November 2019

Educators' Perceptions of Students' Academic and Social Growth in a Collegiate High School Program.

John Matthew Legg
*University of South Florida*

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Educators’ Perceptions of High School Students’ Academic and Social Growth in a Collegiate High School Program

by

John Matthew Legg

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Program Development with an emphasis in Educational Innovation Department of Teaching and Learning College of Education University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Howard Johnston, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Judith A. Ponticell, Ph.D.
Paul Cottle, Ph.D
Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
November 1, 2019

Keywords: belonging and social engagement, academic and social growth, concurrent enrollment

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DEDICATION

To Suzanne, my remarkable and amazing wife, whose sacrifice, encouragement, and love provided me the opportunity to pursue my dreams. Also, to our children, Rebecca, Dylan, Alexa, Jack, and Evangeline, who are a gift and treasure from God.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my major professors, my committee, and my Ed.D. Cohort members for their unwavering support during this noble endeavor. Thanks to Dr. Howard Johnston for his constant guidance and helping me orient myself through the doctorate process. Thanks to Dr. Paul Cottle for his insight, wisdom, and reminders to keep the focus on what is “best for students” not for the system. Thanks to Dr. Ponticell for her keen insight and guidance into research practices and educators and student behaviors. Thanks to Dr. Shaunessy-Dedrick for reminding me to focus on differentiation and ensuring best practices meet the needs of individual students. Thanks to the educators at the research site for going the extra mile and allowing me to be a part of their amazing programs. Special thanks to the principal of the research site for her leadership, dedication to providing post-secondary access to students in a tailored approach. Finally, to my family for tolerating me while I was often distracted three years while I endured this three-year journey. Only the Lord knows where the road will lead, but we will always travel down the road together.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine educators’ perceptions of high school students’ academic and social growth in a collegiate college program. Collegiate high school programs afford opportunities to minorities and the economically disadvantaged, as well as first-generation college students (Aviles-Reyes, 2007). This research used a qualitative case study framework to collect information about educators’ perceptions of the academic and social integration of students in a collegiate college program. Data were collected in phases—educator focus group interviews and individual interviews—and subsequently coded and reviewed using thematic comparative analysis. The guiding question was as follows: What are educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in a collegiate college program? In addition, the following question was explored: What are educators’ perceptions on the ways school culture affects students academically and socially?

Eight educators participated in a focus group and individual interviews for this study. The participants’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth and effects of the school culture were grouped into three themes and several subthemes. The three main themes included belonging, customizing, and common purpose.

The themes were analyzed and resulted in six findings which had a positive effect on student academic and social growth: (a) students and educators exhibited a high degree of belonging; (b) belonging membership and social engagement have a positive effect on instructor morale; (c)
educational customization promotes students’ academic and social growth; (d) a synergetic motivation of “wanting” was present and had a positive effect on school culture; (e) a common purpose dictated all program members’ expectations and behaviors; and (f) post-secondary skills were cultivated and developed.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

While many aspects of American culture have changed significantly since the late 1800s, the framework of the modern American high school has not been altered (Frey, 2005). Instead, elevated global pressure and competition have increased the need for modernizing the U.S. secondary educational system and producing students who are ready for college and careers in the global marketplace (Kuo, 2010). To modernize the secondary educational system, the United States must address three key areas: international competition, continuity of the education system, and the inadequate use of the final year of high school, otherwise known as the “wasted senior year” (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007; Richardson, 2007; Schulz, 2007). The American educational system needs to be transformed from low-level skills and rote memorization and focused on higher-level cognitive skills such as critical thinking, creating, problem-solving, evaluating, and implementation.

The American education system structure has mostly remained unchanged since its inception in 1635 (Boyer, 1983). A fundamental limitation in encouraging and preparing students to enroll in postsecondary education is the lack of continuity between high school and postsecondary institutions (Andrews, 2010; Orr, 1998). However, many programs are emerging which are blurring the lines between secondary and post-secondary education (Hughes, 2010; Mensel, 2010).
A key area of concern currently being addressed is related to the challenges of the final year of high school (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001). One approach is attending Collegiate High School programs. Collegiate High School schools are innovative high schools that allow students who, due to financial, family, or community issues, are least likely to attend college, providing an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and 60 college credit hours before leaving high school. In particular, Collegiate High Schools and Early Colleges are expected to (a) provide dual credit at no cost to students, (b) offer rigorous instruction and accelerated courses, (c) provide academic and social support services to help students succeed, (d) increase college readiness, and (e) reduce barriers to college access (Texas Statute §102.1091, 2018).

**Statement of the Problem**

A significant number of high school seniors take reduced academic loads because they have already completed the required courses for graduation and fulfilled college admission requirements (Andrews, 2010). As a result, few seniors grow academically, and many regress, resulting in a difficult transition to postsecondary expectations. Numerous studies have asserted that students who take a more rigorous high school curriculum have higher educational attainment and earnings (Adelman, 1999, 2006; Allensworth, Nomi, Montgomery, & Lee, 2009; Attewell & Domina, 2008; Aughinbaugh, 2012; Dougherty, Mellor, & Jian, 2006; Long, Conger, & Iatarola, 2012; Morgan & Klaric, 2007; Rose & Betts, 2004; Speroni, 2011). New programs with increased rigor are needed in order to provide senior high school students adequate courses that offer an incentive to develop academically. Students' transition to college is enhanced when they are challenged academically, and they are more likely to persist in college (Andrews, 2000).
Rather than a time of relaxation and celebration, the senior year should be a “launching pad” for the future (National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001; Roderick, Coca, Moeller, Kelley-Kemple, 2013). Historically, senior year has been reserved for completing the final graduation requirement prior to the student entering the workforce or college. However, in our global competitive economy, students need more preparation than the basic high school requirements. As a result of this shifting educational landscape, the time spent during the final year of high school has become increasingly important (Roderick et al., 2013). According to Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, the new role of the senior year must be to prepare students for lifelong learning:

…[H]igh schools must shift from being last stop destinations for students on their education journey to being launching pads for further growth and lifelong learning for all students… The mission of high schools can no longer be to simply get students to graduate. Their expanded mission, as President Obama has said, must also be to ready students for careers and college—and without the need for remediation. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, July 15, para. 3)

Furthermore, engaging in concurrent enrollment courses has been found to improve educational outcomes for students—in particular, low-income and minority students (An, 2013; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007; Speroni, 2011). A growing consensus exists that the current global economy requires the current workforce to obtain postsecondary education and training in addition to a high school level education (Carnevale, Hanson, & Gulish, 2013; Conley, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2004a). Simply achieving a high school diploma is no longer sufficient for economic success, both for the individual and for the nation as a
whole. Moreover, postsecondary or credential completion is associated with significantly higher wages and earnings (Baum, Kurose, & Ma, 2013).

As a result of this persisting problem and the growing challenge of post-secondary access—especially for economically disadvantaged students—in the 1990s and the early 2000s, states began to encourage more flexibility and innovation through options such as charter schools, corporate tax scholarship programs, vouchers, career academies, technical high schools, and other forms of educational innovation in both non-traditional and traditional schools. One rapidly expanding type of school innovation program is focused on the transition to college, such as Early College and concurrent enrollment programs. As a result, an expansion of educational innovation has occurred, especially in the areas of transition to college programs such as concurrent enrollment and the Early College model (Barnett, Maclutsky, & Wagonlander, 2015).

Concurrent enrollment, and specifically Collegiate high school programs, continue to increase in popularity and are being promoted to address specific inadequacies in secondary schools (e.g., a lack of rigor during the senior year) and help address transition and success of students—in particular, the at-risk group—in postsecondary institutions (Karp et al., 2007). Currently, a cursory review of the literature yields evidence of positive outcomes of Early College/Collegiate High School (ECHS/CHS) programs and the strong efficacy of related programs, and is supported by quantitative and qualitative studies. However, there has been limited research regarding social aspects and logistical characteristics of Early College programs. Furthermore, scant research exists from the perceptions of participants, faculty, and administrators of Early College programs, resulting in limited understanding regarding their experience and views of the unique characteristics of Early College programs. Such investigations promise to provide new insight into possible issues, challenges, motivations, and
best practices of Early College programs as articulated by the people who actually manage and work in them.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand educators’ perceptions in a Collegiate College program, specifically as these perceptions relate to cultural effects on students’ academic and social growth. The literature has suggested such programs represent a promising, viable, and sustainable reform model (Haskell, 2016; Quint, Thompson, & Bald, 2008). Currently, there exists significant quantitative research on the outcomes of Early College programs on student high school completion rates, course rigor, college access, and college completion. However, scant qualitative research exists on the outcomes of Collegiate High School or Early College programs on actual students, academic implementation, faculty involvement, and programmatic implementation. This research examined students’ academic and social growth in a Collegiate High School program by analyzing the perceptions of those who implement Collegiate High School programs: the educators.

**Guiding Questions**

The guiding questions for this research were as follows: (a) what are educators’ perceptions of students’ academic experiences and social growth in a Collegiate College program?; (b) what are educators’ perceptions on the ways in which school culture affects students academically and socially?

**Conceptual Framework**

This research used four theoretical frameworks to help conceptualize the perceptions and outcomes of Early College programs. First, I used Tinto’s (1997) concept of Classroom as Community as a lens through which to view academic and social success and as a framework to
explain how learning occurs in an academic and social context. Second, I used Rawls’ (1971) Social Justice Theory to provide insight into the needs of low-income students to have access to early college. Third, I used Deci and Ryan’s (2012) Self-Determination Theory to illuminate student motivations in Early College. Lastly, I utilized Locke and Latham’s (1990) Goal Theory to provide an understanding of the objectives of Early College.

**Classrooms as Communities**

Tinto’s (1997) concept of Classrooms as Community contends that formal learning (academic performance) increases, in part, as a result of informal (faculty interaction) academic systems as well as formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems.

Classrooms as communities has three tenets. First, collaborative or shared learning groups enable students to develop a support network consisting of a small community of peers. This supportive community helps students connect to the broader social communities within academic institution while immersing and connecting them to academic life. Therefore, this community may assist the student both academically and socially. These communities form within the classroom but extend outside to informal settings. In this manner, collaborative learning settings are enabled (Tinto, 1997). Second, students benefit by learning a variety of perspectives beyond those of a single faculty member. Learning communities allow students to connect their academic and personal experiences to class content based on diverse perspectives (Tinto, 1997). Finally, formal (academic) learning is “deeper and richer, in the collaborative learning settings” (Tinto, 1997, p. 614). Tinto created a model for students’ understanding of factors which affect student departure. By establishing collaborative learning environments,
educational institutions can intervene and mitigate factors that cause students to depart from educational intuitions.

In addition, it is important to note that Tinto (2016) stated social engagement and academics, while linked, are not directly correlated:

It does not follow, however, that the linkage between involvement and learning, on one hand, and between learning and persistence, on the other, is simple or symmetrical. As to the impact of involvement upon learning, one has to ask about the specific nature of student involvement. Not all involvements lead to learning in the same fashion. Much depends on the degree to which student involvement is a meaningful and valued part of the classroom experience. Having a voice without being heard is often worse than having no voice at all. As to the linkage between learning and persistence, though learning is in general positively associated with persistence, it is not the case that learning guarantees persistence or that failure to learn, beyond the obvious case of academic failure ensures departure. (p. 616)

**Social Justice Theory**

Rawls' (1971) Social Justice Theory discusses and provides the context for understanding the distribution of societal benefits. Rawls considered social justice as the distribution of benefits and burdens within a society, meaning that a just society ensures the good of the state and the individual. Rawls advocated for improving the position or condition of those on the margins of social and economic status and believed everyone should have the same opportunity to the “offices and positions” in a given society (p. 53). Accordingly, all citizens should have equal access to training and education to qualify for various jobs.
Social Justice Theory states education is a precious asset, and as such, resources should be allocated to improve the education for those on the margins. In addition, education has been shown to increase an individual's ability to acquire wealth, participate in society, and promote self-worth. Also, equal opportunity for education and college access and completion should be a priority of education policy. This priority includes providing college access and completion to minorities and students from low-income households. Increasing college access may help close the gap between socioeconomic groups (Hoyle & Kutka, 2008). Concurrent enrollment is a pathway to college. Concurrent enrollment programs, particularly ECHS/CHS programs, increase college access for low-socioeconomic students (An, 2013). I used the social justice theory framework to support the need to have high quality, proven access to and completion in college for students, in particular, low-income students.

Self-Determination Theory

As a result of the self-selection process of concurrent enrollment, this study used Self-Determination Theory (SDT) as a framework to establish an understanding of students’ motivation to participate in concurrent enrollment (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012). This theory provides a framework for understanding human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2012). Deci and Ryan (2008a) argued motivation has three dimensions: intrinsic, extrinsic, and motivation type. Intrinsic motivation describes actions for which the effect is “interesting and spontaneously satisfying” (p. 15). There are three types of intrinsic motivation: the first type is the need to know, the second is the need to accomplish, and the third is to experience stimulation (Vallerand et al., 1992). Extrinsic motivation is when an individual engages in an activity as a result of a separate consequence.
Motivation can further be delineated according to two types: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008b). Autonomous motivation encompasses all forms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation which have been incorporated into one's sense of self. In contrast, controlled motivation consists of external regulation, in which one's behavior is a function of external contingencies of reward or punishment, as well as interjected regulation, in which the regulation of one’s action has been partially internalized and is energized by factors such as an approval motive, avoidance of shame, contingent self-esteem, and ego-involvement (Deci & Ryan, 2008b, p. 182). Deci (2008b) suggested all human beings have the need for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, which in turn drive human behavior. These needs drive behavior. Intrinsic motivation is more likely to exhibit psychological wellness as compared to extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Concurrent enrollment allows students to explore the pathway to exhibit intrinsic motivation.

**Goal Theory**

The final theoretical perspective is Goal Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), which describes the existence of a feedback loop. Goal theory argues a cycle exists which drives motivation and consists of various characteristics. Goal theory establishes mutual, agreed upon goals among many stakeholders. These goals are a set of mutually agreed upon tasks which all parties agree have some degree of importance; a commitment to self-efficacy on the part of both the students and support systems stakeholders; constant feedback; a degree of task complexity; and finally, various levels of satisfaction upon completion of each level (Locke & Latham, 1990).

I used these four theoretical perspectives to analyze the data generated from the study and as a framework for thinking about and drawing conclusions about my findings.
Overview of Research Design

A qualitative case study approach was chosen because qualitative methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people attribute to events they experience (Creswell, 2005, 2013). A case study focuses on the unique insights and perceptions of a particular situation, allowing for a deeper understanding and rich descriptions of the complexities of a given situation and issues. Case studies are well-aligned with interviews, which help to illuminate participants’ experiences, perceptions, and understandings (Creswell, 2005, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). I used the data collection circle (Creswell & Poth, 2018) as a guide for my data collection.

My sample population was eight collegiate college program educators who (a) establish an ethic of care and positive relationship with early college students, (b) have direct interaction with the transition of students between secondary and post-secondary education, and (c) have students who come from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, including, but not limited to, marginalized groups such as low-income populations.

I used both focus group and individual interviews as the primary methods of data collection. One 60-minute focus group session was conducted with a group of five classroom educators. The advantage of using a focus group interview is that it may generate greater depth in conversation than other data collection methods for qualitative social research as it allows for a free flow of discussion among participants to generate data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Individual interviews were conducted with the school counselor, school principal, and college dean. Moreover, these interviews were conducted independently of each other and from the classroom educators’ focus group. I interviewed the school counselor, the principal, and
college dean to obtain information about the context of the program and their perceptions of students’ academic and social growth. For the individual interviews, I used a semi-structured interview format. The semi-structured format is thought to allow for enriched interaction through additional probes for more information, responses that can be more personalized, and greater insights than those produced using a structured format (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Seidman, 2006).

**Significance of the Study**

Issues facing low-income students’ transition from secondary to post-secondary education are not new; however, because of new policies, educational innovations, and technologies, further opportunities and techniques are being developed and implemented to address many of these issues (An, 2013; Andrews, 2000; Karp et al., 2007; Speroni, 2011).

Through new policies and educational innovations, an opportunity exists to provide more students—in particular, low-income students—pathways to more economic opportunity through a higher level of educational attainment (Barnett et al., 2013a). As a result of these new programs, significant programmatic information can be learned from those who implement these innovative programs and work directly with the students. By listening to and analyzing the perceptions of educators regarding their Early College programs, best practices, program interventions, and characteristics can be learned to better assist students as they transition from secondary to post-secondary education. My goal is to gain insights through this research that may inform educational policy, program design, and allocation of resources to better support educators and students to achieve higher academic achievement.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

The following terms are used in this study:
**Acceleration programs:** Acceleration refers to administrative modifications which permit students to reach educational goals at a faster than usual rate or an earlier than usual age. Deviations from age and grade lock-step distinctions are rare and usually represent hard-won battles on the part of parents, teachers, and other advocates for gifted or high-achieving students (Elkind, 1981).

**At-risk student:** A high school student identified as having one or more characteristics believed to be associated with a high potential to withdraw or dropout from school (Roueche & Jones, 2005).

**Collegiate high school:** According to the 2014 Florida Statutes, at a minimum a collegiate high school “includes an option for public school students in grade 11 or grade 12 participating in the program, for at least 1 full school year, to earn CAPE industry certifications pursuant to s. 1008.44 and to successfully complete 30 credit hours through the dual enrollment program under s. 1007.271 toward the first year of college for an associate degree or baccalaureate degree while enrolled in the program (F.S.1007.273(2)).

**College-ready:** A high school student is ‘college ready’ if he/she has taken and passed the required courses for minimal college entrance and is considered to be college qualified (Marks & Diaz, 2009).

**Completion rate:** The ratio of students from a class of ninth graders who graduated from high school in 4 years as compared to those who did not graduate in the same cohort in 4 years (Karp & Hughes, 2008).

**Culture (school):** Refers to the sum of the values, cultures, safety practices, and organizational structures within a school that cause it to function and react in particular ways (Tableman & Herron, 2004).
**Dropout rate:** A measure of students who leave school during a 4-year cohort period (Tinto, 1997).

**Dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment:** An academic program designed to help students excel in the academic world as well as in the workforce by allowing high school students to earn high school and college credits simultaneously, thus reducing time and money spent on postsecondary courses (Boswell, 2001).

**Early college:** Innovative high schools that allow students who, due to financial, family, or community issues, are least likely to attend college, opportunity to earn a high school diploma and 60 college credit hours before leaving high school. These schools (a) provide dual credit at no cost to students, (b) offer rigorous instruction and accelerated courses, (c) provide academic and social support services to help students succeed, (d) increase college readiness, and (e) reduce barriers to college access (Texas Statute §102.1091, 2018).

**Delimitations**

This study was conducted in one Collegiate High School located in a major metropolitan area in the southeastern United States. The school is located in a suburban area on the grounds of a state (community) college. The five teachers and three administrators who participated in the study did so voluntarily. Educators who were selected to participate were chosen based on specific selection criteria: (a) they established an ethic of care and positive relationship with early college students; (b) they had direct interaction with the transition of students between secondary and post-secondary education; and (c) their students came from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, including, but not limited to, marginalized groups such as low-income populations.
Chapter Summary

Chapter One presented the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, significance of the study, definition of key terms, and delimitation of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of relevant literature.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

This review of relevant literature is organized around the following topics: (1) historical context of secondary education, (2) transition into post-secondary education, (3) The purpose of this literature review is to provide a background on secondary education, the blurring lines between secondary and post-secondary education, the history of concurrent/dual enrollment and related sub-models, and the effect of concurrent enrollment options on students, particularly for low-income and minority students. To understand the blurring of the lines, this chapter also provides a brief overview of the origins of secondary education.

Historical Context of Secondary Education

Prior to 1910, the American education system at the secondary level was an experimental program, exclusively for the upper class and privileged as opposed to the nearly universal democratic institution of today. In 1910, only about 9% of American youth attended high school (Boyer, 1983). The first American secondary campus was a private secondary school, the Boston Latin Grammar School, founded in 1635 to prepare pupils to service the church, become government officials, or to attend Harvard (Rudolph, 1990).

Unlike elementary education, secondary education endured a slow expansion to gain acceptance. Elementary education spread quickly among the American population and gained recognition in the succeeding generations; however, this was not the case for high school
The first public high school did not appear until nearly 200 years later when the English Classical School opened in Boston in 1821 (Rudolph, 1990).

The English Classical School curriculum consisted of subject matter thought to best prepare young minds at the time: civic, history, logic, navigation, composition, declamation, mathematics, logic, surveying, and moral and political philosophy. Soon after, other public high schools began to appear in parts of New England and New York. The primary purpose of these schools was to provide college preparation for young men, and enrollment remained quite small (Rudolph, 1990).

By 1870, only 500 public high schools existed with a total of 50,000 students; however, education soon began to change (Boyer, 1983, p. 46). Young women were being accepted into secondary schools, receiving training in “normal” classes to become teachers, while working class youth entered high schools to learn skilled trades (Boyer, 1983, p. 46). A seminal moment occurred in 1874 when the Michigan State Supreme Court ruled taxes could be levied to support not only an elementary education, but also a secondary education. As a result of the court ruling, as well as the increase in urbanization and the dominance of the Industrial Revolution, large cities began to construct high schools. Yet by 1890, only 3.5% of students graduated high school.

However, this statistic started to change (U.S. Department of Education, 2004a) and a split began to occur. Parents started selecting non-academic routes for their children by having them attend the new vocation-oriented secondary schools. The classic college preparatory school remained; however, a new option began to take root.

Many parents and students saw the “new vocationalism” as a shortcut to new skilled jobs in burgeoning factories and agricultural enterprises. Academic subjects came to be regarded as
merely a part of, rather than the core of, the curriculum of manual training schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). By the end of the 19th century, gaps in the quality of academic rigor became apparent and alarmed many education leaders of this era (Boyer, 1983, p. 49). During this new Progressive Era, the purpose of schooling “became the core upon which Americans relied to assure the continuity and evolution of their government, their economy, and their social values” (Graham, 2005, p. 3). Traditionally, the aim of American public schools was to promote virtues and morals necessary to cultivate citizenship in the early republic through teacher-centered instruction of the classics (Bohan, 2005; Evans, 2004; Reese, 2007).

In 1892, the National Education Association convened education leaders, called the Committee of Ten, to review inequity in the quality of education and make recommendations. Charles Elliot, the President of Harvard, chaired the Committee of Ten. The Committee of Ten focused on nine specific academic conference disciplines: (a) Latin; (b) Greek; (c) English; (d) Modern Language; (e) Mathematics; (f) Physics, Astronomy, and Chemistry; (g) Natural History; (h) History, Civil Government, and Political Economy; and (i) Geography (Bohan, 2003). The History, Civil Government, and Political Economy discipline was comprised of well-known historians at the time, as well as the future President of Princeton and President of the United States, Woodrow Wilson.

The Committee of Ten proposed recommendations concerning the high school curriculum to determine which subjects should be taught to prepare students for college and a better life. MacKenzie (1894) noted that a major objective of these reforms was to ensure that “a national system of education...aims at certain common results and uses common means, involving compromise and yielding of individual judgments, for the common good” (p. 148). Several discipline-specific committees were formed to recommend curricular reforms.
The reforms advocated by the Committee of Ten coincided with an increasing number of students who entered American schools throughout the Progressive Era. The number of students nearly doubled from the convening of the Committee of Ten in 1890 from 3.5% to 6.4% by the end of the 20th century (Bohan, 2003). In subsequent years, this trend continued—by 1920, 16.8% of students graduated from secondary school, and by 1930, high school graduates accounted for 29% of the population (Bohan, 2003).

A pivotal moment occurred in 1940 where a majority (50.8%) had graduated from high school (Bohan, 2003). In 1918, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, a group appointed by the National Education Association, issued a report known as the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*. In it, the Commission stated that the primary purpose of high schools consisted of health and citizenship. The U.S. Bureau of Education used this report to lay the foundation for the modern American high school, with an emphasis on providing custodial care that later came to be known as “life adjustment” education (Wrang, 2001). The structural framework for today's secondary schools is mostly unchanged from the recommendation of the Committee of Ten and the Cardinal Principles.

**A Nation at Risk**

President Reagan established the National Committee on Excellence in Education (1983) to address the perceived inadequate state of the America education system and the overall stagnation in U.S. educational performance. Secretary Bell believed the United Stated States needed a “Sputnik-like occurrence” to spur education reform (Bell, 1988). The Committee's report, *A Nation at Risk*, prompted serious discussion and action to implement higher academic standards. The Committee expressed alarm that the rise of global trade and the United States as the leading world power, as well as the dawn of the information age, were not being
accompanied by complementary changes in U.S. schools. *A Nation at Risk* harkened back to the Committee of Ten, renewing the declaration that American schools provide all students with access to a rigorous academic curriculum:

> If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war, as it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)

The Committee made three primary recommendations in their report: (a) more rigor, (b) new standards, and (c) better preparation for teachers and higher pay. First, the report suggested states increase the rigor of their curricula and challenge students to do advanced coursework (Borek, 2008; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Second, the Committee recommended states adopt new standards requiring students to meet higher-level requirements to graduate. In 1983, not all states had established graduation standards. For those states which had standards, many of those standards were set to a lower benchmark (Borek, 2008; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Finally, the report noted that some teacher training programs did not provide adequate training for teachers. Furthermore, teachers were paid far less than other fields that required a college degree. As a result, there was a shortage of qualified teachers, especially in areas such as science and math. Among other teacher-related recommendations, the report suggested that teacher-training programs require more of prospective teachers and that teacher pay should be tied directly to student achievement (Borek, 2008; National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Immediately upon publication, *A Nation at Risk* resulted in an explosion of education reform in the United States and brought greater economic and national security. Tyack and
Cubin (1995) noted the report facilitated educational reform at the state level and generated “more education laws and regulations than they had generated in the past twenty years” (p. 78). Subsequently, in 1984, the Task Force for Education on Economic Growth released *Action in the States: Progress Towards Education Renewal*, reporting over 250 state task forces were created to study education and recommend changes (Guthrie & Springer, 2004).

**No Child Left Behind**

In 2001, at the federal level, education reform focused on accountability with particular attention paid to minority students. President George W. Bush, a Republican, with the assistance of Senator Ted Kennedy, a Democrat, signed bipartisan education legislation, titled the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This act mandated increased accountability from schools, both from the teachers and from the students. Annual standardized tests measured how schools were performing against achievement measures. Schools were also responsible for publishing annual report cards that detailed their student achievement data and demographics. If schools failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), they would be held accountable by punitive measures and corrective action plans. Under NCLB, states were required to have an assessment system for all schools, and each state was required to plan for restructuring if they failed to meet AYP for 3 years. Moreover, NCLB required teachers to be highly qualified if hired using Title I funding. By promoting accountability for the achievement of all students, NCLB played an essential role in protecting the civil rights of the country's at-risk students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). In order to create options for students, NCLB allowed military recruiters access to 11th- and 12th-grade students’ names, addresses, and telephone listings when requested (U.S. Department of Education, 2004b).
While NCLB helped in closing achievement gaps and mandating transparency, it also had several problematic results. The law created incentives for states to lower their standards, emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success, focused on scores instead of growth and progress, and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools which may have missed their state-established goals (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). On December 10, 2015, President Obama authorized the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which offered flexibility to states from some of NCLB’s most cumbersome provisions. In order to qualify for this flexibility, states had to demonstrate that they adopted college and career-ready standards and assessments, implemented school accountability systems that focused on the lowest-performing schools and those with the most significant achievement gaps, and ensured districts were implementing teacher and principal evaluation and support systems (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

**Transition into Post-Secondary Education**

There is a growing consensus that the current U.S. economy requires more than a high school level education, as the modern economy requires individuals to possess postsecondary education and training (Carnevale et al., 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Achieving the high school graduation milestone is no longer sufficient for economic success, both individually and for the nation. Postsecondary or credential completion is associated with significantly higher wages and earnings (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010), increased tax revenues (Rouse, 2007), decreased unemployment and lower rates of criminality and welfare receipts (Baum et al., 2010; Belfield & Bailey, 2011). Moreover, many students do not finish college: fewer than half of the high school class of 2004 in the United States earned a college degree within 8 years of their intended high school graduation (Lauff & Ingels, 2014). According to
data from the U.S. Department of Education (Aud et al., 2013), 3.1 million students graduated within 4 years from high school in 2010, successfully achieving high school completion and enrolling in college. However, only 68% or 2.1 million enrolled in college the following fall—meaning that nearly one-third “leaked out” at this third step. Of the graduate cohorts in 2004 who successfully navigated the college matriculation step of the pipeline, nearly 40% were lost later on, having never completed a postsecondary credential 8 years after high school (Lauff & Ingels, 2014).

It is important that postsecondary completion rates vary among student population subgroups, as this indicates some students are more adversely affected than others. For example, while 81% of upper-income high school graduates successfully enter college the following fall, only 52% of low-income students do so—a 29% gap (Aud et al., 2013). The result is a stunning disparity in college graduation rates among students of different socioeconomic levels from the high school cohort of 2004: 23% of students from the lowest income quartile had earned a college degree by 2012, whereas 67% of students from the highest quartile had done so (Lauff & Ingels, 2014). Similar gaps exist between White and Black or Hispanic students (Aud et al., 2012).

**Structural Deficiencies of the American High School**

The American high school structure is a fragmented system. The recent reforms in education have not met the needs of students in order to prepare them to compete in technology or a diverse and global economy (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Although some success has been realized with reforms consisting of restructuring high schools into small learning communities based on specialized curriculum with newer and more modern teaching (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001), wealthy educational and philanthropic groups such as the
Annenberg Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have financially supported and advocated for more specialized school models. These educational, philanthropic organizations have funded research to explore the effectiveness of the specialized school model on student academic achievement (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). Among the most significant findings from this research is that many families are using the early college option as a way to defray the rising cost of higher education and lessen the time required to complete college (Fink, Jenkins & Yanagiura, 2017). Many students are taking college courses while they are in high school—according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, high school concurrent enrollment students grew 67% from 2002 to 2010, to 1.4 million students in concurrent enrollment students in the 2010-11 school year.

Recent reports have suggested a strong collaboration between the K-12 and higher education sectors in developing initiatives essential for ensuring that the skills and knowledge taught and assessed in secondary schools are well-aligned with those needed for success in college (Barnett et al., 2013a). This conclusion is of significant importance because a national crisis has developed as a result of increased high school dropout rates, especially among economically disadvantaged students, coupled with a lack of employable workforce skills (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). A high school diploma alone is no longer sufficient and has become virtually irrelevant in the global marketplace (Reynolds & Weagley, 2003). As a result, secondary education institutions and post-secondary institutions have collaborated to establish educational pathways for at-risk, disengaged students to obtain needed workforce skills through enhanced educational opportunities (Berger et al., 2007; Lieberman, 1990, 2004). Moreover, employers are using educational levels of applicants as a critical factor in deciding whether to fill vacancies (Reynolds & Weagley, 2003).
In this global marketplace, those students with the least access to higher education and lower employability opportunities have experienced the most barriers. Many of the obstacles occur due to lack of family support for post-secondary pursuits, negative experiences in primary and secondary education, and funding opportunities (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2000). As a result, programs have been implemented to address transition to college. These programs are a collaboration between secondary and post-secondary institutions to allow targeted students exposure to college by earning college credit at a faster pace and lower cost (Swail, 2000).

The College Board (2010) reported in 2010 that “there are formidable challenges at every level of the system that confront students who aspire to enroll and succeed in college” (p. 4). One such challenge is post-secondary readiness—ensuring students are prepared to be enrolled in college and succeed, without remediation, in credit-bearing coursework (Barnes & Slate, 2010). Many students are not prepared because of the fragmented education system among various states; each state establishes its minimum graduation standards, which may or may not correlate with college readiness (U.S. Department of Education. (2004a). The National Center for Educational Accountability (Aud, et al., 2010) argued states should establish standards at Level I to achieve 10% or less of students who are in need of remediation. Equity in college preparedness is also a concern. Peters and Mann (2009) stated, “Students from poverty, small schools, and schools with high minority, populations need to be provided the same head start on college as students from larger, less diverse, and more affluent high schools” (p. 652).

Concurrent/dual enrollment programs provide a pathway for such a “head start” for low-income and minority students.
Students arriving at college are expected to manifest a range of academic skills (Achieve, Inc., 2004; Conley, 2010; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009). The most frequently referenced skills include writing and critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills (academic skills and strategies); time management and note-taking skills; the ability to study independently (learning skills and strategies); as well as perseverance and the ability to work under pressure (effective and psychological attributes) (Shaw & Werno, 2016).

With the adoption of Common Core curriculum and college or career readiness standards, the proliferation of expectations for all students reveals gaps in delivery and achievement which adversely effects minorities (Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman, 2004). The lack of access to a college-level education has an adverse economic effect on all demographics. The unemployment rate for those with a high school diploma or less was 9%, as compared to 3.5% for those with a bachelor's degree or higher (Ogunwole, Drewer, & Rios-Vargas, 2012).

While the need is great for post-secondary access and completion among all groups, for at-risk groups the need is even greater. Common factors which adversely affect at-risk students include drug use, being home more than 3 hours a day, poor literacy skills, and not being academically challenged at school (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010). These factors may be mitigated when educators can establish relationships that foster a trusting environment in an academic setting (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006). Teacher support is not the only support system which has shown benefit—peer support has demonstrated evidence as a successful strategy for improved academic performance for underserved and at-risk students (Pathways to College Network, 2007).
Concurrent Enrollment

The first documented use of the concept of secondary students simultaneously earning college credits was derived from J. W. Osborn in 1928. Osborn (1928) asserted this proposal would eliminate mediocre-level curricula, which offered little challenge to more academically advanced secondary students (Puyear, 2013). Osborn went on to argue that the purpose of this partnership was to provide above-average students more challenging coursework beyond the standard high school courses. However, concurrent enrollment programs are no longer only for the higher academically achieving students; concurrent enrollment programs are for all levels of intellect and backgrounds (Hughes, 2010). Osborn wrote about the repetition in curricula between some high school courses and introductory college courses. In 1956, Osborn's concerns were addressed through the development of the advanced placement (AP) examination, a single standardized test used to determine students' proficiency in specific subject areas (Greenberg, 1992).

Collins (1980) credited Jamestown Community College in New York as the first institution to enroll secondary students in college courses to receive dual college and high school credit. In 1978, Jamestown Community College invited advanced 11th-grade students to enroll in two college courses during the summer before their senior year. During the same year as the Jamestown Community College concurrent enrollment program, Project Advance at Syracuse University began. According to Edmonds, Mercurio, and Bonesteel (1998), Project Advance originated in 1973, when seven local high school principals and superintendents met with university staff members to develop a program that would “challenge high school seniors, many of whom had completed all of the requirements for high school graduation by the end of the eleventh grade” (p. 1).
Project Advance began as a result of secondary school administrators collaborating with Syracuse University administrators to address the need to make a senior year of high school more meaningful (Syracuse University Project Advance, 2018). As a result, Syracuse administrators determined that with minimal cost, high school students could take college-level courses in high school. Adelman (2008) claimed that more collaboration among parents, schools, students, and the community was needed to prepare students for life beyond secondary school better. Moreover, Lerner and Brand (2006) asserted that learning should be connected to technology since students are more engaged in technologically-delivered learning material.

**Fundamentals of Concurrent Enrollment**

Concurrent enrollment or dual enrollment refers to enrollment in two levels of schooling at once. It can include (a) pre-school and elementary, or (b) elementary and secondary enrollment. In this study, the term concurrent enrollment was used to refer to secondary students simultaneously enrolled in high school and college. Concurrent enrollment and dual enrollment are terms used by numerous researchers in the United States (Assouline, Colangelo, VanTassel-Baska, & Lupkowki-Shoplik, 2015).

Concurrent enrollment and Early College programs allow students to earn college credit while still enrolled and attending high school. While concurrent enrollment was originally intended to provide more educational opportunities for academically talented students, concurrent enrollment is now used as a transition to college programs (Rogers & Kimpston, 1992). Concurrent enrollment programs are similar to other credit-based achievement programs such as AP, Advance International Certificate for Education (AICE), and International Baccalaureate Program (IB). The programs offer high school students coursework, which is more rigorous than typical high school courses and serves to prepare students for more advanced
curriculum at the college level. Concurrent enrollment and Early College programs are designed to expose students to college coursework, accumulate college course credit, and as a result, increase post-secondary degree attainment.

Transition to college programs became more commonplace in the early 1990s. In the past, these concurrent enrollment programs were isolated and a rare occurrence; however, more than 2-million students were enrolled in concurrent enrollment programs as of 2011 (Aud et al., 2010).

Concurrent enrollment programs consist of partnerships between secondary and post-secondary institutions. Tinto (2005) argued post-secondary institutions could benefit from forming partnerships with the secondary school environment since the early experiences of secondary school affect college persistence. Concurrent enrollment provides students exposure to more rigorous and meaningful academic courses (Tinto, 2006). Concurrent enrollment programs have various models based on school districts, individual schools, and state college matriculation agreements. Concurrent enrollment programs range from full immersion of a high school student on college campus, taking exclusively college-level courses to a student taking one college-level course at their high school offered by the dual certified high school and state college instructor. Concurrent enrollment and Early College programs typically provide a curriculum that is aligned to satisfy both state high school graduation requirements and general education requirements to fulfill an associate's degree. Programs can vary from offering a single course option to a more rigorous collegiate model of a 4- to 5-year program, beginning in eighth or ninth grade and ending with an associate's degree. Often, concurrent enrollment programs consist of a 2-year program beginning in 11th grade. Early college and collegiate high schools are a sub-category of concurrent enrollment programs. Early college and collegiate programs
have entrance criteria and a more structured course selection. In particular, these programs tend to be more formalized and offer a support structure such as academic guidance, application, assistance, financial aid, college selection guidance, and college transition assistance.

College affordability is a significant driver of increased growth in concurrent enrollment programs. Typically, there is no cost directly associated with the student for concurrent enrollment programs—the cost of tuition and textbooks are absorbed not by the student, but rather by the school district, state college, or the state. For example, the Texas Legislature has allocated more resources to high schools and postsecondary institutions to cover costs directly associated with concurrent enrollment programs. Iowa offers a weighted funding formula for school districts that have students completing college-level coursework. And, in Florida school districts and postsecondary colleges negotiate a cost-sharing model on a district-by-district basis. State statutes require each school district and post-secondary institution to offer collegiate programs and concurrent enrollment through an agreement. High school students' participation and completion rates are an important component of the school grading formula.

According to Finken (2003), there are three categories of concurrent/dual enrollment: (a) Students attend college classes at a post-secondary institution by a post-secondary instructor; (b) Students attend classes at their respective high school taught by a post-secondary instructor, and (c) Students attend a class at their secondary campus taught by a high school teacher who is certified by the college. Students arriving at college are expected to manifest a range of academic skills (Achieve Inc., 2004; Roderick et al., 2009; Rotherham & Willingham, 2009). College-ready students need the following attributes as aforementioned: critical thinking, analysis, and evaluation skills; time management and note-taking skills; the ability to study independently; as well as perseverance and the ability to work under pressure (Shaw & Werno,
While concurrent programs have various forms of implementation, they share some constant characteristics. In particular, concurrent programs have nine common characteristics: degree attainment (associate’s degree level and industry certifications), college access and enrollment, credit accumulation, high school completion, improved academic achievement in high school, high school retention, college readiness, increased high school attendance, and improved academic performance in college (Berger et al., 2013; Rochford, 2011).

The enrollment process for students in a concurrent enrollment program is largely a self-selection choice-based model. Concurrent enrollment benefits to students are observable, statistically significant, and positive (Swanson, 2008; Taylor, 2013). Concurrent enrollment programs have yielded many positive effects for enrollees, such as having a positive effect on reducing the time-to-degree-completion problems and reducing the financial cost of higher education on students, students’ long-term debt, students’ families, and state budgets (Appleby et al., 2011). Moreover, further evidence demonstrates that concurrent enrollment results in fewer years needed to complete a degree, cost improvement, and reduced household pressures concerning debt financing of higher education expenses (Haskell, 2016; Rothstein & Rouse, 2011). One subset of concurrent enrollment is dual-credit enrollment (DCE), which pertains to secondary students taking post-secondary courses on secondary (high school) campuses (Haskell, 2016). Concurrent enrollment students are all enrolled in high school courses taken at a secondary or post-secondary school campus (Haskell, 2016). Further evidence demonstrates underrepresented student households experience more significant improvement than do their general student population counterparts concerning such outcomes, providing particular benefit to economically brittle students during their academic and early-labor market careers (Haskell, 2016; Rothstein & Rouse, 2011).
Tinto (1998) argued academic integration was a key indicator of college persistence, and courses taken on a secondary campus allowed students to experience that integration even earlier through faculty interaction. The establishment of this partnership has a positive effect on at-risk students. Woosley and Shepler (2011) asserted programs targeting first-generation college students' early integration added to retention. Moreover, secondary faculty are more accessible to students in comparison to post-secondary faculty (Tinto, 1998). By providing opportunities which promote social links and academic experiences, this could lead to a higher rate of persistence. The collaboration of both high school and college staff are crucial in helping to promote first-generation college student success (Woosley & Shepler, 2011); thus, concurrent enrollment provides the opportunity for this significant partnership.

**Growth in Concurrent Enrollment**

The National Center for Educational Statistics reported 82% of high schools offering some form of concurrent enrollment credit program for the 2010-2011 school year. Furthermore, 53% of all post-secondary institutions reported having some concurrent enrollment students enrolled (Thomas, Marken, Gray, & Lewis, 2013). However, these data only pertained to public high schools and excluded private schools. Over two million students are enrolled in at least one concurrent enrollment course, with 601,500 enrolled in industry certification/technical coursework and 1.4 million in academic college credit courses (Thomas et al., 2013). More than 70% of all high schools offer some form of concurrent/dual enrollment courses (Thomas et al., 2013).

Over a 4-year period from 2015-2016 to 2017-2018, annual concurrent enrollment participation in Florida College System institutions increased by 21,468 students. This is a 38% increase over the 4 years and an average of 9.5% increase per year (Florida Department of
Education, 2019). In 2018-2019, 1,851 high school students graduated with their Associate of Arts degree before the students were awarded their high school diploma (Florida Department of Education, 2019).

Figure 1. Annual head count of students dual enrolled in the Florida College system, 2011-2012 to 2018-2019. Source: Florida Department of Education, Community College and Technical Center Management Information Systems, HD3F29L.

In Texas, concurrent enrollment increased by 285% from 64,910 in 2007 to 185,255 in 2019. Dual credit enrollment represented 10% of higher education enrollment in 2018.

Figure 2. Texas dual credit student enrollment (Texas Department of Education, 2019).
North Carolina has experienced a large number of high school students concurrently enrolling in college. In the fall of 2017, the University of North Carolina had 66,316 high school students concurrently enrolled in college courses (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2019).

**Figure 3.** Number of North Carolina student enrolled in UNC institutions, Fall 2017. (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2019)

The number of concurrent enrollment students has dramatically risen since 2000 as students and families have realized the positive effects of concurrent enrollment. Those positive
effects consist of financial savings, a head start on college, higher high school completion rates, and a higher degree and certificate completion (Fink et al., 2017). Fink stated the following with regard to these impacts:

Among former dual enrollment students who started at a four-year college after high school, 64 percent completed a college credential within five years. Completion rates ranged from 34 percent in Nevada to 75 percent in Florida. In nine states, including Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Maryland, and Virginia, more than 70 percent of students earned a college credential. (p. 2)

The number of concurrent enrollment students has significantly risen over the past decade. Using data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) from 1995 to 2015, fall enrollments of students aged 17 or younger at public 4-year institutions grew from 72,000 to 220,000, while growing from 163,000 to 745,000 at community colleges (Fink et al., 2017).

**Outcomes of Concurrent Enrollment**

Concurrent enrollment has had a positive effect on post-secondary access, degree attainment, college credit accumulation, and high school completion rates, representing a general academic achievement not only for affluent students, but low-income, minority students as well (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds et al., 2017). Engle and Tinto (2008) confirmed that taking more rigorous courses in high school increased the chances of low-income, first-generation college students’ enrollment in a 4-year college. There is a significant positive effect on graduation rates between early college participants and their non-early college peers (Berger et al., 2013). Concurrent enrollment students who are enrolled in college are more likely to complete a degree than non-concurrent enrollment students (An, 2013).
Concurrent enrollment has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy as a “gateway” for post-secondary education. Nationally, from 2010 to 2016, 88% of former concurrent enrollment students attended post-secondary institutions upon exiting college; conversely, 12% did not participate in a post-secondary institution (Fink et al., 2017). Berger et al. (2013) reported higher college enrollment rates for concurrent enrollment students as compared to their peers. Moreover, students in concurrent enrollment programs exhibited significantly higher rates of post-secondary credentials than those who were not in a concurrent enrollment program (Edmunds et al., 2017). Edmunds et al. (2017) reported a significantly higher number of students attending or planning on attending a 4-year university than their non-concurrent enrollment peers. These programs are not only for affluent or white populations; low-income and minorities experience a significantly positive effect in degree attainment as compared to non-concurrent enrollment students (Giani, Alexander, & Reyes, 2014). In Fink et al. (2017), based on data from 2010 to 2016, average completion rates among former 17-year-old concurrent enrollment students who first matriculated at a 4-year college ranged from 34 to 75% by state. In nine states, more than 70% of former concurrent enrollment students who enrolled at a 4-year college after high school earned some college credentials within 5 years after leaving high school. In Wisconsin, 71% of lower income, former concurrent enrollment students received a college award, compared with 61% of higher income students (Fink et al., 2017). Four studies (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds et al., 2017; Giani et al., 2014; Struhl & Vargas 2012), comprising 67,474 students across the United States, reported strong effectiveness in college access and enrollment. A number of studies have indicated access to post-secondary education has improved through concurrent enrollment, lowering the cost of college and thus increasing the likelihood students will enroll in some form of post-secondary education
Furthermore, concurrent enrollment students generally have higher grades and persist at greater rates than their traditional peers (Allen & Dadgar; Karp et al., 2007).

**High school completion.** Concurrent enrollment students have reported strong evidence of the effect of completing high school as compared to non-concurrent enrollment students (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds et al., 2017). Two studies by Berger et al. (2013) and Edmunds et al. (2017), based on 4,052 students across the United States, substantial evidence in the effectiveness of concurrent enrollment programs in the completion of high school. Edmunds et al. (2017) reported an increase in the percentage of students in concurrent enrollment programs who completed high school as compared to those not this type of program. The study consisted of 1,355 students in multiple high schools in North Carolina who demonstrated an increased high school completion rate when enrolled in a concurrent enrollment program.

**College credit accumulation.** Concurrent enrollment students have reported a high level of college persistence related to the completion of sophomore-level college credit accumulation (Giani et al., 2014). Students in concurrent enrollment programs continued to accumulate college credit versus leaving college during or after their freshman year (Struhl & Vargas, 2012). The studies reported positive correlation in an intervention on outcomes in college accumulation. The sample size was 64,340 U.S. high school students.

**General academic achievement.** Edmunds et al. (2017) and Berger et al. (2013) both reported a positive effect of concurrent enrollment on program students' standardized math achievement and English language arts scores as well as their high school grade point average. Edmunds et al. (2017) reported higher achievement of concurrent enrollment students’ passing rate on their end-of-year college exams in three or more college prep math courses, as well as
their end-of-course exam in Civics and Economics, English I, and Biology I. Additionally, Tinto (1998) reported academic integration was a key indicator of college persistence, and courses taken on a secondary campus allowed students to experience that integration even earlier through faculty interaction.

The establishment of these partnerships has a positive effect particularly on at-risk students. Woosley and Shepler (2011) stated programs targeting first-generation college students' early integration added to retention. Secondary faculty are more accessible to students in comparison to post-secondary faculty (Tinto, 1998). Additionally, providing opportunities which promote social links and academic experiences would lead to a higher rate of persistence. The collaboration of both high school staff and college staff are crucial in helping to promote first-generation college student success (Woosley & Shepler, 2011); thus, concurrent enrollment provides the opportunity for this significant partnership.

Engle and Tinto (2008) confirmed that taking more rigorous courses in high school increased the chances of low-income, first-generation college students’ enrollment in a 4-year college. Further research has asserted concurrent enrollment increased the chances of first-generation college students’ initial enrollment (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Given these gains, there is an increasing concern of subpar secondary and higher education outcomes, which has resulted in concurrent enrollment or dual credit enrollment programs becoming widely popular in the United States (Berger et al., 2013; Edmunds et al., 2017). These initiatives, considered accelerated learning programs, permit secondary students to enroll in college-level courses via concurrent enrollment, early enrollment, or AP, and provide high school and higher education course credit based on successful course completion and the requirements of the receiving higher education authority (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Boswell, 2001;
Greenberg, 1988). These acceleration initiatives have proven effective by improving the transition from secondary to post-secondary school. In addition, the programs have shown overall improvements in secondary and higher education outcomes (Harnish, 2005; Vargas, 2015). A subset of concurrent enrollment is dual credit enrollment (DCE). In order to clarify the distinction, DCE entails secondary (high school) students enrolled in post-secondary (College) courses on a secondary (high school) campus, whereas concurrent enrollment pertains to post-secondary secondary (college) students enrolled in post-secondary (high school) courses either on secondary (high school) or post-secondary (college) campus (Haskell, 2016). Further evidence has demonstrated underrepresented student households experience significantly more improvement than their general student population counterparts concerning such outcomes, providing particular benefit to economically brittle students during their academic and early-labor market careers (Haskell, 2016; Rothstein & Rouse, 2011).

While there have been limited longitudinal studies yielding the full understanding of the outcomes of early college, there have been enough data collected to show a significant increase in graduation rate, college credit accumulation, and college enrollment (Lewin, 2010). For example, nationally, 74% minority students and 56% low-income students are meeting or exceeding national averages for achievement (Nodine, 2009). In 2008, 2,360 students graduated with early college credits from 37 early colleges. In these programs, the 4-year graduation rate was 92% as compared to the national average of 72%. The same year, out of 4,198 graduates from across Early College programs, 83% reported earning at least some college credits as compared the national average of 17%. Moreover, 40% of early college students received at least 1 year of college credits (Matthews, 2010).
Limitations of concurrent enrollment. The positive effects of concurrent enrollment have their limitations. Extant research has reflected mixed evidence as to the effect of concurrent enrollment programs on college attendance or completion. This criticism rises from the challenge in obtaining accurate data on students’ high school academic history and college enrollment patterns (Cowan, Goldhaber, Hayes, & Theobald, 2016). Until recently, statewide databases have not typically linked the academic records of high school students to postsecondary outcomes. Given this, the majority of previous studies have suffered from challenges due to missing data. An (2013a) analyzed data from the NELS:88 and noted concurrent enrollment students who enroll in college are about 8% more likely to complete any college degree and 7% more likely to complete a bachelor’s degree than non-participants. Further research has indicated students with prior concurrent enrollment participation generally earn higher grades and persist at greater rates in postsecondary education (Allen & Dadgar, 2012; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007).

Early College/Collegiate College Programs

Since 2000, the number of students who have enrolled in concurrent enrollment program has risen each year. Since the late ’90s, there has been an increase in the number of students who have received their associate’s degree even before they graduated high school (Fink et al., 2017). Collegiate college programs often have various names, such as Early College Designs (Jobs for the Future, 2014), Smart Scholars (Frey, 2011), or Enhanced Dual Enrollment Systems (Middle College National Consortium, 2019). Early College students take selected college courses while in high school, with carefully structured supports used to facilitate their success. Although the number of these schools offering Early College programs is growing, there are still only about 280 in the United States (Jobs for the Future, 2014).
Early College innovations are forcing the traditional high school model of ninth through twelfth grade to evolve. In the early college model, the 11th- and 12th-grade high school experience has changed to give all students adequate preparation for college and career. The goal for the 12th grade is not to be a terminal point in education, but rather a transition point for students’ next education phase, whether it be college or a career (Vargas, 2015). Early college students enroll in courses which are often more rigorous than traditional high school courses. Like other concurrent enrollment programs, many Early College programs are structured such that students attend classes on a college campus. Often, early college students obtain an associate's degree before they earn their high school diploma, which saves them 2 years in university tuition. Early college students are often enrolled in a university up to 2 years earlier than their peers. The participating high schools include many that serve low-income, urban, and rural communities, with large numbers of students who would be the first in their family to attend college. It should be noted that despite the diversity of models, they all take into account research-based design considerations, including (a) attention to secure high school–college partnerships; (b) careful sequencing of courses and supports that allow students to progress toward greater independence; (c) built-in opportunities to gain college knowledge, that is, the knowledge needed to navigate formal and informal college systems; (d) measures to ensure the authenticity of college courses; and (e) a focus on key relationships that help students to believe that they can succeed in challenging college courses (Barnett, Bucceri, Hindo, & Kim, 2013).

Early college students are significantly more likely to earn a college degree than traditional high school students. Andrews (2010) reported that 25% of early college students received a college degree (typically an associate's degree), as compared to 5% of comparison students. Initially, many of these program collaborations between colleges and high schools
were established to provide gifted and motivated students more educational opportunities early (Andrews, 2010). However, more programs began to develop with the purpose of targeting an underserved population in the form of early colleges. Early colleges exposed underserved populations by exposing them to more rigor and the college environment. These students experienced a blending of high school curriculum and core college requirements to obtain both their high school diploma and their associate’s degree, equating to 2 years of college credit (Wolk, 2005).

Early College/Collegiate High School programs have adopted specific principles which outline a framework for success. Jobs for the Future, a Bill and Melinda Gates Education Foundation funded program, focuses on the promotion of policy for early colleges. Jobs for the Future (2014) outlined the five core principles as follows: (a) ECHS/CHS programs are committed to service underrepresented students in higher education; (b) ECHS/CHS programs are established and sustained by a local school district or lead education agency, a post-secondary institution, and the community at large, all of whom are jointly accountable for success; (c) ECHS/CHS programs and their higher education partners and community jointly develop integrated academic programs so all students can earn 1 to 2 years of transferable college credit leading to college completion; (d) ECHS/CHS programs engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develop academic and social skills as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion; and (e) ECHS/CHS programs and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policy that promotes the early college movement (Jobs for the Future, 2014 p. 2). ECHS/CHS programs use three critical components as a framework to implement the core principles: rigor, relevance, and relationships, 3R's (Berger et al., 2013). This framework,
created by the Instruction for Educational Leadership Center in the early 1990s, contained only rigor and relevance. Relationships have been recently added and have been proven to be a critical component in successful educational strategies (McNulty & Russell, 2007). Students must learn to reason, collaborate, and problem solve to be considered college or career ready, skills which are often lacking in many curriculums. A link must be established between rigor and relevance, with a small, intimate educational setting where adults demonstrate interest and involvement in a student's learning (Wagner, 2002).

Successful ECHS/CHS programs have demonstrated common characteristics which have resulted in students' success. The characteristics were described by Berger et al. (2013) as the following: common focus, high expectations, personalized learning, respect and responsibility, performance base, and a focus on technology. Students and educators share a common focus, including a few mutually established goals. The use of resources, time, and effort are aligned with a mutually defined goal to help the learner; usually, this goal is college credit attainment.

Students and educators alike have high expectations. Educators are focused on students demonstrating success and the completion of rigorous college credit-bearing coursework. In early college, personalized learning is an essential component for student success. Early College/Collegiate High School programs are designed to facilitate the educator and student relationship, where each learner has an educator mentor who functions as an educational and personal advocate. More often than not, the schools are small in number. In addition, the school is a safe, ethical, and nurturing environment reinforcing respect and responsibility for the students. Educators model and demonstrate ethical and responsible behaviors, and relationships are based on mutual trust and respect. Early college programs provide needed, enhanced, comprehensive programs with additional academic support and counseling to facilitate the
secondary-postsecondary transition (Bailey & Karp, 2003). Early colleges are performance-based. Students are promoted based on mastery and demonstrated competency. Students who lack mastery are given time, resources, and assistance to demonstrate proficiency. Finally, educators implement technology-rich, creative curricula to maximize student engagement. Educators engage parents as partners and frequently communicate the student's progress with their parents (Berger et al., 2013).

According to Berger et al. (2013), early college has a significant positive effect on degree attainment for minority students relative to non-minority students and on low-income students relative to higher income students. As a result, minority and low-income students are less likely to achieve a college degree than other groups (Berger et al., 2013; Aud et al., 2013). Early college programs focus on reducing the gaps in degree attainment related to minority status and low-income status. For example, in Texas, concurrent enrollment programs have increased the opportunity of college degree attainment for all students regardless of sub-group (Struhl & Vargas, 2012).

Early college/Collegiate High school programs is a subset of concurrent enrollment, with programs that have defined the eligibility and enrollment process, support systems, course selections, and performance expectations (Jobs for the Future, 2014). Early College/Collegiate High School program participants attend the respective program without respect to the district or school-level boundaries in a faculty dedicated to maximizing dual-credit course enrollment, often located on or near a public higher education campus (Haskell, 2016). The ECHS/CHS program structure helps students focus on earning college credits while in high school, often to obtain an associate's degree as opposed to undefined post-secondary credits. The goal is usually to substitute graduation requirements for secondary courses with concurrent enrollment, early
enrollment, and Advanced Placement to fulfill an associate's degree requirement. In instances where ECHS/CHS students choose to earn an associate's degree coinciding with receiving their high school diplomas, several additional college-level courses are required (Edmunds et al., 2017; Nodine, 2009). Depending on the student's preferred course selection, these courses may be taken at the ECHS/CHS as additional concurrent enrollment courses, while others may be considered as early enrollment at the affiliated college. Early College/Collegiate High School programs provide a head start toward college completion at the expense of the state's public education system and without more significant burdens on that system or those households supporting it (Fincher-Ford, 1996; Karp & Hughes, 2008; Lieberman, 2004; Welsh, Brake, & Choi, 2005). Numerous studies have supported positive outcomes for participants in DCE and ECHS/CHS programs (Karp et al., 2007; Kim & Bragg, 2008; Speroni, 2011; Struhl & Vargas, 2012; Swanson, 2008). Finally, ECHS/CHS graduates are anticipated to accrue less debt as a result of educational expenses, have an advantage in finding employment, and have overall higher lifetime earnings. As a result of many of these benefits, it is projected that the savings are not only experienced by the families, but also by educational institutions and governments (Berger et al., 2013; Palaich, Augenblick, & Maloney, 2007; Vargas, 2013).

**School Culture**

According to Deal and Peterson (2009), there is no single best definition of school culture. Lumby and Foskett (2011) defined culture as a tool to assist with the process of making sense of people by providing a mechanism for categorizing, simplifying, and describing the human state. Wagner (2002) describes school culture as shared experiences both in and out of school (traditions and celebrations), a sense of community, of family and of a team. These concepts are embedded in the organization and operate unconsciously. Deal and Peterson (2009)
explain that school culture, like any other culture, contains all the traditions, values, and norms of a school. And, as Marion (2002) stated, “Culture is influenced by the totality of the organizational experience” (p. 227).

Several studies (Fullan, 1998; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Rossman, 1988; Rutter, 1979) have concluded that culture is an essential component of improving teaching and learning. While teachers come with their own bias, the school culture sets the tone for what happens in the classroom (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). School culture is a shared understanding by teachers, staff, and students, and school culture can effect students' success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

The College Board (2006) advanced the notion of a “college-going culture” that “builds the expectation of postsecondary education for all students—not just the best students” (p. 2). In schools where positive culture exists, the academic achievements of students increase, and teachers believe in student ability to progress academically (Deal & Peterson, 2009; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2004). Mitchell (2008) identified six elements of positive school culture: (a) collaborative leadership, (b) teacher collaboration, (c) collegial support, (d) unity of purpose, and (e) learning partnerships.

The College Board (2006) observed that “creating a college-going culture requires a change in attitude on a global scale” (p. 6). It requires that the school believes and acts as if all students are expected “to achieve at a high level”; this requires challenging “the existence of low-level and unchallenging courses” and debunking “negative myths about who can and who cannot achieve success in rigorous courses” (p. 6).

**Limitations of Early College/Collegiate College Programs**

While the preponderance of evidence suggests many positive aspects of concurrent
enrollment programs, in particular, Early College programs, there remain significant limitations. Borden, Taylor, Park, & Seiler (2013) cited inadequate rigor to prepare students for college, concurrent enrollment instructor qualifications, insufficient or inconsistent academic rigor, lack of an authentic college experience, and, in some states, the transferability of concurrent credit. The prevailing common concerns center on assuring quality rigor and ensuring concurrent enrollment courses are at rigorous post-secondary level. There is a lack of research indicating that concurrent enrollment courses are equivalent to traditional college courses. Another limitation is ensuring instructor qualification; a significant number of concurrent enrollment instructors are high school teachers credentialed as adjunct community college faculty. Most state policies rely on the postsecondary institutions' regional accreditation requirements for faculty qualifications (Borden et al., 2013).

Ensuring that concurrent enrollment fulfills its promise of providing an authentic college experience is also up for debate (Karp, 2012; Smith, 2007). In many states, there are concerns over concurrent course transferability. Critics, and even some supporters, of concurrent enrollment have expressed concern that the exponential growth of concurrent enrollment of students who may not be academically or socially ready for post-secondary education will dilute the rigor and effectiveness of concurrent enrollment (Mangan, 2016).

Finally, a paramount concern is the lack of research and understanding of many perceived intangible factors that lead to student success in concurrent enrollment, such as student motivation, prior academic work, economic status, family support, and student characteristics (Bailey & Karp, 2003; Karp & Hughes, 2008).

Concurrent enrollment—in particular, structured programs such as early college—shows promise. Such programs are still emerging and maturing and require further research.
Chapter Summary

Chapter Two presented a review of relevant literature on the history of secondary education, the effects of A Nation at Risk and No Child Left Behind, transition to postsecondary education, structural deficiencies in the American high school model, history of and research on concurrent enrollment and early college/collegiate college programs, and limitations of these programs. Chapter Three presents the methods used for this study and the rationale for their appropriateness for this research.
CHAPTER THREE:

METHODS

The purpose of this research was to examine educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in a Collegiate High School program. The questions guiding the study were: What are educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in a Collegiate High School program? What are educators’ perceptions of the ways in which school culture affects students academically and socially? Participants in this study included instructors, administrators, and support staff in a Collegiate High School program. This research used a qualitative case study framework.

Research Design

Qualitative methods can be especially useful in discovering the meaning that people attribute to events they experience. A case study framework focuses on the unique insights and perceptions to be gained from a particular situation, allowing for deeper understanding and rich descriptions of the complexities of the case. Case studies are well-aligned with interviews, which help to illuminate participants’ experiences, perceptions, and understandings (Creswell, 2005, 2013; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009).

Creswell and Poth’s data collection circle (2018) was used to guide the steps of the study (see Figure 4). This chapter is partially organized in relation to the components of the data collection circle.
Description of Research Site

I selected a Collegiate High School program located in a major metropolitan area of a southeastern state in the U.S. I used the pseudonym of Southern State Collegiate High School (SSCHS) to protect the identity of the school. SSCHS is a suburban 4-year high school located on the grounds of a state (community) college and is part of the Southern County Public School Board. SSCHS works in collaboration with the local state college. At the conclusion of Grade 12, students at SSCHS receive a high school diploma from the Southern County School District and an Associate of Arts degree upon completion of all required credits.
Varying documents were used to provide information about SSCHS, but those documents are not cited in this section to protect the identity of the school. SSCHS opened in August 2004 to provide educational opportunities for students in Southern County who are emotionally and academically prepared to participate in college-level coursework. The core components of the program represent a blend of secondary and post-secondary curricula, with the employment of various instructional strategies which accommodate learning styles, incorporate the integration of technology, and support extensive group and individual counseling and mentoring. The program consists of a 3-year curriculum allowing students in 10th-, 11th-, and 12th grade to simultaneously complete the requirements for a high school diploma and an Associate of Arts degree.

SSCHS consists of two programs: The Pre-Collegiate Program and the Collegiate Program. The Pre-Collegiate Program emphasizes instruction to prepare 10th-grade students for success in college-level courses. Students take traditional high school courses with specially designed courses that support college readiness skills and writing and research at a level of higher learning.

The Collegiate Program supports 11th- and 12th-grade students who are considered fully dual-enrolled in college coursework, leading to the completion of an Associate of Arts degree. Each student attending SSCHS follows an individualized program, designed cooperatively by school personnel and the student along with input from parents. SSCHS has responsibility for providing instructional and ancillary support to ensure student success. The student is responsible for fully utilizing the opportunities provided while the parents are responsible for providing a support system outside of the classroom. The relationships enhanced by the involvement of the school staff, the student, and his or her parents strengthen the foundation for
the success of SSCHS. As such, the high school has received an “A” rating according to the Florida Department of Education School Grade ranking every year since it opened in 2004.

Enrollment in the program is capped at 240 students per year and consists of a four-step process. In step one, all potential applicants must attend a workshop information session, which is held in January preceding the year of enrollment. The information sessions are held in multiple locations and times throughout Southern County. In step two, all applicants must apply via an online portal (Figure 5 provides admissions requirements for Pre-Collegiate and College Programs). In step three, all applicants must pass the Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) placement test. Lastly, in step four, applicants must submit all application material and PERT information by the application deadline, which is usually the first Friday in February. If more students apply than space is available, a computer-generated lottery is used to select the students who receive an invitation to enroll.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Collegiate Admissions Requirements</th>
<th>College Program Admissions Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern State college program is strategically designed to prepare 10th grade students to succeed in courses.</td>
<td>Southern State college program is an accelerated program for 11th and 12th grade students (Dual Enrolled) in required college courses for an Associate of Arts degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unweighted GPA 3.0 or higher</td>
<td>• Unweighted GPA 3.0 or higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Successfully passed Algebra One and End of Course exam by the end of Grade 9.</td>
<td>• Successfully passed Algebra One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Minimum College placement test scores of:</td>
<td>• Successful passed Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 92 Reading</td>
<td>• Minimum College placement test scores of:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 92 in Writing</td>
<td>o 106 Reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o 100 in Mathematics</td>
<td>o 108 in Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. SSCHS 2019 admissions requirements.*
Mission and Values

SSCHS has developed and implemented a focused mission, vision, and core values to promote a unique culture for its early college program. SSCHS’s mission is for students to simultaneously earn a high school diploma, an Associate of Arts degree, and a Bright Futures scholarship. SSCHS’s vision is to cultivate motivated learners, develop critical thinkers, and empower visionary leaders.

SSCHS outlines their core values as (1) student first, (2) continual improvement, (3) collaborative learning, (4) integrity, (5) family and community environment, and (6) mutual respect. ‘Student first’ is reflected by SSCHS’s commitment to communicating and helping students understand that educators care about them as individuals; they are always willing to assist, as well as celebrate their success. Resources, decisions, and efforts are aligned to help students succeed. Continual improvement is attained by staff review of data, soliciting feedback, and exploring research-based best practices to respond to students' changing needs. Students and staff are expected to learn from mistakes and continually reflect on improving. Collaborative learning is realized by fostering a sense of community and helping students and staff excel. By working collaboratively, staff and students benefit from one another’s strengths and experiences, which in turn allows for the development of a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the world. The core value of integrity is reached through SSCHS educators being committed to act responsibly, honestly, and ethically. Family and community environment is achieved by SSCHS nurturing relationships and working together to encourage students to learn, flourish, and grow, both academically and personally. The final core value of mutual respect is achieved by SSCHS seeking to understand other perspectives while guiding students in forming healthy relationships and appropriate social skills.
Demographics

SSCHS provided data for the tables that follow showing the demographic makeup of the school and its graduation statistics for the 5 years previous to this study. Table 1 indicates that the school is somewhat less diverse than the county school system as a whole.

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity Demographics Compared to Southern County Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
<td>&gt;1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the last five years, the proportion of students who are female has increased (Table 2). In 2013-2014 the percentage of female students was slightly more than 50% of the student body. In 2017-2018 female students represent more than two-thirds of the student body.

Table 2

Gender Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates that over the last 5 years the school has had a 100% high school graduation rate with an average of 96% of the student body completing an A.A. degree.
Table 3

Percent of Students Graduating by Degree Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Seniors</th>
<th>H.S. Graduation Rate</th>
<th>A.A. Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017-18</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-16</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants

For this study I was seeking educators who had (a) established an ethic of care and positive relationship with early college students, (b) direct interaction with the transition of students between secondary and post-secondary education, and (c) students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, including, but not limited to, marginalized groups such as low-income populations.

Five instructors were selected to participate in a focus group interview, and two administrators (school principal and state college dean) and a school counselor were selected to participate in individual interviews (see Chapter 4 for additional information about the participants). Participants were purposefully selected for their ‘fit’ within the desired criteria in consultation with the school principal.

Gaining Access and Developing Rapport

In order to obtain access and develop rapport, I emailed the site location principal and gave a brief introduction about myself and the scope of the research project. I had previously interacted with the principal when I visited the program the previous year. The principal was supportive of the research project and assisted with logistics.
To conduct research at SSCHS, Southern School District County required an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to be submitted and approved by the local state college (see Appendix C) and the University of South Florida (see Appendix D). The site location principal agreed to be the on-site sponsor of this research.

To recruit participants, a recruitment letter (see Appendix B) was electronically sent to all eligible participants by front office personnel. I requested that the principal not send the email directly to reduce potential for indirect perception of coercion. The email stated that participation in this research study was voluntary and that in no manner would their employment be affected if they declined to participate. In addition, participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Moreover, the role of the school was voluntary, and the school principal could decide to withdraw the school’s participation at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality. Establishing a high level of confidentiality was critical in order to insure participants were protected from potential harm or punitive action based on their perceptions and to promote an atmosphere of openness and authentic responses (Patton, 2015). Prior to coding, I assigned pseudonyms to each participant and removed individual names from the final interview transcripts.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a focus group interview and individual interviews. The focus group and individual interviews were conducted at the selected school campus in order to maximize the familiarity and comfort of the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 6). The principal assisted in coordinating the room and times for the focus group and individual interviews in order to minimize any disruptions to classroom or school functions.
Focus Group

The advantage of using a focus group interview is that it may generate a more free flow of information and greater depth of response than other data collection methods for qualitative-social research (Cohen et al., 2011). I conducted one 60-minute focus group session with a group of five classroom educators on May 8, 2019. The focus group session was framed by the two research questions: What are educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in a Collegiate High School program? What are educators’ perceptions of the ways in which school culture affects students academically and socially? These open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to engage in cross talk with each other and respond uninhibited to the questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Kvale, 1996). I used follow-up and clarifying questions to encourage participants to elaborate and provide more specificity to a response (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) or explore experiences or opinions (Seidman, 2006).

Individual Interviews

I interviewed the school counselor, the school principal, and state college dean to obtain contextual information about the program and their perceptions of students’ academic and social growth. Interviews were conducted on May 15, 2019; the individual interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 45 minutes in length. I used a semi-structured interview format, framing the questions to provide participants with the flexibility and freedom to explore the phenomenon in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The semi-structured format allows for enriched interaction and more personalized responses to gain more insights than those produced using a structured format (McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Seidman, 2006). Moreover, semi-structured interviews permit the data collection method to “elicit additional data if initial answers are vague, incomplete, off topic-or not specific enough” (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p. 255). According to
Burns (2010), “[a] semi-structured interview aims to enable[s] [researchers] to make some comparison across…participants' responses, but also to allow for individual diversity and flexibility” (p. 75).

Examples of interview questions include, but are not limited to:

- Can you provide contextual background on the purpose and origins of this program?
- What is your involvement in this program?
- How long have you been an instructor/principal/dean?
- What subject/grade level do/did you teach?
- What motivated you to teach/work in this program?
- What was your experience with students in other programs, and how does it compare to this collegiate/early college program?
- How would you describe students entering the program?
- How would you describe students exiting the program?

A limitation associated with semi-structured interviews is that the direct interaction involved may entail some subjectivity and bias on the part of teacher-researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). In order to limit my own biases during the interviews and when drafting the interview guides, I used a self-reflecting journal and attempted to refrain from communicating personal values and opinions. In order to engage in reflexivity (Xerri, 2018), I needed to be aware of my own beliefs of and bias toward the effects of early college so that these aspects would not unduly influence the questions I asked in the interviews and color my reactions to the interviewees’ responses. During the interviews, I was mindful that “some delicate balancing act is needed here between nonjudgmental neutrality and empathetic understanding and approval” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 141).
Recording Information and Data Storage

Both focus group and individual interviews were digitally voice recorded using an auto-recording device, and transcribed verbatim, with attention to pauses and emphasis to avoid misinterpretation of the participant's intended viewpoints (Robson, 2002). I used a third-party transcription service to transcribe the interviews into a password-secured MSWord document. The commercial transcription service was Rev, a transcription service located in San Francisco, CA.

Field Notes

Field notes were recorded during the focus group and interviews, reviewed after each interview, and later analyzed and compared to the interview transcriptions (Maxwell, 2005). On the first page of each set of notes, I recorded the date and time and a working title that indicated the content of the notes. Topics addressed in the field notes included particular events that participants recalled, and my speculations about emerging themes, points of clarification, and any connections that I detected between or among participants’ perceptions (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007). Other notations in the field notes included observations about participants’ attitude and direct quotes that caught my attention.

Minimizing Field Issues

I visited the site location the week prior to the focus group to review the room selected for the focus group. In order to be approved for the study by the site location, the principal was trained and completed human social behavioral investigators resource training (HSBIRT) and received certification. R. Suzanne Legg served as my assistant with the focus group. She also completed the HSBIRT and received certification (see Appendix E for these certificates).
During the focus group interview, we had one disruption. The disruption was a small group of educators from the college who mistakenly entered the room for less than one minute.

**Managing, Organizing, and Storing Data**

I completed, reviewed, and organized all relevant data, digitized all materials, and uploaded the data to University of South Florida’s secure data storage program (Box) for storage and retrieval. The data consisted of consent forms, IRB approvals, transcriptions, digital voice recordings, field notes, and journals. Data will be stored for 5 years; at the end of 5 years, all digital records would be deleted via University of South Florida record deletion protocols.

I used the MAXQDA qualitative analysis software program and Excel to organize the data for the coding process. This method allowed for uniform retrieval categories, coding, and thematic development.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns were carefully considered throughout the study. The principal at the site was frequently informed and consulted about the purpose and scope of the study. As a result of the site location being a collaborative effort between the school district and state college, approval to perform this study was granted from the review board of the state college that houses the early college program. Approval of the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of South Florida was obtained before data collection, and I used the IRB Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk protocol (see Appendix A).

Participant identity was protected by assigning pseudonyms in the final transcripts. I reviewed verbally the need for confidentiality before the focus group and individual interviews. Before conducting the focus group and interviews, participants were informed that they may
refuse to answer any question that make them feel uncomfortable and that they may discontinue participation at any time without negative consequence.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to codify data generated by the participants. The use of thematic analysis “…empower(s) individuals to share their stories, hear their voices” and to … “be sensitive to issues such as gender differences, race, economic status, and individual differences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 40). Thematic analysis is a method to identify, analyze, and report patterns that emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in analysis of data, provides a structure for organization of themes, and assists in interpreting the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A quick view of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phase guide to thematic analysis is provided in Figure 6.

![Figure 6. Six-phase guide to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).](image)

I described and coded the data using two perspectives: emic and etic coding. Patton (2015) described emic coding as language and categories used by people in the culture studied to capture the unique vernacular and methods of a particular group. Next, I used etic coding, which
entails codes originating from specific literature and researcher interpretation for the purposes of developing categories and themes. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I also used constant comparative analysis to compare incidents or examples in the data across focus group and individual interviews to develop, refine and explore relationships among categories and themes (Boeije, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 2015).

Finally, I analyzed the themes in relation to the four theoretical models that provided the conceptual framework for the study: (a) Tinto’s (1997) Classrooms as Community; (b) Deci and Ryan’s (2001) Self-Determination Theory; (c) Rawls’ Social Justice Theory (1971); and (d) Locke and Latham’s (1990) Goal Theory. I reviewed the incidents and examples, using MAXQDA and coded passages in relation to each of the four theories. Next, I organized and counted the frequency of each code. The codes were used to generate themes and sub-themes within the four theories.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Creswell (2013) points out that qualitative research strives for understanding. He describes eight procedures that contribute to verifying qualitative research findings and enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. He recommends that any research study employ at least two of these procedures. In this study I engaged in four of the eight procedures:

- Persistent observation, by listening to the audio recordings and manually reviewing the transcriptions for accuracy.
- Member checking, by providing each participant a copy of the transcriptions and requesting that participants validate the transcriptions for accuracy. I provided a self-
addressed envelope for the participants to return the transcriptions with corrections made. Four out of the eight participants provided minor corrections. The corrections provided were changed on the transcriptions used for coding.

- Triangulation, by checking the consistency of findings across data sources
- Thick description, by providing a detailed account of participants’ perceptions and describing them in context of feature of the site
- field experiences in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context

**Transferability**

Transferability entails “the degree of similarity between the site studied and other sites as judged by the reader (and) is assessed by looking at the richness of the descriptions included in the study” (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 173). As a qualitative study, this study would not be transferable unless the new research takes place at a site where its characteristics and the demographic data of participants are identical to the description of participants and site location in this study.

**Limitations**

Study limitations were consistent with limitations of qualitative research. This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of eight collegiate high school educators in one collegiate high school within one county in Florida; thus, the findings are not generalizable to all educators’ experiences, concurrent education programs, or geographical settings. The educators who participated in this study varied by gender, race, age, educational background, personal background, and professional background; these factors themselves may have influenced the educators’ perceptions of the collegiate college program. Finally, my personal bias could have
influenced the findings. To minimize the influence of my personal bias, I consciously adopted a stance in which preconceptions and prejudices were acknowledged as I performed my analysis of the interviews based on transcriptions of the recorded responses of study participants, and I used field notes and a reflective journal to log my approach and perspectives during data collection and analysis.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter Three presented the research design, description of the site, selection of participants, data collection and analysis strategies, trustworthiness and credibility procedures, transferability and limitations.
CHAPTER FOUR:

FINDINGS

This chapter presents results of the analysis of the focus group and individual interviews with participants at the collegiate high school. Interview data were collected to answer the guiding questions: What are educators' perceptions of students' academic experiences and social growth in the Collegiate College program? What are educators’ perceptions of the ways in which school culture affects students academically and socially? Data from the interviews are reflected in this chapter based on the order of focus group interview and individual interviews. Focus group interviews consisted of five classroom educators and a guided discussion of the perceptions based on the research questions.

The findings are organized into two sections: (a) a summary of participant responses to the research questions and (b) emergent themes from the data addressing the research questions. In addition, the participants’ background information is provided, including, educational and professional background, as well as the courses and years the participant has instructed at the collegiate high school. Finally, participants’ perceptions were grouped into three themes and several subthemes. The three main themes were belonging, customization, and a common purpose. Each theme was comprised of several subthemes, which supported the main theme. Figure 7 provides an illustration of the research design framework, indicating the results of data analysis.
Participant Profiles

Study participants had a wide range of academic and professional experience, ranging from 10 years to 35 years in a traditional public school setting.

Table 4

Participants’ Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Subject Matter</th>
<th>Education Experience</th>
<th>Years at Collegiate College</th>
<th>Background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Resource Instructor</td>
<td>17 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Educational Nonprofit Director, Curriculum developer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The background information provided by participants was self-disclosed during the interview process. Participants 1 through 5 were part of a single focus group interview, while participants 6 through 8 were part of three separate individual interviews. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the focus group lasted 60 minutes, while the personal interviews ranged from 20 to 45 minutes.

Participant 1 (P1) had a doctorate in education and has been a member of the collegiate high school faculty for 10 years. P1 developed and implemented a leadership development curriculum, was a creative writing instructor focused on study skills, provided resources to teachers, and interacted directly with learners.

Participant 2 (P2) had over 27 years of experience in education; 7 of those years were as a private tutor, and the remaining were as a public-school teacher. P2 indicated instruction of chemistry and mathematics courses.
Participant 3 (P3) had over 23 years of educational experience as an instructor of English I, II, and III, as well as a course and yearbook coordinator for the college. P3 has been at the college for 15 years and is an original faculty member of the collegiate college program. Prior to teaching at the collegiate college, P3 taught for 7 years at traditional public schools.

Participant 4 (P4) had 17 years of education experience and has been a member of the collegiate high school faculty for 12 years. P4 served as a classroom instructor for 5 years in a traditional public school before becoming a faculty member at the collegiate college program. P4 has taught history, economics, and civics courses.

Participant 5 (P5) has been in education for 35 years as a math instructor. P5 has 16 years of experience at the university level, 6 years at private school, 4 years in engineering, and has been at the collegiate high school for 10 years.

Participant 6 (P6) has been in education for over 20 years and is the second principal of the collegiate college program. P6 has been the principal for 11 years. Before being appointed as the principal at the collegiate college, P6 served as principal of a traditional public school prior to joining the collegiate college program, district administrator, assistant principal, instructor, and first-grade teacher.

Participant 7 (P7) has been in education for over 30 years and has been a school counselor for a total of 12 years. P7 has also been a collegiate school counselor for 2 years. P7 has experience working with middle and high school students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. P7 indicated working at two "A" schools and two "F" schools before coming to the collegiate college. Prior to being a school counselor, P7 had 8 years of experience as a classroom teacher and was in the private sector in educational sales for 10 years.
Participant 8 (P8) has been in education for over 30 years. P8 is the college dean who directly supervises the collegiate high school program for the state college. P8 indicated working in the K-12 system in another part of the state for 18 years before working at the state college. P8 has been at the state college for 14 years.

Research Question One (RQ1)

In what ways do you feel that students demonstrated academic and social growth?

Table 5

Research Question One – Individual Response Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Summary Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>No response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Relationships, small classes, effort, trust, discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Student improvement, increased language and presentation skills, understanding of deeper content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Success is more than a grade, academic and social growth are synonymous, relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Relationships, college level skills, resiliency, success is more than a grade, academic and social growth are synonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Confidence, College readiness skills, workplace skills, community/leadership engagement, and post-secondary navigational skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Anxiety, stress, and time and management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Graduation rates and student autonomy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P1 through P5 were asked the first research question in a focus group setting and were permitted to have a conversation with each other on the research question topic. The participants expressed a wide range of views on how students demonstrated academic and social growth. However, the participants were in general agreement with each other’s perspective as to what consisted of academic and social growth.

During the focus group conversation, P1 did not respond directly to research question number one, but provided insights during other research question and discussions.
P2 stated that “actions” (s. 56) expressed academic and social growth. Furthermore, this individual revealed that academic and social growth were dependent on relationships: "So success (is) in the trust relationship, success in a real relationship where I actually can tell this child there is" (s. 79). P2 expressed that this was a result of smaller class sizes: “Again, another thing we can do because it's small class size, and I can listen to them present to me. And we were discussing when I'm grading them what I'm looking for" (s. 78). One of the key indicators P2 suggested looking for is effort:

And we were discussing when I'm grading them what I'm looking for. And I'm discussing...I don't expect perfection, but I expect them to give me their best, and that's individual, so we talk about that, and I'd say, "I don't need an automaton not to just memorize it. I really want you to talk to me." When they present, they need to convince me that they've learned it, that they know it. (s. 78)

P3 expressed academic improvement, enriched English and presentation skills, and more in-depth content as evidence of academic and social growth:

In my classroom, I want them to improve stuff English teachers want to improve. I want them to be able to speak, read, write, listen, view critically, present using visual presentations with PowerPoint or whatever medium they're using. And I want them to improve those skills. Those are the skills I'm looking for in English; I'm looking to improve those. I want to move them forward. (s. 98)

P3 went on to mention the importance of deeper content:

If you get just into a deeper concepts, but if they improve their year reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, presenting oral presentations and stuff like that, if they can
improve all those areas, they're becoming more academically successful, will be successful in college if they can do that, in many of their classes as well. (s. 99)

P4 outlined three points relating to social and academic growth: (a) success is more than a grade, (b) academic and social growth are synonymous, and (c) the importance of relationships. P4 emphasized that “it has to mean a lot more than just everybody gets an A” (s. 57). P4 argued that academic and social growth “is not just represented by a single number” and that “you'd see a student's ability to process information, apply the information” (s. 57). Furthermore, P4 suggested, “it's about what the student has learned, has grown” (s. 57).

P5 reinforced P4’s points that academic and social growth were synonymous, stating, “I agree with P4. It goes together, academic success and social” (s. 74). P5 also reinforced P2’s point about smaller classes being conducive to building relationships. P5 stated, “I have my students together in groups and tables. I have them work together, and we have such small classes, you all mentioned the small classroom. We're able to know our students individually” (s. 74). P5 then introduced a new indicator of success—resiliency—emphasizing the importance of students learning from failure, as failure is part of learning. P5 reported:

It should be. Because not everything gets everything perfect, but from when you get something wrong, that means you've learned something new. That's part of the necessary part ... but we've stigmatized this whole thing to where if you get an F or a bad grade, you've done something wrong. That's the general attitude. You didn't study hard enough, you didn't do this thing, or something has gone wrong, and the students they fear. They fear failure. They won't have the right answer, be afraid to share it because they're afraid of being wrong. They don't want to take a chance on taking that leap (s. 123); I think that's been indoctrinated into the kids by the time they get to us. That's why I'll ask a
question, and they'll be 20 kids in that room that know the answer, but they'll just stare at you. Because getting facts wrong is a stigmatizer. It's a bad grade; it's a red mark on your paper. That's bad. Instead of, ‘No, that's part of learning.’ That's a necessary part of learning. Unfortunately, we punish it. (s. 124)

P6, 7, and 8 participated in separate individual interviews. In this format, the researcher prompted each participant by asking the research questions. Their answers were explored through other follow-up questions as well as a free flow of information. P6 provided in-depth information with regard to RQ1, indicating that college readiness skills, workplace skills, community leadership, and self-confidence were evidence of academic and social growth. P6 stated:

[the] ability to navigate post-secondary institutions once they leave a Collegiate High School/Early College program is one of the greatest benefits for the students we serve. Students learn important habits, skills, and the confidence needed for their continued success as they pursue post-secondary education. (s. 773)

P6 noted that college readiness skills consist of (a) how to practically use a learning management system to access the syllabi for each course, online resources, and submit assignments; (b) how to use the syllabi as a “roadmap for success” (s. 830) in each course to guide their mastery of the course objectives and concepts; (c) how to organize tasks, manage their time, study effectively, conduct research, think critically, cite sources, and effectively read, write, and apply knowledge in a variety of disciplines; (d) how to work effectively with a diverse student body to complete group presentations and projects; and (e) the importance of attending classes, taking adequate notes, and studying every day instead of trying to cram for tests the night before (s. 827- 833).
P6 provided details on workplace skills as an indicator of academic and social growth, referring to workplace skills as interpersonal skills and outlining those skills as follows: (a) how to participate appropriately in college-level discussions when expressing viewpoints and how to be politely assertive when working as a member of a group or team; (b) how to use technology effectively for a variety of tasks; (c) how to make professional presentations using tools such as PowerPoint, electronic publications, and verbal presentations; (d) how to navigate social situations, make introductions, good handshake, eye contact, first impressions, speaking with others on a variety of topics, remembering names, and table manners; (e) how to dress for success, develop their personal brand, and use social media effectively; (f) how to create an e-portfolio and other multimedia presentations that look professional; (g) how to create a good resume, LinkedIn profile, elevator pitch, and develop interview skills; (h) familiarity with students’ rights and responsibilities so they know how to conduct themselves appropriately on a college or university campus; and (i) familiarity with safety processes so they know what to do in the event of an emergency, how to stay safe, and what to do when they feel unsafe on campus (s. 834-843).

P6 argued that community engagement was necessary evidence of academic and social growth, intertwined with leadership skills, school engagement, and community engagement in referring to these skills. P6 outlined these skills as follows: (a) students participating in college clubs and organizations while in high school, so they are more likely to serve as officers/leaders in college clubs and organizations as they continue their post-secondary education which research indicates also improves student achievement; (b) civic-minded – due to the required service as part of their involvement in service clubs, National Honor Society, and the community service required for the Bright Futures Scholarship, students cultivate empathy, confidence,
leadership, and other skills that they may not learn in an academic setting; (c) students are more globally aware due to their involvement in cultural activities at the college and study abroad opportunities (s. 848-856).

P6 indicated that students had gained valuable navigation skills to help guide them in college majors and career focus. These skills included (a) the students have been able to take numerous interest inventories and created college major/career plans, so they effectively select courses aligned to graduation/career/workforce requirements in their chosen field; (b) students are learning how to apply for scholarships, which is especially crucial for first-generation and economically disadvantaged students; (c) students understand how to select and register for courses, so registration is more efficient and timely, increasing the likelihood they are enrolled in the courses they need in the right term; (d) students have already taken college courses, so they have the skills and confidence necessary to excel; (e) students know the resources offered by colleges and have used them, so they are not afraid to ask for help, seek tutoring, use resources effectively; (f) students know how to email a professor when they are absent, have a question, etc. and take advantage of "office hours" when they need additional support; (g) students learn how to ask for a letter of recommendation from professors, seek college opportunities, and apply for scholarships/internships; and (h) students learn the ethics aligned to their chosen major and have developed leadership skills (s. 848-856).

Finally, P6 indicated as a result of acquiring college readiness, workforce, and community leadership skills, students will have gained the self-confidence to navigate and succeed in the post-secondary educational landscape (s. 857). P6 stated:

In addition to the skills listed above, students gain confidence in navigating the college/university system which is especially important for the first generation and
economically disadvantaged students who may not have the necessary guidance and support from their families. Furthermore, students who have participated in CHS/Early College programs have learned these critical skills giving them more time to enjoy the additional opportunities offered by their college/university or to be able to work, if needed, while continuing to excel in college coursework. (s. 857)

P7 indicated handling stress and anxiety, as well as time management, were essential factors in academic, social growth. P7 stated, “because they (students) are learning to manage not just their academics, but they're learning to manage their emotions, and they're learning coping skills . . . We have lots of support” (s. 478). Time management is another factor. As a result of the students having more flexibility in their class schedule, time management skills are critical. P7 indicated:

I think the biggest thing is getting kids to manage their time and understand that we're giving a lot of structure your sophomore year, and you're going to have a lot of freedom your junior and senior years. You need the skills to be able to do the work so that ... and the reminder that you're going to have a lot of free time. You need to budget that. You have plenty of time, but you need to learn how to make your priorities. (s. 479)

P7 reflected the same concept as P2, 4, 5, and 6, that relationship development is an essential factor in developing these skills by stating, “I think the most important part is the relationship” (s. 528).

P8 had the least direct personal interaction with the students. P8 indicated that student academic and social growth was evidenced by the high level of graduation rates and student autonomy skills. P8 reported that “our (state college) graduation rates are high success rates” (s. 801). This high graduation rate reflected well on the success of the students. P8 also argued that
the high school students being able to manage independence on a college campus successfully reflects their social growth. P8 illustrated this by stating:

Most college freshmen and sophomores, which is what these students end up being. No one's saying, did you go to class? No one's saying, oh, your GPA. Oh, are you having struggle with this? Oh, you need some leadership training. Why don't you come and do this? Oh, why don't you come out and do some community service? No one is saying that to them if they're in a normal college setting. So they're not babied, not coddled. (s. 797)

**Research Question Two (RQ2)**

In what ways does the school culture affect the students academically and socially?

In response to RQ2, the participants, both in the focus group and individual interviews, tended to focus on how the school's culture affected the students socially and the factors relating to the school culture. During the interview, the researcher permitted the focus group and individual interviews to explore this dialogue. Table 6 provides an overview of the general content of their interview responses.

P1 expressed that the school's culture was a place where “the kids can be themselves; they can be goofy” (s. 360). The school culture focused on a sense of diversity to create this

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Summary Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Acceptance – no subs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Later start times, flexibility for students, responsiveness, individual attention, and respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Flexibility, student discipline, and respect, individual attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Academic support, relationships, autonomy, clear expectations, respect, security, individual attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Leadership development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Leadership development, individual value, autonomy, collaboration, time management, curiosity, school size, peer accountability, discipline, purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
culture. P1 stated, "We teach diversity in all the different programs and things we do. It's molded top down" (s. 380). P1 also referred to the consistency of staff as a factor in establishing the school’s culture, as it rarely used substitute teachers. P1 stated, “I haven't seen a sub for a while” (s. 452) and went on to highlight how the school culture created a culture of acceptance for all students. P1 articulated that the school provided a culture where students who may not feel accepted in other environments were accepted and could flourish. P1 noted, “I remember John Doe, as geeky as you could ever hope for saying, ‘In another high school, I'm the kid they would turn upside down in a garbage can, and here they voted me Prom King’” (s. 318).

P2 began by identifying that even the time start of the school day affected the school's culture and, in return, the students. P2 stated, “A big thing, they (students) start at 8 am here. An extra hour sleep for high school students. . . and on Friday's there are no classes” (s. 198). According to P2, by having a non-traditional class schedule, the students have a higher degree of autonomy:

They (students) can select the time they start. If you're not a morning person, in your junior and senior year you can take a class at 9 am, 10. You can take a midday class. If you don't like evening stuff, you can get all your classes done in the morning. (s. 200)

P2 continued by expressing, “These students have absolute freedom. . .my son went here he said ‘I was very happy.' He remembers being happy!” (s. 202). P2 further elaborated that the school culture created respect, stating, “Everyone here I respect. We have respect for one another. There's respect here. And I believe that everyone here cares about the students” (s. 137). P2
indicated a high sense of caring for each other, and that students contribute to establishing a unique school culture. P2 continued,

> Yeah, I have to say that. That I noticed isn't common... I would say different, different here, major difference. I actually think it's the people. I think the people here genuinely love and care for students. Every single body doesn't always get along but even the people I don't get along sometimes, I really believe they love and care for students. They just may come at it differently than I do. (s. 237)

Another factor which affected the school's culture was the administration’s responsiveness to the teachers, teachers' responsiveness to students, and finally, students’ responsive back to the faculty. P2 emphasized that “all of us feel like we are listened to” (s. 128) and “the administrations cares” (s. 127). P2 elaborated on how the teachers established a caring culture for students:

> That child did not slip through the cracks, because of our administration and because of what we can do here. So, if something is not right, someone will help him make it right. It's not just another kid. It's our kid, and we care. We will make it. We will fix it. We treat them like they are our children. (s. 32)

As a result of this level of care, attention to individual students, and responsiveness of the faculty, P2 stated that the students “want a special place to be; they (students) chose us; we chose them” (s. 284). P2 did not specifically mention any academic benefits resulting from the school's culture but highlighted the characteristics which created the school culture and some of its effects. In particular, P3 highlighted the notion that the school culture could be unique and provided flexibility to establish its own culture. P3 stated, “We could [be] anything, and we can think outside the box” (s. 16). In the focus group, P3 reiterated the assertion of P2 that “there
was respect” (s. 138) in the school and the importance of this factor in school culture. Also, P3 supported P2’s suggestion that the school culture fostered a system of care and individual attention by stating, “We'll take care of him (referring to a student)” (s. 33). During the focus group, P3 contributed to the discussion regarding discipline being a part of school culture that affects students. P3 indicated,

Plus, there's less ghetto element. There's less like that ... kids who misbehave and they don't want to do things that are just doing e-cigarettes in class or something. Kid goes like, ‘In my old school they vape all the time in class.’ I'm like, ‘In class? Why?’ We don't have kids like misbehaving like that. We don't see it; we don't have them doing that.

(s. 197)

P4 addressed RQ2 by stating support from the school administration shapes the school culture, indicating that the faculty "have support from the administration on all kinds of stuff" (s. 403). P4 stated that “learning is a social exercise” (s. 58) by “building relationships” (s. 58) and that “once the relationship is established, the curriculum is easier” (s. 149). P4 also emphasized that the school culture permitted relationship-building with students, and it has an effect on academics:

If we have a relationship, someone they can trust, they can come to, they can talk about issues and things like that, they're going to learn more. They're going to learn better.

Without those relationships, it's harder. (s. 149)

During the focus group, P5 addressed how the school size affected culture, indicating that being part of a smaller school allowed for more attention to individual students and more opportunities for those students to take on leadership roles. P5 stated, “Students (have) opportunity to be a part of the larger school community, to take a leadership position where
maybe in a bigger school that wouldn't be as readily available because you're a smaller fish in a bigger pond” (s. 316). In addition, P5 concurred with the other participants that a culture of caring was present: "They'll know immediately when one of our students, if something is going on, and we take care of it right away. And I think that makes a huge difference" (s. 75). As a result of the school culture, P5 indicated students were more responsive to faculty. P5 observed:

They'll (students) listen to the teachers, they'll listen to the principal, listen to the assistant principal . . . I think that's one of the most powerful aspects. . . they want to know, ‘Why am I doing this?’ (s. 206)

P5 concurred with the other participants that a culture of caring was present, stating, “They'll know immediately when one of our students, if something is going on, and we take care of it right away. And I think that makes a huge difference" (s. 75).

During the individual interviews, P6 outlined several factors that affected school culture and the effects on students. P6 was not privy to the information from the focus group yet indicated many of the same points. However, because of the nature of the individual interview, P6 was able to elaborate more precisely and provide greater detail than members of the focus group. Similar to the focus group, P6 indicated that the school's culture affected students' leadership skills, reporting the school designed its culture to address student leadership skills. P6 stated, “I wanted to bring the school to another level, besides policies and procedures and looking at data to get better, was a leadership development program” (s. 583).

P6 continued that community service was an essential part of student leadership skills. P6 stated that “students know it's important to give back, that students know that's part of leadership, and they gain a lot of skills that they wouldn't gain in any other way” (s. 598). While the development of leadership skills is an essential part of the school's curriculum, it also serves
to aid the students in fulfilling the Bright Futures requirement. P6 illustrated this fact by stating, "We really like the fact of what the Bright Future's component does for our students, as tied to the leadership development program" (s. 601). P6 indicated the school culture allows the students to be more collaborative, flexible, and autonomous. P6 reflected,

Here, we try to make sure that it's more collaborative. We have a peer tutoring program. We talk to students about helping each other be successful. And they have more freedom and flexibility to take the courses that they want. (s. 711)

By allowing for more flexibility, P6 argued that the students develop the autonomy to work in a more collaborative setting. P6 indicated this autonomy and flexibility resulted in increased intellectual curiosity. P6 reported:

I think our students genuinely like to learn, and they are inquisitive, and they enjoy that. They have intellectual curiosity. I think the fact of being in control of their education, and being able to choose some things, versus only being able to choose electives or having the same pathway as everyone else. I think they enjoy taking responsibility for their education. (s. 708)

P7 indicated as a result of the school culture, students have a strong sense of individuality. P7 stated,

They (students) are not just going along with what everybody else wants to do, and I think part of that is just the freedom of this generation. I think that they don't feel that they have to do all the traditional high school activities. I think that it's a shift with kids seeing that there are lots more activities than just your traditional high school activities to have a full life. (s. 512)
According to P7, as a result of the unique small school environment, a sense of individuality is cultivated; P7 went on to state the following:

I think we have a small school high school experience. We still have a fall dance. We still have a prom, but typically, our kids are not going to be your type of student that would be going to a lot of athletic events, anyway. That really would not be their thing, but we have kids that are still playing sports on their zoned high school teams. They may still be going to some of those games, because they still have friends at that school, but they've made new friends. They're enjoying their independence and their freedom that they have here when they're juniors and seniors. I think it's just an opportunity in a small setting to maybe take on a leadership role that maybe they might not have taken on at a school that had 1,200 or 2,000 students. (s. 508)

P8 indicated the importance of access and exposure to post-secondary education, expressing the fact that a significant number of students would not have access to post-secondary education. The school’s culture creates this opportunity for advanced coursework. As P8 commented,

A lot of these students wouldn't go to college. And what we find with the collegiate high school student, they didn't necessarily want or need that traditional high school experience. This is their high school. This is a completely different type of high school than anything else. And this fits a certain population and it fits them well, and yeah, I would guarantee probably half of them wouldn't survive the regular high school experience. Wouldn't go on to college. This is a really special thing, again, for this special population. (s. 799)

Analysis of Themes in Relation to Theoretical Perspectives
Saldaña (2015) defined a code as “most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3).

Table 7

**Emic Codes Identified in Focus Group and Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded Words</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Size/Class size</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customization</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Growth</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows the emic codes I identified and the frequency of the codes within the transcript texts. Emic coding focused on the participants’ perspectives, looking at common words or phrases that they used in their responses. I reviewed the transcripts using MAXQDA and coded the passages. I then organized and counted the frequency of each code.

Next I examined the emic codes in relation to the four theories that contributed to the Conceptual Framework of the study: Classrooms as Community (Tinto, 1997); Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008); Social Justice Theory (Rawls, 1971); and Goal Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990). Table 8 shows the etic codes that emerged from my
interpretation of the emic coded passages in relation to these four theories. Major themes and sub-themes (elements) are identified for each of the four theoretical models.

Table 8

_Etic Codes Identified in Relation to Theoretical Perspectives_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Perspective</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-Themes (Elements)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms as Community (Tinto, 1997)</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Determination Theory (Deci &amp; Ryan, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Program Structure (School/Class Size)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Justice Theory (Rawls, 1971)</td>
<td>Customized Pathways (Tailoring)</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Theory (Locke &amp; Latham, 1990)</td>
<td>Common Purpose</td>
<td>Wanting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rigorous Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement Goal (AA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, a flow chart was constructed to capture the organization and relationships of themes, sub-themes (elements), and characteristics of those sub-themes (see Figure 8). The section that follows provides discussion of the findings represented in this figure.
Figure 8. Findings for research questions – themes flowchart.

Theme One: Belonging

Tinto's Classrooms as Community model (1997) contends that formal learning (academic performances) increases as a result of informal learning, in part, as a result of informal (faculty interaction) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems (Tinto, 2006). Using this framework, the theme of Belonging emerged as a by-product of the fact that students self-selected to apply for the collegiate college program and then were selected by the collegiate college based on applications, PERT test, and GPA to be a member of the collegiate college program. The theme of Belonging is characterized by the subthemes of (a) Community, (b) Relationships, and (c) Social Experience.
Community. The subtheme of community was a dominant theme which repeatedly emerged in the data. The subtheme of community emerged more than any other subtheme (67 times). Community can be defined as having shared knowledge, shared responsibility, and shared knowing (Tinto, 2000, p. 2). Shared knowledge occurs by requiring students to take courses together and organizing those courses around a theme. Shared responsibility occurs when students and teachers become responsible to each other in the process of trying to know. Students participate in collaborative groups which require students to be mutually dependent on one another so that the learning of the group advances (Tinto 2000). Shared knowing occurs when programs establish a cohort of students who simultaneously enroll in several classes and develop bonds separate from just their academic experience (Tinto, 2000).

![Diagram of community components]

Figure 9. *Tinto’s components of community*

Each participant spoke in regard to one or more aspects of community. The data reflected this on multiple occasions. The collegiate high school is designed to create shared knowledge by grouping students into grade-level cohorts. P7 explained, “... once they (students) get into the junior year, they're in classes together, so they know each other” (s. 502).

P2 expressed shared responsibility by stating, “... the child did not slip through the cracks, because of our administration and because of what we can do here. So, if something is not right, someone will help him make it right. It's not just another kid. It's our kid, and we care” (s. 32). P6 confirmed the aspect of shared responsibility noting students at the collegiate
program are "more collaborative. We have a peer tutoring program. We talk to students about helping each other be successful" (s. 711).

P7 explained the program purposely designed the first three days of the school year to establish shared knowing. P7 commented, “The first couple of days, when the sophomores enter here, we give them a chance to get to know each other. We play ... We have icebreakers, and the students get to know each other's names” (s. 477). Through these activities, the school places a paramount focus on creating shared knowing. P7 further elaborated that the students feel as though they are “in an atmosphere where people care about me, definitely know my name, and they're going to watch out for me” (s. 477).

P1 reinforced the point that collegiate program designed a system to create shared knowing. P1 noted:

And it's not just about getting to know the teachers as well; we want to make sure that they develop a good network of friends. They're all brand new to the school. It could be (an) intimidating environment for them. We do a lot of different activities with them. Sometimes it's (the) whole group. So we'll have the whole sophomore class in the big room together, introduce them to everybody, let them know what everybody does at the school. We have them introduce themselves to one another. I'll have them do an activity where they pair off with someone they haven't met. They interview one another, and then they get up in front of the class and introduce one another. That's kind of a nice way to do that. (s. 141)

**Relationships.** One of the most critical factors highlighted by the participants was the need to form personal relationships with the students. Participants indicated effects or importance of relationship on 58 separate segments during the interviews. The relationships
referenced were multi-dimensional such as administration to teacher, administration to student, teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to student. According to Split, Koomen, and Thijs (2011), student-teacher relationships is critical to forming the social context to the environment for learning takes place. Student-teacher interactions have a strong influence on a student's academic performance and behavior (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Self-determination theory exemplifies the importance of good student-teacher relationships. The theory argues that individuals have three basic psychological needs: the need for relatedness, autonomy, and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2012). Roorda et al. (2011) demonstrated that the quality of student-teacher relationships is strongly related to students' motivation to learn. Further research states that the association of teacher-student relationships is stronger with student engagement in comparison to the student's learning achievement (Cornelius-White, 2007).

P4 discussed the importance of relationships and how they are the foundation for academic learning. He emphasized that it must be established early. He noted,

I'm building relationships with a student. Once that relationship is established, you have a relationship of trust, respect, safety. They feel safe in the classroom to express themselves and all kind of stuff. The academic stuff gets so... it's easy practically. So to me developing those relationships with students, which we can do here, is what leads to academic success. (s. 58)

P2 affirmed the importance of relationship by stating, “So, success (is) in the trust relationship, success in a real relationship” (s 79). P4 elaborated,

Because once that the relationship is established, the curriculum is easier. If we have a relationship, someone they can trust, they can come to, they can talk about issues and
things like that, they're going to learn more. They're going to learn better. Without that relationship, it's harder. (s. 149)

P2 shared a deep sense of care and affection that all the teachers had for each student. She confided, “I think the people here genuinely love and care for students . . . I really believe they love and care for students” (s. 237).

P7 expressed the multi-dimensions aspects of the relationships in the program succinctly. She stated, "The most important part is the relationship, the relationship between the staff and the administration, the relationship between staff, the administration, and the students, the students to each other. I think the best part of this program is a relationship” (s. 528). P2 further noted this relationship is not isolated to the teacher-student relationship but extends the importance of the establishment of the principal-student relationship. P2 expressed,

Your administration starting from the top down. Our principal will sign and write a comment on every students' report card. She knows every student by name, by face, and she looks at their report cards, and she has a comment . . . She knows who her students are. (s. 126)

P6 affirmed the teacher's assertion of the importance of relationships, stating,

When you share expectations, build the relationship, and students really understand that you care about them, and you really just have their best interest at heart, it allows you to help them more. It also allows when they are having difficulty; they are more willing to come to you and ask for help. It's hard for them to ask for help. (s. 636)

According to the participants, teacher–teacher relationship was an essential aspect of the program. P4 stated,
Like families, we occasionally squabble with each other. That's okay. That means somebody is thinking. If everybody agreed on everything, then somebody's not thinking. Because without a relationship, it doesn't matter what the book says. It's going to be hard. (s. 141)

P1 expressed it was critical to foster and establish the student-student relationship. She stated the importance of not only the teachers and students developing relationships, but also that the program allowed for space for the students to create bonds with each other. As P1 explained,

And it's not just about getting to know the teachers as well; we want to make sure that they develop a good network of friends. They're all brand new to the school. It could be (an) intimidating environment for them. We do a lot of different activities with them. Sometimes it's (a) whole group. So we'll have the whole sophomore class in the big room together, introduce them to everybody, let them know what everybody does at the school. We have them introduce themselves to one another. I'll have them do an activity where they pair off with someone they haven't met. They interview one another, and then they get up in front of the class and introduce one another. (s. 163)

P6 discussed aspects of a horizontal relationship, student to student, and how those relationships are an integral part of the collegiate high school program. P6 explained,

I think the horizontal relationships are closer, because it's a small group, and they bond. I also think they bond because, for a lot of them, this is the first real challenge they've had. We do a lot of team presentations. They work together in groups, and we teach them how to work together in groups. They are dependent upon each other. (s. 644)

She continued that the program created time and space for students to develop the student-student relationship, stating, "We build that (space) into, and that also helps them bond" (s. 645).
P6 further elaborated the important of student–community relationship. P6 expressed the
importance for students to be engaged in the community and for the community to be engaged
with the school and the students. P6 purported that “community engagement” (s. 844) is vital to
the students’ academic success. P6 stated:

Students (are required to) participate in college clubs and organizations while in high
school so they are more likely to serve as officers/leaders in college clubs and
organizations as they continue their post-secondary education which research indicates
also improves student achievement. Civic-minded – due to the required service as part of
their involvement in service clubs, National Honor Society, and the community service
required for the Bright Futures Scholarship, students cultivate empathy, confidence,
leadership, and other skills that they may not learn in an academic setting. Students are
more globally aware due to their involvement in cultural activities at the college and
study abroad opportunities. (s. 845-847)

Program structure. The final subtheme of the theme of Belonging involved the program
structure. The school structure is purposefully designed to promote belonging in two key ways:
purposeful social experiences and small school/small class sizes. The participants discussed
social experiences in 20 coded passages and small school/small class size in 12 coded passages.
To distinguish the difference between school size and class size, I specifically inquired if either
school size or class size mattered more (s. 41); P1 through P5 all stated both were equally
important (s. 42-52).

The subtheme of program structure is referring to the policies and procedures of the
school that guide the learning and social norms of the program. As stated previously, Tinto's
Classrooms as Community model (1997) contends that formal learning (academic performances)
increases as a result of formal learning (academic performances) increases, in part, as a result of informal (faculty interaction) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. The informal (peer group interactions) of the social network extend beyond the classroom in informal meetings and study groups (Tinto, 2006, p. 613). The participants frequently cited the importance of this peer-interaction and purposeful space and designed the program provided to facilitate this informal learning. The establishment of the social experience was not an accident, but systematically intended to facilitate informal learning. P7 stated that during the first three days of the school year, the programs designs activities and events to create informal learning. P7 stated, “The first couple of days we give them a chance to get to know each other. We play – We have icebreakers, and the students get to know each other's names” (s. 474).

P6 reinforced that the program had a structure to create a social experience in its design at the beginning of the school year. P6 described the events and activities are embedded in the first three days of the programs are designed to promote social experiences. P6 stated,

The first three days, we have a three-day orientation essentially. We also have that orientation in the spring for the students, and we do a little team building activity with them. (s. 616)

The program provides significant social experiences outside of the formal classroom setting. These social experiences include various academic, art-based, athletic, and community-based experiences. Clubs and organizations include the Fitness club (s. 304), SAT club (s. 305), Arts club (s. 305), National Honor Society (s. 308), Phi Theta Cappa (s. 328), Engineering club (s. 328), Chemistry club (s. 332), Math club (s. 337), Wellness club (s. 687), Interact service club (s. 686), College Signing Day (s. 688), Senior Grad Bash (s. 689), Model United Nations, (s.
(s. 691), homecoming dance and events (s. 684), movie and game nights (s. 674), student
government (s. 329), and various college clubs and association (s. 704). In addition to the
aforementioned school-based social experiences, the program allows for external social
experiences at other schools or organization. The program permits the students to join another
school's athletic team. P6 noted:

We have many other athletes; we have dancers, we've had swimmers, we have one of our
students is captain of the St. Pete High golf team. We have kids in gymnastics. We have a
state roller derby champion. We have gymnasts; we have students who are involved in
sports. They are not missing out on it, but they are not at their school. They are at their
zone school. (s. 673)

The second component of the program structure subtheme, which creates the theme of
belonging, is the small school/class size environment. The literature on the effects of smaller
school/ small class size is inconclusive. Research exists which does suggest benefits to small
school/small class-size. Miller-Whitehead (2003) suggested that small classes do help improve
teacher morale and reduced negative discipline issues. Miller-Whitehead (2003) also suggested
that smaller class sizes reduced the need for remediation through early identification and
prevention of problems.

Moreover, Miller-Whitehead (2003) asserted small classes have long term benefits such
as lowered dropout rates, decreased teen pregnancy rates, improved graduation rates. Also,
Normore and Ilon (2006) suggested smaller class sizes had a positive impact such as safer
schools with fewer discipline problems, higher levels of teacher-student and student-student
engagement, and more instructional curriculum time. However, the literature suggests that there
are many factors other than class size affecting student achievement. While class size influences
what occurred in the classroom, the research on class size and student achievement indicates other variables, limits, and factors that affected student achievement. Some of these variables are the physical environment of a school and classroom. A second factor is the range of class sizes and the resources spent by schools on students (Lewit & Baker, 1997). A third influence is age, education, and experience of teachers (Ehrenberg, Brewer, Gamoran, & Willms, 2001).

The participants repeatedly stressed the point that the structure of the school size and classes played a factor in creating a sense of belonging for the program. Early in the interviews, P4 noted that “we establish a relationship because of our class size” (s. 37), while P5 emphasized that class size is “everything” (s. 39). P2 added, “I talked to the students they were doing projects this week. Again, another thing we can do because it's small class size, and I can listen to them present to me” (s. 78). P5 reinforced this point again by stating, “I have them work together, and we have such small classes, you all mentioned the small classroom. We're able to know our students individually. We know when they're having a good or having a bad day” (s. 74). P4 discussed that he could do differential instruction because of the class size, stating, “differentiating instruction, well that's an absolute mandatory thing here. Again, we're going to go back to class and school size. That's only possible because we're not dealing with overwhelming numbers” (s. 109). According to P4, the small school environment allows for the faculty to know each student: “They (students) want to be here at a very small school. The small school is ... you can't say that too much because we know every kid” (s. 249).

P7 shared the view of the focus group participants that smaller school/class size fostered relationships and a sense of belonging. P7 stated, “We are able to do that because it is a smaller environment, and you have those personal relationships with teachers or other staff member” (s. 484). P7 further noted how the small school environment allowed for intervention from faculty:
I think it's because we're small, and I think it's because we're set up so that there are a lot of triggers or cues that let us know if something's going on with a student and that the student has opportunities for support, because our students can get help from a teacher for academics. (s. 530)

P6 further agreed with the other participants that smaller school/class size was an essential component of the program. P6 noted:

I think the difference is first and foremost, our size. When you have a big school. When I was at (Name Omitted), I had 1200 students. The same principal, the same passion for what I do, but honestly it was hard for me to meet the needs of all those students. It was impossible. You focus on the students that need you most and hope that you are helping as many students as you possibly can. Here, I know every student (s. 64) It's also the fact that the small size doesn't allow them to get away with things. In other words, in a big school when you do something inappropriate, or you are nasty to someone, or you make a poor choice, you can probably get away with it a lot easier than when there are 75 of you. (s. 642)

**Theme Two: Customized Pathways**

Theme two, which addressed RQ1, was Customized Pathways. The theoretical framework which underpins this theme is John Rawls’ (1971) Social Justice Theory. This theory considers social justice as the distribution of benefits and burdens within a society, meaning that a just society ensures the good of the state and the individual. Rawls advocated for improving the position or condition of those on the margins of social and economic status and believed everyone should have the same opportunity to the “offices and positions” (p. 53) in a given
Accordingly, all citizens should have equal access to training and education to qualify for various.

Collegiate college programs increase college access for low-socioeconomic students (An, 2012). The participants articulated the need to have high quality, proven access to and completion in college for students, in particular, low-income students and how the collegiate high school program meets those needs through flexibility of school choice programs, diversity of student population, and respect of autonomy of individuals.

Rawls (2001) further stated that “[j]ustice as fairness regards citizens as engaged in social cooperation, and hence as fully capable of doing so, and this over a complete life” (p. 18). In this context, I applied the term of students in place of Rawls’ term of citizens. In education, citizens (students) must be able to demonstrate the ability to understand, apply, and act from a position of justice that reflects an understanding and awareness of social cooperation (Rawls, 2001). Also, citizens (students) must have the capacity to possess, modify, and to pursue a concept that is good for both themselves and their respective society (Rawls, 2001).

According to the study participants, social justice can be achieved in the collegiate high school by the theme of customized pathways. This theme is comprised of three subthemes: (a) flexibility provided by school choice, (b) diversity of students, and (c) development of autonomy and navigational skills.

**Flexibility.** Flexibility emerged as a dominant subtheme as a characteristic of customization. The participants referenced flexibility in 49 passages. The participants talked about the ability to adjust and modify their program, lessons, and schedules to meet the needs of individual students. According to P2, working at a charter school allowed for responding to the requirements of each student: “An advantage of working at a charter school is that you get to
respond to your students' needs” (s. 13). P4 indicated the program was continuously being evaluated to ensure the school program was meeting the needs of the students. The school evaluates continuously, “Are we a good fit for you (students)?” (s. 215).

Even the time of the beginning and ending of classes or bell scheduled was flexible. The students could arrange their schedule by factoring in the start time of classes. P2 noted,

And they can select the time they start. If you're not a morning person, in your junior and senior year you can take a class at 9 AM, 10. You can take a midday class. If you don't like evening stuff, you can get all your classes done in the morning. (s. 200)

P2 expounded on the concept that a single program or school cannot be all things to all students, stating the following:

One size does not fit all, and it's not going to be perfect, and we get what we get, but a lot more kids are going to be successful in this environment. A lot more. More kids will make it. (s. 405)

P5 shared that having flexibility led to increased job satisfaction: “I really enjoy working here. I enjoy the flexibility” (s. 29). P2 observed that the program was a product school of choice by being a charter school. As a result of being a charter school, the faculty had latitude in curriculum. P2 indicated the following:

. . . (we) have the flexibility and freedom with curriculum ... we decided to go much deeper. But that's an advantage of working at a charter school is that you get to respond to your students’ needs. (s. 13)

P4 purported that a school or program should not be designed to meet the needs of every child and that it was acceptable to be unique and allow students to choose which program best fits their needs. P4 indicated this with the following:
Because you know the concept of... there's no such thing as we're the best school. I know we've got banners and plaques and all that, but that doesn't matter to me. Different schools fit different kids, whether it's just the vibe, the neighborhood, the specific program, like the magnet program. I never want to say, “We're the best school for every type of kid,” because we're not. We're not the best school for everybody. People can be successful at (Name Omitted), people can be successful at Harvard. They (students) can be successful everywhere. We have just found our niche, and if you're that type of student that is looking for our particular type of acceleration and our vibe, our culture, we're for you. And if not, that's okay (s. 217). Even students leave here; I never want to say to them, ‘Oh, you failed.’ No, we weren't right for you. And I think that's where we're kind of going in education, to have more choices, different types of places, different types of schools, smaller learning communities, so they have more of a choice and can find their fit. And so I think this is a model for them. (s. 218)

P7 shared that having the ability to have personalized learning and relationship based on the students' individual needs attracted her to work at the school. P7 stated,

I can very much say that I was attracted to Collegiate because of the opportunity of having a more personalized relationship with the students and to better meet their needs and what they needs as far as education, personal-social needs that they may have for the school counselor, career advising, but my attraction was the fact that I would be able to spend some quality time with students rather than having more students than I could possibly get to. (s 460)

P6 indicated the importance of having a flexible and customizable program to meet the needs of the students. P6 stated:
I think it's important to realize that this program can be an innovative model for others, because it allows the freedom as a charter school to not have a one size fits all, but to really look at data and the unique needs of your students, and build a program that meets their needs. I think it allows us to be flexible and nimble because I'm in control of the budget, and I can make decisions based on data now. I'm held accountable, my board approves my budget, but I'm not given like I was when I was a school principal. These are your units, whether they meet the needs of your students or not. This is what you get. This is your allocation. (s. 737)

**Diversity.** There is increasing evidence of the benefits to academic and social growth of educational institutions having a diverse student population. Student diversity appears to contribute to increased satisfaction, retention, and civic responsibility despite the widespread critique that these services harm the development of community on campus. Research on cognitive development indicates that problem-solving capacities, critical thinking, and cognitive complexity increase for students exposed to diversity on the campus and in the classroom (Smith & Schonfeld, 2000).

The participants indicated that diversity was an essential aspect of their program—diversity in the faculty composition, the student composition. The participants reported that diversity was reflected by gender, race, income, and sexual orientation status. P2 discussed the effect of a variety of staff has on the student population. P2 observed:

Here, there’s diversity, it you look at our staff ratios, and the ages and the number. They have three dads, I joke, or four dads. They have Dr. Call and you three guys. I think that matters. I think it matters more than people realize that they have men in their lives as we all know as compared to society not everybody has a dad at home, and a lot of our kids,
they need strong male role models that show them that it is good to be a grown man, dress nice and do a good job. (s. 367)

P1 reported that diversity was embedded in the courses, stating, “We also teach diversity in all the different programs and things that we do. It’s modeled from top down” (s. 381). P3 added with a hint of sarcasm, “I teach English. I don’t know why you’d think I teach diversity. I teach English” (s. 382) and further elaborated on how diversity is embedded in the literature course: “It did not come up in The Great Gatsby” (s. 383).

P8 opined that the students who entered the program had a diverse and wide range of academic capability, yet the students performed at a high level. P8 suggested that that diversity was positive, and it resulted in higher academic performance. P8 purported, “These students, they're not necessarily the highest caliber, which is a misnomer. There's the diversity of, again, people don't think it's very diverse, it is. And yet their results are undeniable” (s. 771). When prompted to elaborate, P8 expounded,

A lot of these students when they first come in, and that's why the 10th-grade year is built the way the 10th-grade year is in the collegiate high school where it is just high school. You aren't doing the college level yet, and that's so we can do some individualized instruction and really get the students where they're going to be successful once they hit those college classes. So it's meeting the needs of the students. So yes, there's a baseline that has to be met, but it's not outrageous. It's not a 4.5 GPA. It's none of that craziness. It's just do you have an aptitude for learning? Is this something you're interested in? Is this something your family's interested in? And so it's that 10th-grade year where we arm the students with the skills to be successful, to navigate both high school and college at the same time at such a young age. (s. 773)
P8 reflected that the student body had a diverse composition. P8 reported that the student body was diverse by gender, geographical location, ethnicity, and income level (s. 775- 779). She indicated that the program had a more significant percentage of the student body on the federal free and reduced lunch program (s. 779).

**Autonomy.** Educational autonomy is classified as self-determination (Schinkel, 2010). The participants in this study referenced instructional autonomy and student/learner autonomy. In referencing autonomy, the educators reflected it as having positive attributes and effects. However, the research demonstrates that some educators view autonomy as having less positive attributes. Some educators observe autonomy as duties expanding outside of the prescribed duties or school system (Sleegers, den Brok, Verbiest, Moolenaar, & Daly, 2013). While some teachers may succeed with autonomy, others could fail and perceive autonomy as a mechanism for administration to circumvent their duties (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014; Sleegers et al., 2013; Waller & Barrentine, 2015). Autonomy empowers educator and student to achieve their personal goals (Flint, 2014). Educator autonomy achieves the most success when educators possess the skills to instruct their classrooms with limited supervision (Flint, 2014; Oostlander, Güntert, & Wehner, 2014). Another aspect of autonomy occurred when educators could have a voice and make a difference in addressing the students’ educational needs (Amoli & Youran, 2014; Sussman, 2014). For this to be achieved, the traditional educational structures must be reconstituted to give educators more authority in their classrooms (Killmister, 2013; Roth & Weinstock, 2013).

P4 purported that autonomy was a vital aspect to his decision at working in the collegiate college program. He reported having more control and the ability to create curriculum essential to him. P4 stated,
I was teaching for the [name omitted] school district before I came here, and I came here because I saw this as an opportunity to be a part of something new. A school that was a little more free to control of the curriculum, and have some autonomy in creating curriculum, and dealing with students in a small class size and all the things that I think are important for an education. (s. 2)

P4 expanded on this premise, indicating that having autonomy empowered educators to be professionals. P4 concluded,

I'm not stuck with a textbook that a bunch of other people voted on in district, and nowhere, teach out of that, no pacing guides on that. And also general respect as a professional. Our administration treats us like professional ... We're professional instructors, and we're treated as such. We're trusted with that. We're not micro-managed. We're given the autonomy we need (s. 436).

P6 indicated that they had autonomy in regard to budgetary decisions and concluded that having this fiscal autonomy permitted the program to be more responsive to the needs of the students and to continue to improve the program as the faculty deemed appropriate. P6 indicated this by stating the following:

I'm in control of my budget, I have to plan that budget, I'm accountable for that budget, I have to meet the needs of my students, and I better meet my targets. With that freedom I can give that freedom to my teachers, and I can hire the best talent I can find, and we can have dialogue, and we have the ability to continually refine and improve this program to meet the needs of our students, and we can adjust quickly (s. 738).

When asked about the importance of autonomy, P6 argued it was the aspect that was “most cherished” (s. 74). P6 opined that having autonomy allowed educators to do what was in the best
interest of the students and allowed for staff success. P6 viewed autonomy as the most crucial tool for their success:

It's (autonomy) what I cherish most about this job is the fact that I have a high degree of autonomy, and I like being held responsible, because then I can do with the help of my team what's in the best interest of my students and staff are successful. They are successful, because I have that autonomy, and that is the biggest difference. To make decisions, to treat my team as the professionals that they are, we can make good decisions based on data, and in the best interest of my students. We hold our students accountable more like the world of work, more like the world of business (s. 740). Here is your job, do it, if you don't do it, then we are going to do things to help you do it. I love that freedom; I love that I can do that for my students. I love that if I have a great idea or my team has a great idea that we can implement it. I can justify it with a rationale, and I can go up and say, "I would like to have this." And they'll listen to me, and I can do it because that's what's best for my students. Not that I can't do it because well if we do that for you, then we have to do it for everybody else. I love that freedom, absolutely (s. 741).

P4 discussed the importance of students having a sense of autonomy, speculating that by empowering students and giving them autonomy, it would increase student motivation. P4 stated,

It gives them a sense of autonomy. That they create that schedule and not just have a schedule handed to them for four solid years. Where they can create that, cater to their own needs, intricacies, and quirks and all that kind of stuff, and that sense of autonomy, I think, is really a motivating factor for a lot of students. (s. 203)
P6 reiterated the effect of student autonomy, indicating that autonomy was a part of their school culture and reduced the number of adverse discipline issues at the school. P6 recalled having a conversation with students in which she said to the student the following conversation:

I need you to show me that you are mature enough, and you are ready to be a college student. How can you do that for me? When you do something like this, are you showing me that you are college-ready? No, I'm not. What are you going to do next time? How can we handle the situation better? We really don't have a lot with discipline at all. (s. 657)

**Theme Three: Common Purpose**

The final theme was a Common Purpose. This theme was clearly defined and agreed upon as the objective for administrations, faculty, college faculty, students, parents, and the community. The participants expressed three subthemes of a common purpose: (a) rigor, (b) wanting, and (c) 100% Associate’s degree/100% graduation achievement.

The theme of Common Purpose, with three subthemes of wanting, rigorous expectations, and achievement, emerged using Goal Theory perspective. Goal Theory (Locke & Latham, 1990), focuses on a feedback loop. Goal theory argues a cycle exists which drives motivation and consists of various characteristics. Goal theory establishes mutual agreed-upon goals among many stakeholders: mutually agreed-upon tasks which all parties agree have some degree of importance; a commitment to self-efficacy on both the students and support systems stakeholders; constant feedback; a degree of task complexity; and finally, various levels of satisfaction awarded upon completion of each level (Locke & Latham, 1990). In general, goal theorists are grouped into two groups: mastery (or learning) goals and performance goals. Mastery goals involve demonstrating increased understanding, skills, and content knowledge.
Performance goals, on the other hand, include reaching a pre-defined performance level or outperforming others (Pintrich, 2003; Seifert, 2004). Mastery goal orientation motivates students to improve their skills in a valued area. However, performance goal orientation motivates students to challenges either as opportunities or as threats (Schweinle & Helming, 2011).

Students' goals may affect their motivation to learn and, in return, the students' academic success. According to research, goals are best described as why and how students engage in an activity (Dweck & Leggett 1988; Maehr, 2001). Students often lack intrinsic academic motivation and may be incapable of setting their own goals (Barry, 2007). As a result, if students are assisted in goal setting, they may be able to establish motivation and boost their achievement performance (Rigby, Deci, Patrick, & Ryan, 1992).

**Wanting.** In numerous passages, the participants reported a strong motivation for the students wanting to be in the program. During all the interviews, this "wanting" was mentioned in 29 passages. The "wanting" was not just isolated to the students, but a shared desire by administration, faculty, and parents.

P1: They do want to be here (s. 179); Yeah, they want to be here (s. 248).

P4: Now, all those kids will have varied skills level. But that common denominator is wanting to be here (s. 178); And that motivator is a factor, the one attribute I can say of all the students that make it through the program, the one other thing is the desire and the drive (s. 180); They want to be here at a very small school. (s. 249); I guess that's motivation, that wants to be her. (s. 247).

P5: You know it's important to note, though that the kids want to come here… It's small, they choose to come here, and they want to do well, and they do well (s. 177). They do want to be here... Because we occasionally get the student that comes in here
kicking and screaming, parents want them to go here they see the two free years of college. And a lot of students we actually see after they've been here a while that they want to stay (s. 181.)

P6: I also think they really love the fact that the students that go here want to learn, and they are motivated (s. 649); I think our students genuinely like to learn, and they are inquisitive, and they enjoy that. They have intellectual curiosity. I think the fact of being in control of their education, and being able to choose some things, versus only being able to choose electives or having the same pathway as everyone else. I think they enjoy taking responsibility for their education (s. 708).

P7: Oh, my gosh. I am in a school where everybody likes to learn. Everybody wants to learn. It's not just sitting in an honors class, and then I go out in the hall, and not everybody's interested in learning. We're all interested in learning. We all want to go forward with our education (s. 472); They (parents) want the best opportunity they can have for their student (s. 522).

**Rigorous expectations.** The participants reported rigorous expectations as a vital uniting characteristic of the program. Benjamin Bloom's (1956) taxonomy outlined the original framework for an understanding of rigorous student work. Bloom (1956) argued the more students were able to perform at the higher levels of the taxonomy, the more rigorous work they would produce. Anderson et al. (2001) updated Bloom's taxonomy with critical thinking skills and application knowledge. A comparison is shown below.
The participants reported that collegiate college courses could provide more rigorous course work as compared to traditional high school. P2 discussed how the students expressed a desire for more rigorous chemistry classes and acceleration. As a result, P2 added an extra class period to accommodate more rigorous course work. P2 explained:

Some of my students have directly told me they want to go into the next college class for chemistry that's advanced. So I've incorporated an extra seventh period. They were asking me about that, where at the end of the year, I help accelerate them for an opt-out exam. And when they leave my class, they can go into General Chemistry. (s. 12)

P2 added that as a school, they “decided to go much deeper” (s. 13). P3 added the same sentiment. He expressed that he has rigorous expectations for his students in English course. P3 stated rigor was vital in English and that he desired to enhance students’ critical thinking and application skills. P3 explained:

In my classroom, I want them to improve stuff English teachers want to improve. I want them to be able to speak, read, write, listen, view critically, present using visual presentations with PowerPoint or whatever medium they’re using. And I want them to
improve those skills. Those are the skills I'm looking for in English; I'm looking to improve those. I want to move them forward. (s. 98)

P3 also expressed rigorous expectations when he communicated his desire to increase the rigor by going into “deeper content” (s. 99). P3 expressed that providing rigorous coursework was essential for students to have academic success in college:

I'm sure you all feel it too in your classes. If you get just into a deeper concepts, but if they improve their year reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, presenting oral presentations and stuff like that, if they can improve all those areas, they're becoming more academically successful, will be successful in college if they can do that, in many of their classes as well. (s. 100)

P4 referred to fluency, proficiency, and high rigorous expectations as part of his coursework, mentioning that student often enrolled in the program with a high GPA, yet the student did not master the material at their previous school. He provided the following example:

Then I can make it specific, and he probably remembers coming in through his English III Honors class. He had English II Honors, this student. He got an A. He could not formulate a sentence. How do you get an A in English II Honors? He literally could not write... he was almost bordering on functional illiterate. And we were like, ‘How do you do this?’ (s. 109).

P5 outlined that rigorous coursework means that students may receive a low grade and went on to discuss rigorous expectations for students. P5 noted that students must learn to take a risk and reach beyond their known capability to grow. Sometimes, this may result in the student receiving a failing grade. Rigorous coursework allows the student these growth opportunities. P5 illustrated this by stating the following:
Because not everything gets everything perfect, but from when you get something wrong, that means you've learned something new. That's part of the necessary part ... but we've stigmatized this whole thing to where if you get an F or a bad grade, you've done something wrong. That's the general attitude. You didn't study hard enough, you didn't do this thing, or something has gone wrong, and the students they fear. They fear failure. They won't have the right answer, be afraid to share it because they're afraid of being wrong. They don't want to take a chance on taking that leap. (s. 123); I think that's been indoctrinated into the kids by the time they get to us. That's why I'll ask a question, and they'll be 20 kids in that room that know the answer, but they'll stare at you. Because getting facts wrong is a stigmatizer. It's a bad grade; it's a red mark on your paper. That's bad. Instead of, 'No, that's part of learning.' That's a necessary part of learning. (s. 124)

**Achievement of Associate's degree/graduation.** The final subtheme was the common purpose of the establishment of the greatest common good. The greatest common good, in this case, is the unifying mission of the collegiate college program of every student earning their Associate’s degree and graduation. The mission states that students will simultaneously earn a high school diploma, an Associate of Arts degree, and qualify for a Bright Futures scholarship. This unifying mission drive the behaviors, policies, procedures, and decisions made by all educational members at both the high school and college. The participants articulated, directly and indirectly, that having a shared tangible outcome of the students achieving their Associate's degree and graduating high school is a common aim. This common aim drives administrative, instructional, student, and parent behavior. P6 specifically mentioned the paramount goal of the program for 100% of the students to obtain their Associate's degree and for 100% graduation rate. Using the 100% AA degree/100% graduation rate as an objective and unifying program aim allows for effective expectation and communication. P6 explained:
It's important that you learn to rely on each other, and because this program is so rigorous, and because once they get in the junior, senior year they don't know who is going to be in their classes with them. Look around, you may have to lean on somebody who is really strong in calculus, and maybe that's not your strength, and they have to lean on you a little bit, and you are a really strong writer. We are going to help each other. The goal is 100% high school graduation rate, 100% AA degree, and as highest we can get, we'd like 100% Bright Future Scholarship (s. 604); I think this model is very powerful in that way. I think it's important to have a variety of models so that we are meeting the needs of all the diverse learners we have out there. For some students, that might be a few college credits, within a supportive structure. For others like ours, it's the AA degree (s. 731).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the findings of the study through presentation of the focus group and interview responses, coding and analysis of themes and sub-themes, and discussion of these in relation to the four theories that contributed to the Conceptual Framework of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this research study was to examine the educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in a collegiate high school program in Florida. Collegiate high schools were established to encourage and assist students in obtaining a high school diploma while earning college credit, and to obtain an Associate of Arts degree. Nationally, the number of dual enrollment students has been increasing. In the state of Florida, the number of dual enrollment students has been increasing at an average rate of 9.5% for the past 5 years (Florida Department of Education, 2019). In 2018, 1,851 students earned their Associate of Arts degree before earning their high school diploma (Florida Department of Education, 2019). In this study, the collegiate high school was located on a community college campus, opened in 2004, and had its first graduating class in 2007. There were 252 students enrolled in this campus at the time of this study.

Although the collegiate high school program has been in existence for only 15 years, there is strong evidence the program is achieving many of its goals. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 included the history and an overview of concurrent college programs nationally and in the state of Florida. Moreover, the literature review indicated concurrent enrollment students nationwide are having success. Currently, the extant research has failed to explore the perception of educators in concurrent education programs, specifically collegiate high school programs. To address this gap in the literature, I explored educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth in one collegiate high school program.
Conclusions

The guiding questions for this study were: (a) what are educators’ perceptions of students’ academic experiences and social growth in a Collegiate College program?; and (b) what are educators’ perceptions of the ways in which school culture affects students academically and socially? The discussion that follows presents conclusions drawn in revisiting the three major themes to explore relationships among them.

Belonging

Educators interviewed for this study perceived that students felt a high degree of belonging, which had a positive effect on school culture and students’ academic and social growth, as well as a positive effect on instructor morale. Two different types of belonging were described: (a) earning membership, and (b) social engagement—the extent to which an individual can feel included, accepted, and supported by others in a different social context (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992).

Membership

Membership into the collegiate college program is not automatically guaranteed, which is different from most traditional schools. In traditional school environments, school membership is primarily based on the location of the students’ geographical residence. In this program, the student must self-select, satisfy pre-qualified requirements, and agree to maintain specific pre-described requisites to enroll. As a result of the students’ effort, the students achieved the opportunity to apply for a specialized program. The students must be accepted into the program through the application process. The application process creates a particular membership class of students. If more applications are submitted than space is available, a lottery is conducted.
Thus, not all students who complete an application and meet the minimum qualifications are enrolled in the program. Those students who are not enrolled are placed on the waiting list.

This membership process appears to be the first phase in creating a sense of belonging. When granted membership, the student is now part of a specialized program that is not necessarily accessible to the general student population. The membership process appears to grant students an exclusive opportunity which they earned, and membership seems to help establish a higher level of self-worth and value for the student. The membership process empowers students who have been granted that membership, and this seems to increase students’ sense of self-efficacy. Moreover, once students are awarded membership, educators address students as though they are a member of a specialized program and convey certain rights and responsibilities. Students have achieved the necessary qualifications and have been accepted in the program, and therefore, belong.

**Social Engagement**

Social engagement is defined as the extent to which an individual feels included, accepted, and supported by others in a different social context (Baumeister & Leary 1995; Hagerty et al., 1992). Educators interviewed felt the collegiate high school program provided a family environment and a community. Programmatic design and relationship-building activities appear to have established a strong sense of social engagement. Moreover, the findings show that the program institutionalized activities and designated intentional spaces to create a community environment. The designated spaces and activities fostered multi-level relationship-building through shared knowing (experiences), shared knowledge, and shared responsibility.

Social engagement also appears to contribute to a strong sense of communal care among the members of the program at all levels: (a) administration to instructors, (b) administration to
students, (c) instructors to instructors, (d) instructors to students, and (e) students to students. This mutual belonging appears to have fostered positive social behaviors and established formal and informal support systems for academic success. Interviewees reported that this shared belonging creates a mutual sense of educational and social responsibility. Educators collaborate to create an accepting and supportive environment with a pedagogical stance of individual care. The program codified an accepting and supportive environment by placing a priority on teacher-student as well as student-student relationships. These relationships appear to be foundational for the formal and informal support systems for social and academic growth. The relationship support system was cultivated in the community and extended beyond the classroom and the school itself.

Furthermore, the school was programmatically designed to create a sense of belonging through social engagement by creating a small school with small class sizes. The small school and small class context work in tandem to have a positive effect on the school culture and students’ academic and social growth. In addition, the small class environment allows for more individualized instruction and support for teacher-student relationships. Moreover, the small school context allows for teacher-student and student-student relationships to continue and flourish, as faculty members can maintain and strengthen the relationship for several years after students exit the course they teach. Lastly, the small school environment allows teachers to collaborate on teaching and behavior strategies across course levels over the students’ entire high school tenure.

Instructor Morale
Belonging also appears to have a positive effect on instructor morale. As a result of this sense of belonging, educators interviewed expressed strong motivation and a high degree of job satisfaction. Similar to students, the faculty members also benefit from having exclusive membership in the program. The community college employs and credentials all instructors to teach at the collegiate high school, and, as a result, the instructors must have a higher level of education (master’s degree or above) to teach college-level courses. These additional requirements function as membership criteria to access the program, creating positive effects similar to the students’ sense of self-efficacy in membership. Moreover, all educators interviewed expressed high levels of social engagement belonging, which appears to have created intense feelings of respect, care, and empathy for administration, students, and fellow instructors.

**Customization**

Educators interviewed perceived customization as vital for students’ academic and social growth, and, organizationally, the school mission and vision are customized to achieve a defined outcome. The program was established as a charter school; therefore, the students must buy into the mission, which in turn increases student engagement. Customization manifested itself by providing administration and instructors with flexibility and autonomy in curriculum and programs and by enabling these educators to meet the needs of a diverse student population. The findings indicate that instructors value the ability to tailor (customize) their lesson plans to meet the unique needs of a diverse student membership. In addition, the findings indicate that the flexibility and autonomy granted to the faculty represent critical elements for employment and employment retention. Lastly, the findings indicate the principal’s having more autonomy to make budgetary decisions positively affected the school’s culture and students’ academic and
social growth because the principal can reallocate resources more effectively to address the needs of instructors and students.

**Common Purpose**

Educators interviewed perceived that a common purpose drove all decision making, expectations, instruction, budgets, and actions of the collegiate high school program. This purpose is aligned tightly with the program’s stated mission: “Students simultaneously earn a high school diploma, an Associate of Arts degree, and qualify for a Bright Futures’ scholarship.” This purpose establishes expectations for parents, students, instructors, principal, and community college. The rigorous expectations and high quality formal and informal instruction in coursework are designed to fulfill the purpose, and students’ social behavior is expected to match the maturity level needed to achieve that purpose.

Everything was designed and is supported to accomplish this unified, concise, unambiguous, common purpose. Multiple orientations and workshops were conducted to remind parents of the common purpose; as a result, it appears the program had a higher level of parental support and engagement. In addition, the community has clear expectations and understanding of the purpose of the program, leading to increased prestige and support throughout the community.

**Wanting**

Every stakeholder of the program, community, college dean, principal, students, and parents, were reported by interviewees to have a strong ‘wanting’ to succeed; the action verb ‘wanting’ was used 168 times during the interviews and was used more than any other verb. The findings reflect this ‘wanting’ had a positive, self-perpetuated effect on school culture. The parents wanted the students to be part of the program. The interviewees perceived the students
wanted to learn and to be challenged. Accordingly, the instructors responded by wanting to challenge the students more and provide more rigorous expectations. The school principal wanted to empower the instructors and meet their needs; the instructors responded by providing a higher level of respect for the principal as well as more enriched learning for the students. The college dean expressed an intense ‘wanting’ for the community college to support the program, principal, instructors, students, and the community. This ‘wanting’ on the part of parents, students, instructors, principal, college, and community has created and reinforced a highly positive culture which was conducive to both academic learning and social growth. It also manifests an aspirational element that is prevalent in the school—a pervasive desire to do better all of the things it thinks that it already does quite well.

**Post-secondary Skills**

Findings indicate that the program cultivated and developed post-secondary skills, consisting of, but not limited to, navigating complex systems such as community college, collaborating with diverse populations, as well as goal setting, time-management, and acclimating to new environments. Moreover, the findings indicate that the educators interviewed perceive the program assisted students in developing these post-secondary skills, both for college and their careers. When the students exit the program, they enter a college or university as a third-year student; consequently, a junior-level student would be required to navigate a more complex system than students entering during their freshman or sophomore year. Therefore, junior level incoming students would be required to be resilient and possess problem-solving, orienting, and navigation skills.
Implications

This section suggests implications for education leaders, such as superintendents, school board members, state educational policy makers, and administrators who wish to address college and career readiness. The section is organized in two parts: (a) implications suggested by the findings of the study, and (b) implications suggested by existing research on concurrent enrollment. While a limited body of research exists from educators’ perceptions of collegiate colleges, there is substantial research on concurrent enrollment that may provide useful perspective on actions, processes, and occurrences in successful collegiate/concurrent high school practices.

Perspectives from Findings of the Study

For superintendents, school board members, state educational policy makers, and school-based administrators who place importance on post-secondary readiness, access, completion, and industry certification skills, the findings of this study suggest:

• A clear and concise purpose is important when designing a concurrent enrollment program, as the purpose should dictate expectations for behavior for all program members and can strengthen policy and procedure fidelity. In this study, the purpose of obtaining an Associate of Arts Degree dictated curriculum, policy, procedures, expectations, and hiring practices.

• Concurrent enrollment is not for all students. Potential students’ and parents’ willingness to meet the expectations of the program is a critical element for student success; thus, expectations should be clearly delineated. Parents or students themselves must self-determine if they can meet the expectations of the program.
• Concurrent enrollment programs can be a tool to provide added customization for students who aspire for a more rigorous curriculum and college and career access, especially for low-income or first-generation students. The educators interviewed in this study perceived that free tuition and free books for two years were positive incentives, especially for low-income students who otherwise may not be exposed to post-secondary education.

• Educators interviewed for this study saw the importance of relationships, not only with their students but with administrators and each other. They also saw the importance of leadership. A strong academic leader who is committed to the purpose of concurrent enrollment is needed to oversee the program. That leader must be committed to the program and its sustainability; must be willing to collaborate with instructors, parents, and students; and must have autonomy, and, in turn, grant autonomy to instructors. Concurrent enrollment instructors are college employees and must be respected as such.

**Perspectives from Best practices**

Information on best practices in concurrent enrollment identifies key factors that contribute to the success of these programs:

• *Recruitment and enrollment.* Educational leaders must establish a well-defined and articulated recruitment and enrollment process. Recruitment should not be limited only to those who are deemed academically talented or gifted; rather, recruitment should be available to families whose parents or the students themselves self-determine they can meet the expectations of the concurrent enrollment program. In addition, recruitment information should be widespread and open-access; school
leaders should outline and post in detail the expectations and enrollment criteria. Numerous workshops and information sessions should also be conducted in the community, particularly in low-income areas, to increase enrollment opportunities.

Official notification should be provided to families regarding program eligibility if students meet the minimum level of qualifications. Upon acceptance into the program, a letter of acceptance, similar to a university practice, is recommended. A transparent lottery must be conducted if more students apply who meet the minimum level of qualification than there is space available. Furthermore, a waiting list should be maintained for students who meet the minimum requirement levels but were not enrolled due to limited availability. A well-defined recruitment and enrollment process will encourage diversity and a sense of accomplishment and ‘wanting’ upon enrollment.

- **Expectations.** Both academic and social expectations should be made clear. Academic expectations may include level of rigor, course sequence, increasing effort, homework, and what is to be expected at the college academically. Social expectations may include behavior and social responsibility, community service hours that must be fulfilled as a school-level obligation, and any state scholarship requirements for community engagement.

- **Academics.** Academic course sequencing is important. Course selection requirements should be reviewed with students and parents that must be satisfied in order to achieve a high school diploma and the Associate of Arts degree. The effect of advanced coursework on students’ overall GPA should be communicated, as well as limits on course withdrawal and course credit transferability.
• **Social-emotional growth.** Professional development for high school instructors should focus on the psycho-social-emotional needs of students in transition from high school and college, and educational leaders should keep in mind that not all high school teachers are equipped to teach concurrent enrollment without proper training and credentialing.

• **Counseling.** A well-trained and knowledgeable school counselor who is well-versed on concurrent enrollment policies and procedures is essential for students to achieve success. The school counselor functions as the students’ liaison between the high school and the community college. The school counselor meets frequently with individual students throughout the semester to ensure they meet course requirements and fulfill high school and college obligations. Often, the school counselor assists students in finding appropriate resources for tutoring, helping with college correspondence, and navigating complicated college and high school bureaucracies. The school counselor also tracks individual student academic performance, attendance, behavior, and other educational and social issues throughout the semester. Once a week, a cohort class should be required where students meet with their peers and school counselor. The purpose of this class is for students to maintain a relationship with their cohort and to communicate any unresolved issues. For the school counselor it is an opportunity to conduct “intrusive counseling” with individual students (Glennen, 1976). Glennen explained that school is passive in waiting for the student to seek assistance, but must be proactive – even “intrusive” in providing assistance. Glennen stated that intrusive counseling has been shown to
reduce freshman attrition from 45% to 6% and is responsible for producing more course hour and heavy course loads for students (p. 50).

- **Extracurricular activities.** Educational leaders should ensure students have access to rich high school-level extracurricular activities. Moreover, educational leaders should require participation in extracurricular activities. Peer connections are important; students can even be required to participate in a club or social group to help maintain peer connections and involvement in traditional high school events, such as athletics, prom, and other social functions. Educational leaders should also designate a dedicated, welcoming space or lounge that promotes collaboration among concurrent students. Moreover, this space could be accessible and available to the school counselor to interact informally with the students.

- **High school-community college partnership.** Even in a mature program, constant attention must be devoted to the complexities of blending the resources of two complex organizations – a high school and a community college. For new programs, this process is even more essential. Before establishing a concurrent program, educational leaders should consider a standing workgroup with monthly meetings to ensure effective communication and collaboration. This workgroup should be comprised of a mix of community college leaders, school district-level leaders and principals. The workgroup’s purpose is to resolve matriculation issues as well as financial, student-related, course registration, and governance issues. Moreover, this workgroup should formulate an annual matriculation agreement for governance to resolve disputes and work through emerging issues. Lastly, this workgroup should review policies and procedures to include, but not be limited to, the following:
✓ Accreditation
✓ Class registration/withdrawal
✓ College enrollment process
✓ College orientation
✓ Course prerequisites
✓ Free and reduced Lunch programs
✓ Grade reporting
✓ Graduation events
✓ Instructor evaluation
✓ Instructor credentialing
✓ Student behavior
✓ Technology accessibility
✓ Textbook issuance/payments
✓ Textbook payments
✓ Transportation
✓ Tuition responsibility
✓ University transfer

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Future research could explore the perceptions of alumni of the collegiate college program after they completed their baccalaureate degree. Specifically, research could investigate if the alumni perceived they were adequately prepared academically and socially for post-secondary education at a university.

Sechenov (1863) established the psychology principle of orienting reflex, which assists individuals in orienting themselves to a new environment. The findings in this study suggest educators perceive that, as a result of the collegiate high school program, students are better able to orient themselves to post-secondary education, and thus exercise an orienting 'muscle.' Further research could explore whether this orienting 'muscle' for post-secondary education exists, and if so, to what extent.

The final recommendation for further research pertains to the longitudinal effect of concurrent education on access and completion of low-income, first-generation students. In this
study, the educators interviewed perceived there was no difference in the ability or performance of low-income and upper-income students in the collegiate high school model. Further research could explore the direct and indirect effects of collegiate high schools on low-income, first-generation students.

**Contribution to the Literature**

Currently, a plethora of research exists on the outcomes and effects of concurrent enrollment; however, there is scant research on the activities and perspectives of professionals within these programs. The literature review conducted for this study did not result in any current research on educators’ perspectives on students’ academic and social growth. As a result, this study may contribute to our understanding of concurrent enrollment by providing findings on educators’ perceptions of students’ academic and social growth at a collegiate high school located on a community college campus. Educators who participated in the study were able to describe their perceptions and provide insight into the operations of this one collegiate high school. Their perceptions and insights could not have been documented utilizing quantitative data from surveys, student performance data, or teacher performance evaluation. The qualitative method permitted educators’ perspectives to emerge, themes to be developed, findings to be discovered, and recommendations to be provided.

**Researcher Reflexivity**

As an individual who grew up in a very low-socioeconomic family with minimal opportunities, equity of educational opportunities has been a driving mission for much of my life. In my community, education represented leisure and an opportunity not afforded to families such as mine. As a result, higher educational opportunities were not provided nor encouraged by my family, school culture, or the community environment. Upon graduating from high school at the
age of 15, I entered the workforce and quickly realized the need for higher education. While access to higher education was extremely limited in my community due to lack of familiarity, resources, and opportunity, I was able to access higher education through the Florida Community College System. However, many individuals from my community were unable to navigate the educational system, and their education ended at high school as a result of lack of exposure to educational opportunities.

In 1999, at the age of 23, I co-founded one of the first charter schools in the state of Florida. I started the school in my home to provide quality educational opportunities for families. Since then, I have worked as a teacher and school administrator, discovering that even with a quality K-12 education, higher educational equity remains an issue for low-income students.

For 12 years, as a Florida legislator in the Florida House and Senate, as Speaker *Pro-Tempore*, and as Chair of House K-12 Committee and Senate Pre-K-20 Education Committee, I had the opportunity to work on state educational policy addressing issues of accountability, assessments, school choice, standards, and educational technology. However, the issue of transition from secondary to post-secondary has remained unaddressed. I have deliberately focused my efforts on assisting low-income students’ higher educational opportunities. Early College programs held great promise for providing opportunities for all students, regardless of socio-economic status.

In 2014, I co-founded the first Early College program in the county. Since that time, I have been researching the growth, effectiveness, and implementation of Early College programs throughout the United States. While significant research exists on the outcomes of Early College programs, there is minimal research on implementation of best practices, specific characteristics,
and the perceptions of students, parents, and faculty of these programs. Through my own life experience, as well as existing research on Early College programs and educational policies throughout the United States, I was able to provide greater insight into the blurring lines between secondary and post-secondary education.

**Relationship with Site**

Prior to the study, I had a limited relationship with the research site and participants. In the previous 5 years before the study was conducted, I visited the research site on multiple occasions to review the program, process, and outcomes of the collegiate high school. At my request, the collegiate college hosted a small delegation of education leaders from my home community and the state legislature to give delegates context and an understanding of collegiate college programs. Of the eight participants in the study, I only knew the principal, who provided testimony and insights before my Pre-K-12 Senate committee on high school acceleration programs.

**Professional Practice**

As a result of this study, my commitment to equity education has been strengthened. The educational institution I founded has expanded its early college opportunities for more learners. The literature and interviews provided clarity and illuminated best practices to increase the effectiveness of these programs. In particular, Tinto’s Learning as Communities transformed my organization’s perspective and approach to practice. My organization has adopted the motto #WeAreCommunity. As a result of this approach, we have experienced an increase in parent, community, and student engagement. We have strategically increased our informal programs such as community programs, student and parent events, and student activities. This approach has led to more formal (academic) gains. In 2019, we were ranked as the #1 public elementary
school and the #2 middle school in Tampa Bay (Niche.com, 2019). Moreover, as a member of several state and national organizations, I am further committed to expanding tailored educational choices that specifically include collegiate high school/early college options for low-income students. Currently, I am advocating for more tailored programs, such as collegiate high school/early college programs in my home community. I am working with the Florida Legislature to expand funding and programs for collegiate college/early college programs in HB 187 – Postsecondary Education for Secondary Students. Furthermore, I am working with the Excellence in Education national program, founded by former Governor Jeb Bush, to expand the acceleration options model for collegiate college/early college programs throughout the United States.
REFERENCES


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McNulty, R. & Russell, Q. (2007). Rigor relevance and relationships: Three passwords that unlock the door for engaged high school students to learn at appropriate levels. *The School Administrator, 64*(8). Retrieved from https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=6534


Appendix A: USF Informed Consent

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk ----- Pro # TBD

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

*Blurring the Lines between Secondary and Post-Secondary Education: Educators’ Perspectives*

The person who is in charge of this research study is John Legg. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge John Legg is being guided in this research by Howard Johnston, Ph.D.

The research will be conducted at St. Petersburg Collegiate High School.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this is to explore school culture in Early College Program through examining the perceptions of facility’s academic and social integration of students in Early College program.

**Why are you being asked to take part?**

We are asking you to take part in this research study because of your experience working in and with Early College program.

**Study Procedures**

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Click on an email link to survey monkey which collects your opinions via survey anonymously
- Participate in focus group interview
- Participate in individual interview.
- Have your interview digitally recorded interviews.
- One focus group interview, limited to one hour session. One individual interview, limited to 45-minute session.

The interview will be conducted at St. Petersburg Collegiate High school at location and time convenient to participants and administration.
Audio and videotaping will be used. Recordings will be transcribed into word document. All information will be confidential. USF facility directly associated with this research will have access to the recordings. No identifiable names or locations will be published in the report. After 5 years, all documents will be destroyed by professional document shredding company. All digital information will be wiped via professional data cleaning services.

**Total Number of Participants**

About 20 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

**Alternatives/Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal**

You do not have to participate in this research study. Your job status will not be affected by your decision to participate or not participate in this research either by completing the survey data or participating in the interviews.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

**Benefits**

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

**Risks or Discomfort**

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

**Compensation**

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

**Conflict of Interest Statement**

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, research nurses, and all other research staff.
Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.

Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research.

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

The sponsors of this study and contract research organization. We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality. The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call John Legg at 727-514-3313.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

_____________________________________________  __________________
Signature of Person Taking Part in Study                  Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

_____________________________     ________________
Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent                  Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent
Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Email

Dear Educators,

You are invited to participate in a doctoral research project conducted on the Early College/Collegiate High school. This research is entitled “EDUCATORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL GROWTH IN COLLEGIATE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM”

You are invited to be a participant in a focus group interview/discussion and potentially individual interviews regarding your perceptions of Early College/Collegiate High school. The focus group interview will be approximately 60 minutes to 90 minutes. Please note, you are not required to participate and may withdraw from participating in the research at any time. Your job status will not be affected.

Your participation will help gain insight into educators’ perceptions into students’ academic and social growth at Early Colleges. This is a doctoral research project conducted under the supervision of the University of South Florida. Compensation will not be provided. However, refreshments will be available to participants. Please reply in the affirmative to be considered for this research to be conducted at our school. Thank you for your consideration. If you have more questions, please you may request more information from your principal.
Appendix C: Site Institutional Review Board Approval

22 April 2019

Dear Mr. Legg,

The St. Petersburg College Research Review Committee reviewed your request to conduct research for the study entitled: "Blurring the Lines Between Secondary and Post-Secondary Education: Faculty Perspectives".

We are pleased to inform you that your research request was approved. Please note that approval constitutes human subjects review by this committee only and in no way indicates St. Petersburg College’s willingness to support this study, commit resources, provide data, or render assistance such as the sending of invitation e-mails, which are all separate administrative decisions at the Department level. Subject to Departmental authorization, this approval will allow you to conduct research provided such research conforms to College policy and the methodology defined in your research proposal/SPC research application.

This research authorization covers a one-year period beginning on the date of final approval. The time frame should be adequate to satisfy your research needs based upon your application. If the research extends beyond this time frame, you will be required to contact the Research Review Committee for an extension of the authorization period. When the study is completed, you are required to provide the SPC Research Review Committee with a copy of your completed study results and all publications and presentations resulting from it.

Thank you for your interest in conducting research at St. Petersburg College.

Best wishes to you.

Sincerely,

Dorraine Watts, PhD, RN
Faculty Chair, SPC Research Review Committee
St. Petersburg College

CC: Sabrina Crawford, EdD
Administration Chair,
SPC Research Review Committee,
Appendix D: University of South Florida Institutional Review Board Approval

4/30/2019

John Legg
Teaching and Learning
10217 Palladio Drive
New Port Richey, FL 34655

RE: Exempt Certification
IRB #: Pro00038357
Title: Blurring lines between Secondary and Post Secondary education: Faculty Perspectives of Early College programs.

Dear Mr. Legg:

On 4/30/2019, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45 CFR 46.104(d):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects’ responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects’ financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However,

administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an Amendment or new application.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subjects research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix E: Certificates of Social Behavioral Investigators Training

Certificate of Completion

John Legg
Completed the Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel Refresher Course
on Monday, December 12, 2016

Certificate of Completion

Robyn Suzanne Legg
Has successfully completed the web-based course
“Protecting Human Research Participants Online Training”

Certificate of Completion

Starla Netz
Has successfully completed the web-based course
“Protecting Human Research Participants Online Training”
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Matthew Legg is a native Floridian, born in Brooksville and raised in Pasco County. He is one of five children who were rich in love, but lacked resources. After high school graduation and while working multiple jobs, John completed an Associate of Arts degree at Pasco-Hernando Community College. He continued his education at the University of South Florida, completing a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and a Master’s degree in Public Administration. In 1999 John co-founded the first charter school in his county, Dayspring Academy, which was ranked in 2019 as the #1 public school in Tampa Bay by K-12 Niche. John led Dayspring to establish the first Early College program in his community; 100% of Early College students graduate with their high school diploma and over 45 undergraduate credit hours, and 75% receive their Associate of Arts Degree prior to graduating high school.

In 2004 John was elected to the Florida House of Representatives where he served as Chairman of Education, of the Congressional Redistricting Committee, and of Government Reorganization. He also served as Deputy Majority Whip and Speaker Pro Tempore. In 2012 John was elected to the Florida Senate, serving as Chairman of the K-12 Education Committee and sponsoring landmark legislation including expansion of Florida Tax Credit scholarships for low-income families, charter schools, virtual schools, and programs for academically talented students. John was named Legislator of the Year for the Florida School Boards Association and Florida Association of School Administrators. John is a past Executive Board Member of the Southern Regional Education Board and past member of the Education Commission of States.