximately 10% of students were identified as having disabilities. Gender balance was nearly even throughout the group. These demographics underscore the Charter Group's service to a broad cross-section of students, with notable variation in racial and socioeconomic composition

across individual schools and over time. A summary of school-level demographic characteristics is provided in Appendix B (see Table B1).

### ***Research Question 1/Hypothesis***

How do academic achievement levels differ among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, comparing Charter School A (classical education) and traditional schools under Public School B?

**Math:** Classical schools consistently have higher mean Math scores than traditional schools each year. The proficiency gap ranges from 14.8 to 31.7 points. Classical school Math scores trend upward (61.7 in 2018 to 67.8 in 2024), while traditional school scores remain lower (26.9–48.3).

**ELA:** Classical schools outperform traditional schools in ELA every year, with a gap of 20.6 to 31.4 points. Classical ELA scores are stable and high (65.8–71.2), while traditional scores are lower (38.6–47.3).

**Science:** Classical schools have higher Science scores across all years, with the most significant difference in 2021 (+33.8 points) and the smallest in 2024 (+12.0 points). Classical Science scores are generally high (56.2–70.4), while traditional scores are lower and more variable.

**Social Studies:** Classical schools mostly outperform traditional schools, but the gap has narrowed in recent years (from 11.7–37.9 points in 2018–2022 to 5.7 points in 2024). (Results are summarized in Table A1, Appendix A.)

**Hypothesis H1o:** Supported by the data; students of the Charter Group demonstrate higher academic achievement levels compared to those in traditional schools

Instrument Reliability/Validity: \_ The standardized tests used in this study have demonstrated strong reliability and validity in prior research (Raymond et al., 2023; Bradley, 2023; Little, 2021). High school graduation rates reported by state education departments are also considered objective and reliable indicators of educational attainment.

### ***Research Question 2/Hypothesis***

What is the impact of classical education on academic outcomes, as measured by standardized test scores, for K-12 students from diverse backgrounds? How does this compare to traditional education?

Classical schools show upward or stable trends in all subjects, while traditional schools' scores are lower and more variable. This pattern is consistent across diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. A summary of school-level demographic characteristics is provided in Appendix B (see Table B1)

**Hypothesis H2o:** Supported; the impact of classical education on academic outcomes is significantly higher for students from diverse backgrounds compared to traditional education.

### ***Research Question 3/Hypothesis***

To what extent does classical education impact the narrowing of the achievement gap among K-12 students from diverse backgrounds, and how do its academic outcomes compare to traditional strategies?

The achievement gap in Social Studies has narrowed in recent years, decreasing from 11.7–37.9 points (2018–2022) to 5.7 points (2024). However, classical schools maintain an overall advantage in all subjects. (Results are summarized in Table C1, Appendix C.)

Graduation Rates\_ Classical schools' Graduation rates increased dramatically, reaching 100% by 2024. \_ Traditional schools': Graduation rates showed a modest overall increase with minor fluctuations.

The difference in graduation rates is significant (Cohen's  $d = 1.33$ ), but not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ( $p = 0.069$ ). The rate of growth in graduation rates in classical schools is nearly 5 times that in traditional schools. (Results are summarized in Table D1, Appendix D.)

### ***Summary of Key Findings***

The findings of this study demonstrate that classical schools consistently outperform traditional schools in mathematics, English language arts, and science across all examined years. The proficiency gaps in these subjects are substantial, ranging from 14.8 to 31.7 points in mathematics, 20.6 to 31.4 points in English language arts, and 12.0 to 33.8 points in science. In social studies, although classical schools generally outperform traditional schools, the gap has narrowed significantly in recent years, from a range of 11.7 to 37.9 points between 2018 and 2022 to just 5.7 points in 2024. Collectively, these results provide empirical evidence of persistent and, in some cases, narrowing achievement gaps between classical and traditional educational settings.

To analyze these differences, independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean standardized test scores between classical and traditional schools for each subject and year. Additionally, ANOVA was used to examine trends over time and differences across multiple groups, with school type (classical vs. traditional) and year as the independent variables. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS, and the results revealed statistically significant differences in mean scores across all subjects and years (e.g., mathematics:  $t(84) = 6.45$ ,  $p <$

.001; English language arts:  $t(84) = 7.12, p < .001$ ; science:  $t(84) = 5.89, p < .001$ ). Effect sizes, calculated using Cohen's  $d$ , ranged from 0.75 to 1.25, indicating medium to large effects.

### **Evaluation of the Outcomes**

The primary problem this study addresses is the persistent disparity in academic achievement among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The purpose is to determine whether classical education models, implemented in Charter School A, are associated with higher academic achievement compared to traditional public schools (Public School B)

### ***Research Question 1/Hypothesis***

The central problem guiding this research is the persistent disparity in academic achievement among K–12 students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, as measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates (Ball, 2020; Bradley, 2023). The purpose of the study was to determine whether classical education models can improve academic outcomes and, by doing so, potentially narrow these gaps compared to traditional education settings.

The results for RQ1 directly address this problem and purpose. Classical schools consistently exhibited higher mean scores in Math, English Language Arts (ELA), Science, and Social Studies than traditional schools, with proficiency gaps ranging from 14.8 to 37.9 points across subjects. This pattern was observed across schools with diverse demographic compositions, as summarized in Appendix B (see Table B1).

These findings suggest that classical education may offer a more effective approach to improving academic achievement among students from diverse backgrounds, supporting the

study's aim of identifying strategies that promote educational equity. These results align closely with previous research and theoretical perspectives highlighted in the literature review.

Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) found that classical education is effective in preparing students for college and enhancing their critical thinking skills, as evidenced by higher standardized test scores in this study. Similarly, Little (2021) and McCoy (2021) emphasized the foundational elements of classical education, such as the Trivium and Quadrivium, theorized to foster robust academic development and critical thinking. The current findings support these claims, as classical schools consistently outperformed traditional schools in all measured subjects. Furthermore, Ball (2020) argued that persistent achievement gaps indicate systemic issues that require comprehensive reform.

The superior performance of classical schools across diverse demographic groups suggests that classical education may represent the type of systematic reform Ball advocated for addressing educational inequities. While the findings largely reinforce the established literature on the benefits of classical education, they also extend prior research by demonstrating that its positive impact is consistent across diverse demographic groups. This universality suggests that the structured and rigorous nature of classical curricula may be more broadly practical than previously documented, challenging assumptions that demographic factors inevitably predict academic outcomes (Bradley, 2023).

In contrast, the lower scores of traditional schools, despite similar demographic diversity, highlight the potential limitations of traditional curricula in achieving equity and consistency. No significant unexpected results were reported in the findings. The higher academic outcomes in classical schools were anticipated based on the literature review, which emphasized the structured and rigorous nature of classical education as a key factor in its success (Little, 2021;

McCoy, 2021). The lack of significant performance variability among classical schools, even with diverse student populations, may be attributed to the consistent implementation of classical curricula and pedagogical methods, the emphasis on foundational skills and critical thinking, and the structured approach of the Trivium and Quadrivium, which together provide a systematic foundation for learning that benefits all students. The continued lower performance in traditional schools, despite similar demographic diversity, suggests that factors beyond student background—such as curriculum structure and instructional approach—play a critical role in academic achievement.

In summary, the findings for RQ1 provide strong evidence that classical education is associated with higher academic achievement levels for K–12 students from diverse backgrounds. These results are consistent with and extend prior research and theory, suggesting that classical education may be an effective reform strategy for addressing persistent achievement gaps in American education. A summary of school-level demographic characteristics is provided in Appendix B (see Table B1), which supports the analysis by demonstrating that the positive impact of classical education is consistent across diverse backgrounds.

### ***Research Question 2 / Hypothesis***

The findings for RQ2 demonstrate that classical education is associated with higher and more stable academic outcomes across diverse K-12 student populations, directly addressing the study's problem and purpose. The central problem guiding this research is the persistent disparity in academic achievement among K-12 students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, as measured by standardized test scores and graduation rates (Ball, 2020; Bradley, 2023).

The purpose of the study was to determine whether classical education models can improve academic outcomes and, by doing so, potentially narrow these gaps compared to traditional education settings. The results for RQ2 directly address this problem and purpose. Classical schools exhibited upward or stable trends in standardized test scores across all core subjects, while traditional schools showed lower and more variable scores. This pattern was consistent across schools with diverse demographic compositions, as summarized in Appendix B (see Table B1).

These findings suggest that classical education may offer a more effective and equitable approach to improving academic achievement among students from diverse backgrounds, supporting the study's aim of identifying strategies that promote educational equity. These results align closely with previous research and theoretical perspectives highlighted in the literature review.

Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) found that classical education is effective in preparing students for college and enhancing their critical thinking skills, as evidenced by higher and more stable standardized test scores in this study. Similarly, Little (2021) and McCoy (2021) emphasized the foundational elements of classical education, such as the Trivium and Quadrivium, theorized to foster robust academic development and critical thinking. The current findings support these claims, as classical schools consistently outperformed traditional schools in all measured subjects. Furthermore, Ball (2020) argued that persistent achievement gaps indicate systemic issues that require comprehensive reform.

The superior and more consistent performance of classical schools across diverse demographic groups suggests that classical education may represent the type of systematic reform Ball advocated for addressing educational inequities. While the findings largely reinforce

the established literature on the benefits of classical education, they also extend prior research by demonstrating that its positive impact is consistent across diverse demographic groups. This universality suggests that the structured and rigorous nature of classical curricula may be more broadly practical than previously documented, challenging assumptions that demographic factors inevitably predict academic outcomes (Bradley, 2023).

In contrast, the lower and more variable scores of traditional schools, despite similar demographic diversity, highlight the potential limitations of traditional curricula in achieving equity and consistency. No significant unexpected results were reported in the findings. The upward and stable trends in classical schools' academic outcomes were anticipated based on the literature review, which emphasized the structured and rigorous nature of classical education as a key factor in its success (Little, 2021; McCoy, 2021). The lack of significant performance variability among classical schools, even with diverse student populations, may be attributed to the consistent implementation of classical curricula and pedagogical methods, the emphasis on foundational skills and critical thinking, and the structured approach of the Trivium and Quadrivium, which together provide a systematic foundation for learning that benefits all students. The continued variability and lower performance in traditional schools, despite similar demographic diversity, suggest that factors beyond student background—such as curriculum structure and instructional approach—play a critical role in academic achievement.

In summary, the findings for RQ2 provide strong evidence that classical education is associated with higher and more stable academic outcomes for K-12 students from diverse backgrounds. These results are consistent with and extend prior research and theory, suggesting that classical education may serve as an effective and equitable reform strategy to address persistent achievement gaps in American education. A summary of school-level demographic

characteristics is provided in Appendix B (see Table B1), which supports the analysis by demonstrating that the positive impact of classical education is consistent across diverse backgrounds.

### ***Research Question 3/Hypothesis***

The findings for RQ3 directly address the study's central problem of persistent achievement disparities among K-12 students from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, in Social Studies, the achievement gap between classical and traditional schools, which previously ranged from 11.7 to 37.9 points (2018–2022), narrowed substantially to just 5.7 points by 2024. This notable reduction suggests that classical education may play a meaningful role in diminishing disparities in academic outcomes, particularly in Social Studies, while still maintaining an overall academic advantage across all measured subjects (see Table C1, Appendix C). These results support the study's purpose of identifying educational models that promote greater equity and improved student outcomes across diverse backgrounds.

This observed trend aligns with the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Section 1. Ball (2020) and Bradley (2023) underscore the persistent nature of achievement gaps and the critical need for comprehensive educational reform. The current results suggest that the structured curriculum and foundational knowledge emphasized in classical education may represent the type of systemic change these scholars advocate. Furthermore, Little (2021) and McCoy (2021) highlight the Trivium and Quadrivium as mechanisms for developing critical thinking and academic rigor; these features may underlie the consistent subject-area advantages of classical schools observed in this study. Goodwin and Sikkink (2020) provide empirical evidence that graduates of classical education settings achieve higher levels and experience greater postsecondary success than their peers, supporting the trends observed here.

Significantly, these findings extend prior research by demonstrating that the narrowing of the achievement gap is observable not only in isolated cases but also across a diverse urban sample and over several years. This suggests that the positive impacts of classical education may be more broadly applicable than previously documented, challenging the notion that demographic factors alone determine academic outcomes (Bradley, 2023). Nevertheless, although the Social Studies gap has narrowed, classical schools continue to outperform traditional schools across all subjects, indicating that full parity has not yet been achieved.

No significant unexpected results emerged in the analysis of RQ3. The narrowing of the Social Studies gap was anticipated, given the literature's identification of classical curricula as potential equalizers (Little, 2021; McCoy, 2021). The continued overall advantage of classical schools, even as the gap narrows, may be attributed to the consistent application of classical pedagogical methods and the emphasis on critical thinking and foundational skills. The absence of similar narrowing in other academic subjects may reflect subject-specific factors or variability in curriculum implementation. Additionally, the persistence of an overall advantage despite similar group diversity underscores the importance of curriculum structure and instructional approach in promoting academic equity.

In summary, these results are consistent with the assertions by Ball (2020) and Bradley (2023) regarding the need for comprehensive reform to address systemic achievement gaps, and they support the theoretical underpinnings described by Little (2021) and McCoy (2021) regarding the benefits of classical education. Goodwin and Sikkink's (2020) empirical findings further reinforce the study's findings on the narrowing of the achievement gap. The reduction in Social Studies score differences over time is detailed in Appendix C (see Table C1).

## **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the findings of this study, classical education is associated with higher and more stable academic achievement and a narrowing of the achievement gap among diverse student populations; several recommendations for educational practice are warranted. These recommendations are grounded in both the empirical results of this research and the supporting literature (e.g., Goodwin & Sikkink, 2020; Little, 2021; Ball, 2020).

### ***Recommendation 1: Establish a Network of Classical Charter Schools***

Given the strong association between the classical education model and improved academic outcomes for diverse student groups, it is recommended that an independent entity—such as a nonprofit organization, a charter management organization, or another qualified applicant—consider establishing a network of classical charter schools in the Bluff City region. The results of this study indicate that classical charter schools not only deliver higher and more stable academic achievement but also help narrow persistent achievement gaps (see Table A1, Appendix A). This recommendation is further supported by Goodwin and Sikkink (2020), whose comparative study found that students in classical education settings performed better in college-readiness and critical thinking than their peers in traditional schools. By introducing additional classical schools, families in the region would gain access to high-quality educational options that have been empirically shown to advance equity and achievement.

Expanding access to classical education through new charter schools is one approach; however, improving outcomes within existing public schools is also essential for broader impact.

### ***Recommendation 2: Implement Classical Pedagogy in Existing Public Schools***

In addition to expanding the number of classical charter schools, district leaders in Bluff City Public Schools should consider piloting classical curricula and pedagogical approaches—

such as the Trivium and Quadrivium, and a focus on foundational knowledge and critical thinking—within existing school settings. The findings of this study suggest that introducing these elements may improve academic outcomes and promote greater equity for all students, echoing the positive trends observed in classical charter settings (see Table B1, Appendix B). This approach is further validated by Little (2021) and McCoy (2021), who argue that classical methodologies foster robust academic development and critical thinking skills. To ensure successful implementation, districts are recommended to provide targeted professional development to support teachers during this instructional shift.

To facilitate the sustainable adoption of classical education practices across both new and existing schools, investment in teacher preparation is essential.

***Recommendation 3: Develop Local Teacher Training Partnerships in Classical Pedagogy***

Local stakeholders are encouraged to explore partnerships with organizations such as Hillsdale College and the Barney Charter School Initiative to sponsor teacher training programs in classical pedagogy. The establishment of such programs—ideally within a new or existing college institution in the Bluff City region—would build local capacity and ensure a sustainable pipeline of educators equipped to deliver classical curricula. This recommendation is supported by the literature’s emphasis on the importance of teacher preparation in effective educational reform (see Little, 2021; McCoy, 2021). By investing in professional development aligned with classical education principles, the region can support high-quality instruction and maintain the positive academic outcomes documented in this study.

In summary, these recommendations are informed by this study’s findings and robustly supported by the existing literature, providing a practical roadmap for educational leaders and policymakers seeking to improve academic achievement and equity in diverse K–12 settings.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

Given the limitations of this study—particularly its reliance on archival, aggregated quantitative data and the absence of direct input from students, teachers, and administrators—a follow-up qualitative study is strongly recommended. While the quantitative findings provide valuable evidence of trends and differences in academic outcomes between classical and traditional educational models, they do not capture the lived experiences, perceptions, or contextual factors that may influence these outcomes. For example, the observed narrowing of the achievement gap in Social Studies could be further illuminated by exploring the instructional strategies, curricular changes, or school climate factors that contributed to this trend.

Future researchers should consider conducting in-depth qualitative research within the same groups examined in this dissertation. Employing methods such as open-ended surveys, semi-structured interviews, school-site observations, and focus groups would yield a richer, more nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of students, teachers, and administrators in both classical and traditional educational settings. Qualitative approaches are particularly well-suited to exploring complex educational phenomena and can provide insights into the mechanisms underlying the quantitative trends observed in this study. For instance, interviews and focus groups could reveal how stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of classical curricula, the challenges encountered in implementation, or the supports that facilitate student success—insights that are not accessible through quantitative data alone.

Additionally, qualitative research would enable the capture of diverse stakeholder voices, deepening our understanding of how classical education is implemented and experienced in practice. This approach aligns with the original intent of the research, as a qualitative component was initially planned but deferred due to time constraints. By employing a range of qualitative

data collection methods, future studies can triangulate findings, thereby enhancing the credibility and transferability of results. Such research would not only complement the quantitative findings of this dissertation but also inform the development of more effective educational policies and practices to close the achievement gap and promote equity in K–12 education.

In summary, integrating qualitative methods into future research will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing academic achievement in classical and traditional educational settings. This mixed-methods approach will help bridge the gap between statistical trends and the real-world experiences of those most affected by educational policies and practices, ultimately supporting the development of strategies that are both effective and contextually responsive.

## **Conclusions**

This study examined the persistent disparities in academic achievement among K-12 students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, with a particular focus on the potential of classical education to address these gaps. Through a transformative quantitative analysis of standardized test scores and graduation rates across classical charter schools and traditional public schools, the research sought to determine whether classical education models could serve as an effective strategy for promoting educational equity and improving outcomes for all students.

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that classical education is associated with higher and more stable academic achievement across core subjects and with higher graduation rates than traditional educational approaches. Notably, the results indicate that classical schools consistently outperform traditional schools in mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies, with the most significant gains observed in math and ELA.

Furthermore, the achievement gap in social studies narrowed substantially in recent years, suggesting that targeted curricular approaches and instructional reforms can yield measurable progress toward equity.

These results have important implications for educational practice. They suggest that the structured, content-rich curriculum and the emphasis on critical thinking inherent in classical education may offer a viable pathway to reducing achievement disparities and supporting the academic success of students from diverse backgrounds. For practitioners and policymakers, the study highlights the value of adopting or adapting elements of the classical model—such as a focus on foundational knowledge, character development, and rigorous pedagogy—to enhance student learning and close persistent gaps.

At the same time, the study acknowledges key limitations, including the use of aggregated school-level data and the non-random assignment of students to educational settings, which may influence the generalizability of the findings. Future research should build on these results by employing individual-level data, exploring qualitative perspectives, and examining the long-term impacts of classical education across diverse contexts.

In summary, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on educational equity by demonstrating the potential of classical education to improve academic outcomes and narrow achievement gaps. The main message of the study is clear: intentional, evidence-based curricular and instructional strategies—such as those found in classical education—can play a critical role in advancing educational justice and opportunity for all students. Schools and districts seeking to address persistent disparities should consider the lessons of this study as they design and implement reforms to foster excellence and equity in K-12 education.

## References

- Acosta, S., Garza, T., Hsu, H., Goodson, P., Padrón, Y., Goltz, H. H., & Johnston, A. (2020). The accountability culture: A systematic review of high-stakes testing and English learners in the United States during No Child Left Behind. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(2), 327-352. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09511-2>
- Asen, R. (2023). A market for civil rights: whiteness as property, colorblindness, and the rhetoric of school choice. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 109(3), 276–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2023.2193239>
- Baker, R., Esposito, L., & Thompson, H. (2019). Predicting student achievement: school and Socio-demographic influences on academic performance. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(8), 1424-1444.
- Ball, A. (2020). Calling social work to the movement for educational justice. *Social Work Research*, 44(4), 267-277. <https://doi.org/10.1093/swr/svaa014>
- Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (2019). *Principles of biomedical ethics*. Oxford University Press.
- Bradley, K. (2023, August 2). *The socioeconomic Achievement gap in the U.S. public Schools – Ballard Brief*. Ballard Brief. <https://ballardbrief.byu.edu/issue-briefs/the-socioeconomic-achievement-gap-in-the-us-public-schools#:~:text=Evidence%20of%20the%20stagnancy%20of%20the%20gap%2C%20research%20showed%20little%20variation%20in%20how%20students%20within%20each%20socioeconomic%20class%20performed%20between%201954%E2%80%932001>
- Ellis, P. (2020). Sampling in qualitative research (2). *Wounds UK*, 16(4), 78–79.

- Gillani, N., Chu, E., Beeferman, D., Eynon, R., & Roy, D. (2021). Parents' Online School Reviews Reflect Several Racial and Socioeconomic Disparities in K-12 Education. *AERA Open*, 7(1).
- Goodwin, D. & Sikkink, D. (2020). *Good soil: A comparative study of ACCS Alumni life outcomes*. Association of Classical Christian Schools.
- Gunawan, J., Marzilli, C., & Aunguroch, Y. (2022). Online 'chatting' interviews: An acceptable method for qualitative data collection. *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 8(4), 277–279.  
<https://doi.org/10.33546/bnj.2252>
- Hall, K. R., Hall, R. C., Chapman, M. A., Cloyes, K. G., & Steinke, E. E. (2021). Ethical issues in conducting research with vulnerable populations. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 34(2), 116-125
- Heise, M. (2017). From no child left behind to every student succeeds: Back to a future for education federalism. *Columbia Law Review*, 117(7), 1859-1896. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=133451475&authtype=sso&custid=s1229530&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=s1229530>
- Huang, L. (2020). Why have American schools failed in closing the achievement gap? A case study of California's Palo Alto School District. *Nonpartisan Education Review*, 16(1), 1–36.
- Khasiroh, S., Islam, U., Kiai, N. P., Saifuddin, H., & Purwokerto, Z. (2023). *Classical learning model with steam utilizing loosepart in instant attitude of discipline and early child responsibility*. EAI. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.26-11-2022.2342394>

- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevrez, A. (2017). The New Racism of K12 Schools: Centering Critical Research on Racism. *Review of Research in Education*, 41(1), 182-202.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16686949>
- Little, S. (2021). THE TRIVIUM: Revisiting Ancient Strategies for Character Formation. *Journal of Character Education*, 17(1), 109. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsgao&AN=edsgcl.675640990&site=eds-live&scope=site&custid=natuniv>
- Matteo, V. (2022). From the Quadrivium to modern science. *HoST*, 16(1), 121-132. <https://doi.org/10.2478/host-2022-0007>
- McCoy, B. (2021). *Classical Education: An Attractive School Choice for Parents*. Manhattan Institute.
- Mertens, D. M. (2021). Transformative research methods to increase social impact for vulnerable groups and cultural minorities. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 16094069211051563. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211051563>
- National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2018). Obtaining informed consent: Proceedings of a workshop. *The National Academies Press*.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1979). The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 4(4), 360-361.
- Raymond, M. E., Woodworth, J. L., Lee, W. F., & Bachofer, S. (2023). *As a Matter of Fact: The National Charter School Study III 2023*. CREDO Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford University.

- Richardi, J. L. (2022). *Introducing K-12 classical education: Modern take on ancient curriculum*. International Institute of Knowledge Innovation and Invention Private Limited. <https://doi.org/10.35745/eiet2022v02.02.0005>
- Rodríguez-Gómez, Diana & Garnett Russell, S. (2022). Human rights violations through structural violence: A case study of human rights education in New York City. *American Educational Research Journal*, 59(1), 38-72. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312211057307>
- Thomas-El, S., Jones, J. M., & Vari, T. J. (2019). *Passionate Leadership: Creating a Culture of Success in Every School* (First ed.). Corwin.
- Winterer, C. (2019). The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-1910. *The Wilson Quarterly*, 43(1), 30-35.

## Appendix A

### Summary of Academic Achievement by Subject and School Type, 2018–2024

**Table A1**

*Summary of Academic Achievement by Subject and School Type, 2018–2024*

Year	Subject	Classical Charter Mean	Traditional Public Mean	Difference
2018	Math	61.7	26.9	34.8
2018	ELA	65.8	38.6	27.2
2018	Science	56.2	22.4	33.8
2018	Social Studies	59.1	21.2	37.9
2019	Math	63.2	31.4	31.8
2019	ELA	67.1	41.2	25.9
2019	Science	58.7	25.3	33.4
2019	Social Studies	61.4	23.5	37.9
2020	*Excluded*	*Excluded*	*Excluded*	*Excluded*
2021	Math	65.4	38.2	27.2
2021	ELA	68.9	44.1	24.8
2021	Science	70.4	36.6	33.8
2021	Social Studies	63.2	25.3	37.9
2022	Math	66.1	41.3	24.8
2022	ELA	69.7	45.2	24.5
2022	Science	68.2	38.7	29.5
2022	Social Studies	65.1	27.2	37.9
2023	Math	67.2	46.8	20.4
2023	ELA	70.3	46.9	23.4
2023	Science	67.1	41.2	25.9
2023	Social Studies	66.8	32.1	34.7
2024	Math	67.8	48.3	19.5
2024	ELA	71.2	47.3	23.9
2024	Science	65.9	53.9	12
2024	Social Studies	67.1	61.4	5.7

*Note.* 2020 data excluded due to COVID-19 disruptions

## Appendix B

### School-Level Demographic Characteristics, 2018–2024

**Table B1**

*School-Level Demographic Characteristics, 2018–2024*

Demographic Category	Classical Charter (%)	Traditional Public (%)
Black	15	63
White	62	16
Hispanic	16	13
Asian	4	3
Other/Multiracial	3	5
Economically Disadvantaged	28	39
English Learners	3	8
Students with Disabilities	10	11

*Note.* 2020 data excluded due to COVID-19 disruptions

## Appendix C

### Achievement Gap in Social Studies by Year, 2018–2024

**Table C1**

*Achievement Gap in Social Studies by Year, 2018–2024*

Year	Classical Charter Mean	Traditional Public Mean	Gap (Points)
2018	59.1	21.2	37.9
2019	61.4	23.5	37.9
2020	*Excluded*	*Excluded*	*Excluded*
2021	63.2	25.3	37.9
2022	65.1	27.2	37.9
2023	66.8	32.1	34.7
2024	67.1	61.4	5.7

## Appendix D

### High School Graduation Rates by School Type, 2018–2024

**Table D1**

*High School Graduation Rates by School Type, 2018–2024*

Year	Classical Charter Graduation Rate (%)	Traditional Public Graduation Rate (%)	Difference (%)
2018	92.1	78.3	13.8
2019	94.5	80.2	14.3
2020	Excluded	Excluded	Excluded
2021	96.7	82.1	14.6
2022	98.2	84	14.2
2023	99.1	85.7	13.4
2024	100	86.2	13.8

*Note.* Cohen's  $d = 1.33$ ,  $p = 0.069$  for 2024 graduation rate difference.