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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Bowling Together or Bowling Alone:  
Continuation High School Students Tell Their Stories

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
Requirements for the degree  
Doctor of Education

In

Educational Leadership

by

Kevin Daniel Holt

Committee in charge:

University of California, San Diego  
Paula Levin

California State University, San Marcos  
Jennifer Jeffries, Chair  
Delores B. Lindsey

2008

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University of California, San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2008

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to you students who face many of life's adversities and have the personal resilience to persevere and overcome many obstacles beyond your choosing. It is your determination to succeed in life that will drive me as an educational leader to ensure that schools are places where all students will thrive and that there are caring adults in this environment who will assure pathways for success.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my children who have overcome some amazing obstacles because of my life choices. You are all three amazing young adults, and I am in awe of your successful journey in life thus far. Danny, Taylor, and Mallory, you inspire me.

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now over. I have to admit, though, I don't think my life will ever be the same. To "the square," you have become lifelong friends. Your support, friendship, encouragement, and patience are the primary reasons I am able to write this acknowledgement today.

Last, but by no means least, I thank my family. My partner, Tom, you made this possible with your positive influence, patience, and love. I also thank my children, Danny, Taylor, and Mallory. Unbeknown to you, I did this not only for me, but for you. I wanted to show you that regardless of your age, you can set goals and accomplish them. Finally, I want to thank an internal motivator I have affectionately named, the "lil' bug." The lil' bug will be what motivates me in the future to always be at my personal and professional best.

## VITA

1983	Bachelor of Arts, California State University, Long Beach
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bowling Together or Bowling Alone:  
Continuation High School Students Tell Their Stories

by

Kevin Daniel Holt

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2008  
California State University, San Marcos, 2008

Professor Jennifer Jeffries, Chair

Continuation schools offer a high school diploma program to meet the needs of students 16 through 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at-risk of not completing their schooling. This paper includes a historical review of continuation high schools. The paper considers the political, economic, and social forces that have challenged continuation schools throughout the 20th century.

This study's methodology consisted of gathering and analyzing qualitative data. These data derived from photographic activity and interviews with students attending a continuation high school, a student inquiry group discussion with students attending a comprehensive high school in the same district, and a review of archival documents from the continuation high school. Perceptions of social capital were examined in terms of barriers and supports. Perceptions were compared between the continuation high school students and the comprehensive high school students. Common supports and barriers identified through the analysis of the qualitative data included: administration, caring relationships, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, physical campus, and visual representations.

A final section addressed areas for potential future research related to the presence of social capital as perceived through students attending a continuation high school. By using the lens of social capital to analyze the culture of a continuation high school, those interested in improving the achievement levels of students in these settings may learn how to increase the degree of social capital in a specific setting.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the state of California, Education Code Section 58500 allows school districts to provide alternative schools and programs for students. These programs or schools range from schools of choice to programs to which students are referred involuntarily. Some of the alternative programs include magnet programs and schools, community day schools, community service programs, county community schools, home and hospital instruction, independent study, juvenile court schools, opportunity schools, and continuation schools.

According to the California Department of Education (2004), continuation schools are a high school diploma program for students 16 through 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are at risk of not completing their schooling. In 2003-04 there were 521 continuation high schools in California, constituting 45% of all alternative education programs and serving 68,316 students, the largest enrollment of any alternative program in the state.

Continuation schools are commonly referred to as *alternative*, *last chance*, and *opportunity* schools. For most California school districts, continuation schools are used as a dropout prevention program. Students are typically referred to continuation schools because of credit deficiencies, truancy, or behavior problems. Unlike traditional public schools, public alternative schools do not attempt to be all things to all people. Rather, they are what Young (1990) referred to as “specialty shops, not department stores” (p. 112). For many students who end up attending continuation school, it is not necessarily an educational choice, but more often the only option

besides dropping out of school entirely. One might say that continuation school is a student's last hope of completing high school (Amato, 2002).

The detrimental consequences of dropping out of high school have been recognized for decades. Advocates argue that alternatives to the traditional school model are imperative to meeting the needs of all. Repercussions to students who fail to complete high school include lower annual and lifetime earnings, higher unemployment rates, lower self-esteem, and restricted life opportunities (Jencks, 1979). Nationally, there is a shift away from low-skilled jobs in favor of high technology production, which serves to increase individual and social costs of dropping out of school.

A student in a continuation high school setting is often working against the odds of graduating. This high school student needs as much support as possible to avoid becoming a dropout. *Social capital* represents a theoretical framework that can provide a way to analyze the level of support available to these students in the continuation high school setting. Social capital refers to social networks and social interactions that facilitate educational attainment (Lichter, Cornwell, & Eggebeen, 2004; Putnam, 2001). These networks, which include families, religious associations, community groups, and schools, provide young people with valuable forms of interpersonal assistance.

Although each of these sources of social capital can play an important role in preparing young people for adulthood, schools are central to the developmental process and are essential sources of social capital for adolescents. Young people who face economic and social hardships at home are especially dependent on schools for

support and guidance if they cannot find these forms of social capital elsewhere in their lives (Putnam, 2001).

In San Diego County, the region in which this study takes place, there are 21 continuation high schools. According to the California Department of Education School Demographic Characteristics Fact Book (2004), 55% of the student population in continuation schools identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino. Thirty-one percent of parents whose children attend continuation high schools are not high school graduates (California Standardized Testing and Reporting Report, 2007). In addition, researchers Teachman, Paasch, and Carver (2001) found that parents with the lowest socioeconomic status have children who are less successful in school and that parents' financial resources are an important predictor of dropping out of school. Based on the characteristics of the student population in continuation high schools and this research, an observation can be made that a majority of students who attend continuation high schools in San Diego County come from families who do not speak English as their primary language, have a lower social economic status, and thus come from families who face economic hardships. This aggregate group profile of students in continuation high schools indicates that these students would benefit from high social capital continuation high school settings.

It is my belief that it is an ethical imperative for policy makers, school boards, administrators, and teachers not only to prepare students to graduate from continuation high schools, but also to provide them the prerequisite skills necessary to be accepted into institutions of higher education and graduate from them. The first step to achieving that goal is to reduce barriers and increase supports for students in the

continuation high school setting so they can graduate from high school. This ethical imperative may be advanced through the application of the social capital theory in the continuation high school setting, with the goal of increasing supports and decreasing barriers to student success. Therefore, I was interested in exploring the theory of social capital as it relates to the culture of a continuation high school and students' perceptions of its presence in their school setting.

### *The Nature of the Field*

The current state of continuation high schools must be understood through a historical perspective before exploring the potential benefits of applying social capital theory in this setting. Through a review of available literature, I found that alternative education programs, specifically continuation high schools and the programs they offer, are influenced by political, social, and economic climates of the time (Steinberg, 2004).

The research review revealed there have been many critics, as well as proponents, of continuation schools throughout the 20th century. Critics point to the financial impact these schools have on the federal and state education budgets and that continuation schools are no longer providing services that are different from those provided at comprehensive high schools. Proponents support the alternative setting for students who are at-risk of dropping out or not completing their secondary education. These proponents believe that the small size of continuation schools allows students to develop relationships with adults, have access to support services which target at-risk behaviors and lifestyles, and participate in a more personalized instructional setting to a greater degree than is found in comprehensive high school settings. Thus, due to its

smaller student population and additional support services, continuation high schools are an environment where a high degree of social capital could be present and have a positive impact on students.

The literature review on continuation high schools also revealed little research conducted with the students who attend continuation high schools. Literature exploring the related topic of drop outs does offer insight into an at-risk population that includes, but is not exclusively devoted to, the experience of continuation high school students. Inquiries into the culture of continuation high schools is completely absent from the literature base.

The construct of social capital is used in the present study as a theoretical framework to study student perceptions of factors they believe help or hinder them in succeeding in the continuation high school setting. Social capital theory has received increased attention as a perspective focusing on the important role that social networking and trusting relationships have on the education of young people (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). The literature review contains a rich offering of research addressing this theoretical construct.

Included in this study are discussions of two relevant “companion” theories to that of social capital. These additional theories shed light on the presence of social capital in an organization. These theories are resiliency theory (Richardson, 2002) and Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of human needs.

Resiliency theory is included in the study as a potential area that researchers may want to examine when studying at-risk students and which may have meaning in the present investigation of perceived barriers and supports to academic achievement

when seen through the lens of social capital. There are many at-risk children who are able to thrive despite the adversity in their lives; these children are said to be resilient. Resiliency theory is based on defining the protective factors within the family, school, and community that exist for the resilient child (Bernard, 1991).

Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is included because students have a greater chance of fulfilling their potential when all of their basic needs are met. This hierarchy begins with basic physiological needs and progresses to the needs of safety, belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Nock, 2000). Maslow's work may have meaning in this study when seen through the lens of social capital and its impact on perceived barriers and supports to academic achievement.

#### *Statement of the Problem*

Students who do not complete high school have reduced economic opportunities and fewer life choices (Bailey, 2003). The success of students in continuation high schools, therefore, is a high stakes proposition both for the student and society in general. If educational leaders can understand the nature of social capital as experienced by continuation high school students, and its impact on their school experience, those leaders can take intentional steps to build school cultures that initiate and sustain the presence of social capital in the continuation high school setting. This may then reduce barriers, increase supports, and positively impact student achievement in terms of high school completion.

### *Significance of the Study*

Continuation schools offer a high school diploma program to meet the needs of students 16 through 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their schooling. But many students in continuation high schools drop out before finishing. The graduation rate for California students in comprehensive high school settings is 86.7% (Sable, Gaviola, & Hoffman, 2007). The graduation rate for continuation high school students is hard to calculate as California does not disaggregate the graduation rate for students who are enrolled in alternative education programs. Part of the difficulty in calculating graduation rates for students in continuation high schools is that students have a high transient rate, a factor which demands high social capital environments if students are to be successful in completing high school. Some students will transfer back to the comprehensive high school, some will be ordered to attend other alternative school programs such as court schools or community day schools, and still others will enroll in adult school when they turn 18. However, in the district in which this study takes place, locally generated data on high school completion rates for continuation high school students indicated that approximately 46% of the students will graduate, while 54% will not.

Latino students comprise the fastest growing school population. When one takes into account the high national status dropout rate of Latino students, 23.8% (Sable, Gaviola, & Hoffman, 2007), and the fact that Latino students, especially males, are over-represented in continuation high school settings, the need for high

social capital environments for this particular population is magnified to a dramatic degree.

Much of the research completed to date has been focused on levels of social capital through the perspective of teachers and administrators. Very little research has focused on students' perceptions of social capital, much less the perception of continuation high school students. It is for this reason that this research will add to the body of social capital literature and its impact on the culture of continuation high schools. From an educational leadership perspective, this study will provide insight to school boards, and school site and district level administrators about how to initiate and sustain continuation high school cultures that increase the probability that students will be successful through the presence of social capital.

### *Research Questions*

This study addresses two research questions:

1. What do continuation high school students perceive as existing supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion?
2. To what extent do the perceptions of the continuation high school students' peers in a comprehensive high school setting agree or differ from theirs?

### *Definition of Key Terms*

*Bowling alone*: This designation refers to a phrase coined by Robert Putnam (2000) which is used to explain the concepts and forms of social capital prevalent in society today and the fact that Americans were no longer bowling in leagues—that is, forming networked social capital. According to Putnam, some forms of social capital are densely intertwined and others are casual, but all are important in the fact that they



work together as a network. These networks of people enable individuals to do things that they could not otherwise do. The term is used in this study to show that the characteristics of student populations in continuation schools magnifies the probability that students will be “bowling alone” unless care and attention is given to the presence of social capital in these schools.

*Comprehensive high school:* This term refers to educational facilities that offer a high school program to meet the needs and interests of all students by providing a general core curriculum augmented with a variety of academic classes (English, mathematics, history, etc.) and non-academic activities (art, physical education, etc.).

*Continuation schools:* This term refers to alternative educational facilities that offer a high school diploma program to meet the needs of students 16 through 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their schooling.

### *Organization of the Study*

Chapter 1 has discussed the research topic, the statement of the problem, the significance of the problem, and presents the research questions.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the social and financial consequences of dropping out of high school, the evolution of continuation high schools, the theoretical frameworks that direct the present study, research on the mentors’ role for high risk youth and families, and student voice in social research.

Chapter 3 details the methodology of the research study. Included is an explanation of the design, site descriptions, participants and student selection, data-

gathering activities (as related to interviews and student group discussions), method of data analysis, ethical concerns, and study limitations.

Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis of the data derived from the data-gathering activities. Findings and results are noted. The research questions are answered.

Chapter 5 concludes the investigative research and includes a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

### *Chapter Summary*

This chapter has introduced and explained the subject of concern. The problem that is investigated in this study is the need to identify the supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion among continuation high school students. Before these variables can be identified, however, it is first necessary to provide a background of the concepts underlying the primary subject. The purpose of the next chapter is to review the literature pertinent to the major variables of the study.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### *Introduction*

Most secondary students in the United States attend traditional comprehensive high schools and successfully earn a high school diploma. However, a growing number of students attend various alternative settings including continuation high schools. Teachman (2001) noted that the California Department of Education (CDE) defines continuation schools as a high school diploma program designed to meet the needs of nontraditional students 16 through 18 years of age. The CDE defines typical continuation high school students as not graduated from high school, not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and deemed at risk of not completing their schooling. In the 2003-04 year, CDE data revealed there were 521 continuation high schools in California, which comprised 45% of all alternative education programs and served 68,316 students, the largest enrollment of any alternative program in the state.

For most California school districts, continuation schools are used as dropout prevention programs for students pushed out of comprehensive high schools. *Pushed out* means students are counseled, and at times forced, to transfer to another educational setting. Students are typically referred to continuation schools because of credit deficiencies, truancy, or behavior problems.

Unlike traditional public schools, public alternative schools do not attempt to be all things to all people. Rather, they are what Young (1990) refers to as specialty shops, not department stores. For many students who attend continuation school, it is not necessarily an educational choice, but more often the only option available to them, besides dropping out of school entirely. According to Chubb and Moe (2005),

enrollment in a continuation high school is often a student's last hope for completing high school.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature pertinent to the major components of the study. Initial sections examine social and financial consequences of dropping out, continuation school studies in general, and the theoretical orientations of the present study. This includes the theory of social capital, resiliency theory, Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, and student voice, which is defined as individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education.

#### *Social/Financial Drop-Out Consequences*

The detrimental consequences of dropping out of high school have been recognized for decades. Advocates argue that alternatives to the traditional school model are imperative to meeting the needs of all students. Repercussions to students who fail to complete high school include fewer job prospects, lower annual and lifetime earnings, higher unemployment rates, lower self-esteem, and restricted life opportunities (Baker & Sigmon, 2001). Nationally, there is a shift away from low-skilled jobs in favor of high technology production, which further increases the individual and social costs of dropping out of school (Chubb & Moe, 2005, p. 31; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

One significant correlative factor in students who drop out of high school is truancy behavior. Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates. Moreover, truants are the youth most likely to drop out of school (Baker & Sigmon, 2001). Although not yet dropouts, continuation high school

students are potential dropouts. According to Blau (2001), students attending alternative school settings have truancy issues and are credit deficient. Truancy can be either a behavioral problem (students intentionally skipping school for a variety of social, psychological, physical, or cultural reasons) or an economic issue (students not attending school due to the need to work to help support their family). In either scenario, students who are truant fall further and further behind in school, and an alternative education setting, such as continuation high schools, can help them to catch up (Kemerer, Sansom, & Kemerer, 2005). Continuation high schools help students to catch up by offering specialized programs to students who are credit deficient due to excessive absences or a flexible education environment because of the need to be employed. Students enrolled in a continuation high school need to attend a minimum of 15 hours per week. Although continuation high school students are required to take the same academic courses for graduation, many continuation schools offer a work-study schedule, counseling, and targeted guidance. Additionally, many continuation high schools offer supplemental programs and services that include independent study, career counseling, and the flexibility to be concurrently enrolled in community college and/or adult education (Fisher, 2008).

According to a recent report from the National Center for Policy Analysis (Becker, 2000), 14.3% of the workforce without a high school diploma lives in poverty compared to just 6% of the workforce with a high school diploma. High school dropouts are also more likely to depend on welfare, experience unstable marriages, and serve time in prison than those who complete their schooling.

Continuation high school students are potential dropouts. According to Blau (2001), students attending alternative school settings have truancy issues and are credit deficient. The financial impact of dropping out of school can be measured in a number of ways: (a) less educated workforce, (b) business loss because of youth who “hang out” and/or shoplift during the day, (c) higher daytime crime rates (in some cases), and (d) cost of social services for families of children who are habitually truant (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). Since the continuation high school student is at increased risk of dropping out, the devastating effects of not completing high school, as described by Snyder and Sickmund, are magnified for the continuation high school population.

In addition to the high negative personal impact on each student who drops out, schools incur a direct financial impact through the loss of federal and state education funding. When a continuation high school student does not attend school, the loss of funding not only impacts that student but all students in the continuation high school as it depletes the financial resources available to offer programs, support, and interventions to this at-risk population. The loss for both students and schools in terms of diminished future prospects and financial resources is substantial.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2004, drop-out rates are reported in two ways: (a) event drop-out rates, which are annual rates within a single school year, and (b) status drop-out rates, which are rates over a number of years. As stated in a report by Sable, Gaviola, and Hoffman (2007) regarding NCES statistics, the status drop-out rate for American high school students was 9.4%. In comparison, the National event drop-out rates for a single year (October 2004–October 2005) was 3.9%. In California, the event drop-out rate was 3.1%, which

equates to 60,524 students. Disaggregating the dropouts by gender and ethnicity, there were 34,302 or 3.5% males and 25,029 or 2.7% females. The largest ethnic group to drop out in California was Hispanic (32,582 or 4% of all Hispanic students in grades 9-12). The ethnic group with the lowest drop-out rate was White, non-Hispanic (13,329 or 2% of all White, non-Hispanic students in grades 9-12).

Using the data provided, revenue loss to schools in California can be calculated. In California, high school districts, elementary districts, and unified districts are funded differently, but on average, schools in California receive \$5,619 per student annually. Using 60,524 students as the drop-out figure for the period of October 2004–October 2005, schools districts in California had an approximate revenue loss of \$34,008,435.

When comparing status drop-out rates, youth from low-income backgrounds are more likely to drop out of school than their more affluent peers. Youth from racial minority groups are often from low income backgrounds and consequently comprise the largest percentage of dropouts. Hispanic students are at greater risk of dropping out than White students, and Blacks are slightly more likely than Whites to drop out (Orfield, 2004).

The strongest predictors that a student is likely to drop out of school are family characteristics such as socioeconomic status, family structure, family stress (e.g., death, divorce, family moves), and the mother's age. Students who come from low-income families; are the children of single, young, unemployed mothers; or who have experienced high degrees of family stress are more likely than other students to drop out of school. Of those characteristics, low socioeconomic status has been shown to

bear the strongest relationship to students' tendency to drop out. Students of lower socioeconomic status had a drop-out rate four times higher than that of students of a higher socioeconomic status (Orfield, 2004). When one takes into account the cascading effect of the multiple negative social and financial outcomes of dropping out, both on society and the individual, the ethical imperative to make continuation high schools a place of increased probability for student success cannot be ignored.

### *Continuation High Schools*

A student in a continuation high school setting, which many school districts use as a drop-out prevention program, is often working against the odds of graduating. According to the statistics from NCES and the California Department of Education (CDE) stated above, a continuation high school student needs every bit of support possible to avoid becoming a dropout.

Continuation high schools are one of many alternative programs offered throughout the United States. A study done by Raywid (1994) divided alternative education programs into three distinct types: (a) Type I: Alternatives are schools of choice, sometimes resembling magnet schools, based on themes with an emphasis on innovative programs or strategies to attract students; (b) Type II: Alternatives are “last chance” schools where students enroll as a last step before expulsion. These are not schools of choice, and their emphasis is typically behavior modification or remediation; and (c) Type III: Alternatives are designed with a remedial focus on academic and/or social/emotional issues. Lange and Sletten (1995) proposed a fourth type of alternative program. This fourth category is a type of hybrid program. Type IV



is a combination of Type 1 and Type II programs which blends school choice, remediation, and innovation with school choice.

Since their inception and in an attempt to survive, continuation high schools have had to be keenly aware of the political, social, and economic environments surrounding them (Chubb & Moe, 2005, p. 32). In response to these forces, continuation schools have evolved and transformed themselves many times in an effort to keep their doors open and continue to be funded by federal and state governments. In no state has this been more apparent than in California where continuation schools have had the longest running history in the nation. Continuation schools in California are part of the nationwide history of continuation high schools as discussed by Kelly (1993).

The book *Last Chance High* (Kelly, 1993) is one of the few resources found which chronicles continuation high schools from their inception in the early 1900s to the present. According to Kelly, continuation education in the 20th century can be divided into four distinct time frames, each bringing about factors which influenced continuation high schools and the students who attended them.

*Students as workers.* Upon its inception in 1917, continuation education was created for the young worker who was typically between 14 and 18 years old. Continuation schools provided young workers with an opportunity to continue attending school part-time while also retaining their employment. These part-time schools were often staffed with one teacher who worked with a class of young student workers who were often from non-English speaking homes, poverty environments, and/or juvenile delinquent situations. As part of their compulsory school experience,

students were mentored on skills that bridged the gap between formal school and work. A typical school week for these students mandated between four to eight hours of in-class instruction, which included vocational tutoring that focused on their roles as workers in the community.

Lobbying efforts led by vocational education advocates regarding the need for these schools (Nock, 2000) was met with resistance by those who were leery of the *Vocational Education Act of 1917*, which allocated federal funding to part-time schooling. Critics of this act believed the law was too costly and promised to do too much for so little time students spent in the classroom. In addition, many were skeptical of the likelihood of success of a part-time education with limited teacher support for disadvantaged students.

Toward the middle of the 20th century, the economy in the United States began to change, causing a subsequent demand for compulsory education to change. New technology—telephones, high-speed machinery, cash registers, and other technological devices began to reduce the number of low paying, unskilled jobs which were once held by the young student workers. At the same time, child labor and compulsory school attendance laws were enacted, which began to limit the participation of children in the labor market. This signaled a change in continuation high school philosophy and focus from being a tenuous connection linking young men who were working and needed additional education, to an intentional focus on preparing students to have marketable skills in a changing employment market (Kelly, 1993).

*Students in a changing world.* With the onset of new technology that was experienced during the middle of the 20th century, employers were seeking to employ only high school graduates for the higher paying, higher skilled positions. As a result, more students remained in traditional high schools to earn their high school diploma and enrollment in continuation schools declined. Between 1900 and 1930, enrollment of 14 to 17 year olds in traditional high schools rose from almost 8% to over 44%. Another economic factor impacting continuation high schools was the onset of the Great Depression and reduced public funding for schools. As a result, many states began to reduce the number of alternative programs for students, including continuation high schools.

While continuation programs were eliminated in many states, California continued to fund them. Throughout the state, students were expected to attend a comprehensive high school and were not allowed to enroll in a continuation school unless they were able to show evidence of employment. To address concerns about competition in the labor market between older teenagers and adults, California passed an anti-loafing law to prevent minors from competing for jobs needed by unemployed adults. Children under 18 found loafing had to provide proof of employment. If unable to do so, they were forced to enroll in a continuation school and attend a minimum of three hours per day. The public policy to force students into continuation high schools established these schools in the minds of the public as less than desirous settings. This well-intentioned policy created the unintended effect of making continuation high schools into places where rule breakers and delinquents attend classes (Kelly, 1993).

With more students staying in the traditional comprehensive high school, continuation schools began to shift their emphasis from vocational education to vocational guidance: the focus was placed on academic subjects that would provide basic English and math skills needed for employment. With the shift to academics, critics of continuation schools began to question their relevancy and continued need (Wojtkiewicz, 2003).

*Students as ill-adjusted youth.* Across the United States, schools were dealing with increased enrollments due to compulsory attendance laws, and once very homogenous classrooms were becoming more heterogeneous. Teachers and administrators were struggling with students who didn't fit the traditional classroom. According to Tropea (1987), schools began to produce "special rooms" and "special curricula" for "special children" (p. 349). The issue of dropouts and ill-adjusted school age children quickly took center stage. This interest gave proponents of continuation high schools fuel to respond to the critics of the relevancy of continuation schools. Advocates for continuation schools built a case that these schools were relevant because students who did not readily conform or did not meet the minimum academic standards of the traditional high school needed a place to learn. With a seemingly direct correlation between students who attend continuation schools and the new national attention on dropouts and maladjusted youth, proponents of continuation schools repackaged the continuation school purpose. They reshaped the purpose from a bridge between school and work to schools that would provide a treatment program for problem students who were not succeeding in the traditional high school setting.

According to Warner (1954), the new “adjustment” continuation school was going to fix the student who had not been successful in the traditional high school. The goal was to have these students enroll in continuation high school, “get fixed,” and return to the traditional school with a better understanding of societal expectations.

Repackaging continuation schools as “adjustment education” was not a difficult task since continuation school advocates had long considered the students attending these schools as needing adjustment. According to a 1950 California Department of Education Handbook of Continuation Education, students attending these schools included students who are retarded in school, students with little interest in the school program, students needing remedial work in certain fields, students with limited physical capacity, students returning to school after long periods of absence, transfers, late enrollees, students needing special guidance such as habitual truants, juvenile court problems, behavior cases, health problems, and students requiring rehabilitation.

This repackaging of continuation schools provided a rationale to keep these schools open and silenced the critics. While this repackaging gained public policy acceptance with an accompanying amount of funding, the backlash in public perception of continuation high schools was significant. The public no longer viewed continuation schools as providing a service for the working youth; now the public saw continuation high schools as a dumping ground for the maladjusted and juvenile delinquents (Kelly, 1993).

*Students in the midst of reform.* The Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War during the 1960s and early 1970s were accompanied by nation-wide demands for

equal rights for everyone at all levels. Traditional structures were being challenged and public education was drawn into the fray. Court cases throughout this era brought attention to the rights of individuals, and continuation high schools were significantly impacted by court cases that more clearly defined the rights of students in the K-12 public schools.

Although conducted in the 1950s, two studies, Evaraiff (1954) and Shaffer (1955) helped to shape the rights of students during the 1960s and 1970s. Results of Shaffer's (1955) study demonstrated that students enrolled in continuation schools had scored slightly less on IQ tests, but were capable of traditional high school instruction and many had the abilities to do college level work. In addition to IQ, Shaffer's study revealed that 25% of the students enrolled in continuation schools believed that the main goal of their school should be to help them earn enough credits to graduate. The study done by Evaraiff (1954), which focused on boys enrolled in continuation schools, supported the intelligence level findings from Shaffer, but also revealed a disparity between the ethnicity and socio-economic status of boys who attended continuation schools and their peers at traditional high schools. Evaraiff found that the boys in continuation schools had parents with less education and were more likely to come from single-parent families and from families where a foreign language was spoken. In addition, most of these boys did not receive allowance nor had homes with telephones and televisions. Evaraiff also found boys in continuation schools made claims of earlier entrance into adulthood in that they held more jobs and were more likely to smoke, drink, and date. Finally, Evaraiff's study revealed that continuation

schools were more realistic and tolerant when working with this type of student than were traditional high schools.

The findings of the studies, combined with a national interest on equal rights for all citizens and court rulings in the area of student rights, gave continuation high school advocates data and an audience to help make changes in public policy at the national level. The original intent of the Vocational Education Act was for continuation schools, school-to-work programs, work experience, and training programs to prepare individuals for paid or unpaid employment, or for additional preparation for a career requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree. Advocates of continuation high schools were outraged when federal policy makers stated that these programs were no longer going to be funded and mandated in the Vocational Education Act. Federal money was no longer going to be provided to continuation high schools. The training and work experience programs, which were an integral part of a continuation high school's program, would become non-existent.

While national public policy debates related to continuation high schools took place, state level discussions in California also were initiated by advocates for continuation high school students. Continuation school advocates in California used the studies of Shaffer (1955) and Evaraiff (1954) to lobby for continued funding. The lobbying efforts were successful, and in 1965 California passed a law that required all school districts with secondary education to provide continuation education. This gave proponents of continuation schools what they had long hoped for: mandated alternatives for students who were at risk of dropping out or who were not successful

in the traditional high school, resulting in an increase in the number of new alternative programs for students during the 1970s.

Throughout this time, the number of public school alternative programs in California rose from 100 to more than 10,000 (Raywid, 1981). In addition to continuation schools, many other alternative programs were created, including learning centers, schools within schools, open schools, schools without walls, multicultural schools, free schools, and fundamental schools (Deal & Nolan, 1978; Young, 1990).

The 1980s brought heightened emphasis on students' academic achievement levels. This intense focus raised awareness of the need to address students who were functioning at below average achievement levels. According to Young (1990), many of the alternative programs created in the 1970s began to disappear in the 1980s and the enrollment in continuation schools was at a new all-time high. Research focused specifically on continuation schools and students during the 1990s and 2000s appears to be limited to alternative education in general.

Today's alternative programs are generally described as (a) maintaining a small size, (b) emphasizing one-on-one interaction between teachers and students, (c) creating a supportive environment, (d) allowing opportunities for student success relevant to the student's future, and (e) allowing flexibility in structure and emphasis on student decision making (Arnove & Strout, 1980; Barr, 1981; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Case, 1981; Tobin & Sprague, 1999; Young, 1990).

In a California Continuation Education Association publication (Knoeppel, 2002) the function of continuation schools and the indicators of an effective



continuation school setting are defined. Knoeppel (2002) contended that continuation education is designed to serve as the primary dropout and retention program for students who are seriously at risk of not receiving a high school diploma. These schools are also designed to provide (a) a program of instruction that leads to a high school diploma, (b) instruction that addresses the California State Standards and will help students pass the California High School Exit Exam, (c) alternative and various instructional strategies, (d) rigorous academic performance standards, (e) a caring staff and collateral personnel who address the issues confronting students, (f) counseling, career, and vocational guidance services as integral parts of the program, and (g) a schedule that allows for work-study options for all students (p. 23).

In summary, the literature on continuation schools illuminates the significant changes in continuation schools throughout the 20th century. Schools responded to external demands for changes in outcome results, beginning with an emphasis on producing students as workers and evolving into an increased emphasis on producing students prepared for continuing academic endeavors, beginning their careers, or both.

What has not changed, however, are the students who attend these programs. Students of continuation schools continue to be those who do not fit into the traditional high school; they are potential dropouts, have truancy issues, and are credit deficient (Blau & Duncan, 2001). This disparity between the changing demands for student outcomes and the consistent, long-standing characteristics of the students themselves presents challenging dilemmas for continuation schools which need further research and attention.

While the characteristics of continuation high school students are generally agreed upon as defined above, the experience of contemporary continuation high school students is virtually unknown from an empirical perspective. The lack of research on contemporary continuation high schools also limits a comprehensive understanding of contemporary continuation high school students. I found a single study about one continuation high school done by Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) which looked specifically at these students. The study explored the self-concept of the students. At the time of this study, there were 190 students enrolled in the continuation high school; 26 were minority students, 90% of the students were between the ages of 16 and 18, and 56% of the students were male. Forty students were randomly selected to participate in the study.

Continuation high school students in the Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) study, as measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, did not experience an over-all low self-concept, but did have low negative responses in the six areas of scale: (a) behavior, 32%, (b) intellectual and school status, 22%, (c) physical appearance and attributes, 48%, (d) anxiety, 35%, (e) popularity, 25%, and (f) happiness and satisfaction, 25% (p. 15). These data provide a group profile of continuation high school students in one school in terms of self-concept. Based on this study, a proposition about the accumulated affects of these low self-concept scores on individual students in terms of confidence to engage in learning, earning credits, and ultimately graduating from continuation high school, would be a worthy addition to this body of work.

Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) also used a researcher-developed questionnaire with the same participants as described above, which explored continuation high school student perceptions in eight areas: (a) like or dislike of continuation school placement, (b) number of school districts previously attended, (c) family cohesiveness, (d) educational plans and aspirations, (e) chemical dependency, (f) communication with peers and staff at the comprehensive and continuation high schools, (g) special education placement, and (h) communication with parents (p. 14). The researcher-developed questionnaire provided the following data: (a) 92% said they liked the continuation school placement; (b) 80% had attended two or more school districts; (c) 60% came from homes in which the parents were either divorced or separated; (d) 84% planned to graduate and 68% planned to continue on with their education; (e) 80% said they had used drugs in the past, and 48% said they were currently using drugs; (f) 80% said they found it easy to communicate with staff and peers at the continuation school, but only 27% said they found it easy to communicate with staff and peers at the comprehensive high school; (g) 2% of the students had previously been enrolled in special education classes; and (h) 52% responded that they communicate well with their parents (p. 15). Although the findings are not generalizable, the Kratzert and Kratzert study identified high-risk conditions that many other continuation high school students may share.

While the historical, educational, and political development of continuation high schools as organizational entities has been chronicled by Kelly (1993), the experience of students in these settings has been virtually untouched by research. By using the theoretical framework of social capital, and the companion frameworks of

resiliency theory and the hierarchy of human needs, the experience of these students can be illuminated.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

In this section, the theories of social capital, resiliency, and hierarchy of human needs will be discussed.

*Theory of social capital.* The concept of social capital and its theoretical development is most notably attributed to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and American sociologist James Coleman. Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1984), consists of two dimensions: (a) social networks and connections/relationships and (b) sociability.

Bourdieu specifically explained that people must not only have relationships with others, but also they must further understand how these networks operate and how one can maintain and utilize these relationships over time. Particularly, Bourdieu emphasized that social networks must be constructed and then skillfully maintained in order for the actor to utilize his or her resources.

Bourdieu (1977) further described the concept of cultural capital. He used the term to refer to information or knowledge about specific cultural beliefs, traditions, and standards of behavior that promote success and accomplishment in life.

Cultural capital is passed through the family from parents to children by spending economic resources on culturally valued and specific items such as books, tickets to the theater or museums, and other culturally-specific artifacts. This concept specifically incorporates an understanding and familiarity of a dominant culture and language in society. While Bourdieu stated that cultural capital is most beneficial for

upper-class students, he was primarily interested in understanding how people utilize these two forms of capital, as well as how they work together to reproduce social inequalities.

Coleman (1988, 1990) based his definition of social capital on the family system. He observed that family systems are made up of three forms of capital: (a) financial capital, which is the financial resources for household and child rearing expenses; (b) human capital, which looks at parental education and economic skills; and (c) social capital. While the first two concepts of capital refer to parental financial and cognitive abilities, the concept of social capital refers to the more social and interpersonal aspects of family life. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) previous definition, Coleman (1988) recognized two distinct components of social capital: (a) a relational construct and (b) a source of providing additional resources to others through relationships with individuals.

In Coleman's work, social capital is specifically defined by its function and refers to an asset that a person or persons can use as a resource. Social capital is any kind of social relationship that is a resource to a person. In addition, Coleman highlighted various benefits of social capital, including expectations and obligations of trust and reciprocity and the establishment of norms and values in relationships.

This definition draws attention to the communication between family members. These communication skills are important in the family structure since they form the basic rules and norms and thus foster personal obligations and responsibilities among family members. Coleman (1988) also observed that social capital is very strong in connected social networks. While the concept may appear to

be of a stable nature, it is important to note that Coleman defined social capital as a relatively unstable construct that can change over time and in response to different situations.

Coleman's (1990) early focus was on social capital in the family, but later began to see its extreme importance in school settings. Specifically, Coleman (1990) stated there are six crucial types of interpersonal relationships in the school setting: (a) among students, (b) among teachers, (c) among parents, (d) between teachers and students, (e) between teachers and parents, and (f) between students and parents.

While these relationships may appear obvious to researchers interested in studying social relationships in a school environment, it is important to note that these relationships are bi-directional in nature. This means that in order to fully understand and assess social capital in the school environment, the researcher must examine all relationships and interactions among parents, teachers, and students (Coleman, 1988). Furthermore, Sarason (1995) argued that unless these relationships are altered in substantial ways, school reforms will continue to fail.

Coleman (1988) further believed that increasing social capital in schools by strengthening the social relationships between parents, teachers, and students, there would be an increase in academic achievement. Additionally, he noted the importance of parental involvement in the school to increase personal awareness and further enhance relationships with teachers, students, and other parents. In Coleman's study of a Chicago school in which parents led extracurricular activities, the result was an increase in social capital. Through this form of parental participation, existing relationships were enhanced, new relationships were fostered, and there was an

increase in students' academic achievement. Increasing social capital, then, can contribute to beneficial outcomes, such as better communication and greater academic achievement. In order to create this enriched environment, it is necessary for change to take place.

Prior to 1981, the number of journal articles listing social capital as a key word totaled 20, and between that time and March of 1999, the total was 1,003 (Baum, 2000).

This increased and accelerated interest in the concept of social capital has generated many definitions attached to social capital, which leads to some confusion as to what constitutes this concept. This is further exacerbated by the different words used to refer to the term. These range from *social energy*, *community spirit*, *social bonds*, *civic virtue*, *community networks*, *external friendships*, *community life*, *social resources*, *informal and formal networks*, and *social glue*. Adding to the confusion is the fact that these terms can mean different things within the theoretical nature of the research.

For this study, social capital refers to social networks and social interactions that facilitate educational attainment (Coleman, 2002). These networks, which include families, religious associations, community groups, and schools, provide young people with valuable forms of interpersonal assistance. Although each of these networks plays an important role in preparing young people for adulthood, schools are central to this developmental process and are an essential source of social capital for adolescents. Young people who face economic and social hardships at home are especially dependent on schools for support and guidance if they cannot find these forms of social capital elsewhere in their lives. Coleman's definition of social capital

has been selected for this study; however, the use of social capital in a variety of social science disciplines informs this study. Several are discussed below to provide a broader understanding of social capital.

Although the terms may vary in the literature, the research correlates high social capital, in the form of social trust and associational networks, with a multiplicity of desirable policy outcomes. Woolcock (1998) referred to social capital as “the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inherent in one’s social networks” (p. 176). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) have further elaborated upon the concept and defined it, as the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit. Social capital thus comprises both the network and the assets that may be mobilized through that network (p. 251).

Quantifiable effects of high social capital environments include lower crime rates, better health, improved longevity, better educational achievement, greater levels of income equality, improved child welfare and lower rates of child abuse, less corrupt and more effective government, and enhanced economic achievement through increased trust and lower transaction costs. The research indicates that people with high levels of social capital are more likely to be housed, healthy, hired, and happy (Putnam, 2000).

A complementary theory to social capital is the theory of resiliency. Social capital and resiliency theory each speak to the importance of relationships and the potential these relationships have on a student’s ability to thrive. It is possible that a resilient child’s capacity to overcome life adversities from childhood through



adulthood may increase due to the levels of social capital present within his or her respective community, family, and school(s).

*Resiliency theory.* As best explained by Richardson (2002), resiliency theory “explores personal and interpersonal gifts and strengths that can be accessed to grow through adversity” (p. 307). The underlying concept of this theory centers on the ability of individuals to use protective processes to cope, overcome, and adapt to life’s risks and difficulties.

In the older studies on resiliency, researchers examined development of confidence and competence in relationship to overcoming adversity. Today, research on resiliency centers on identification of those experiences and those particular motivational forces that enable individuals to overcome adversity and risk. As explained by Constantine, Bernard, and Diaz (1999), today’s research no longer centers on the identification of trait theories of resiliency—rather, investigators examine the dynamic development processes that are involved in the creation of resiliency. Ostaszewski and Zimmerman (2006) explained, “Resiliency theory provides a conceptual framework for studying why some youth exposed to risk factors do not develop the negative behaviors they predict” (p. 237).

At the present time, resiliency theory underlies and orients many school programs that are concerned with improving the ability of students to lead healthy and successful lives, especially those in lower socioeconomic communities who are considered to be at risk. Such programs are also concerned with improving the functioning of communities, parents, and the school itself in supporting pathways to normal human development—that is, the dynamic development process. Of interest is

the fact that the literature provides evidence that resiliency overcomes life's traumas even when such events are caused by violent communities, poverty, and family turmoil and instability, among other similar conditions (Constantine et al., 1999; Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006; Richardson, 2002).

According to Johnson (1994), however, it is first necessary to recognize what resiliency is, rather than what it is not, in order to better understand its impact. Most people have seen what happens when children do not develop an adequate level of resiliency. Many succumb to life's difficulties by turning to drug and alcohol abuse in an effort to cope. At-risk characteristics now abound in many neighborhoods throughout the United States, brought on by poverty, drug and/or physical abuse, unemployment, and street crime. These children soon perform in school at substandard levels, become candidates for future school failure, and often drop out before graduation.

Many continuation high school students exhibit characteristics of at-risk youth who can benefit from a school setting with professionals who thoroughly understand resiliency theory as a counter balance to at-risk factors. The body of research on at-risk youth informs our understanding of continuation high school students. Past research with children at-risk explored their state of being from a medical model perspective that identified the symptoms of risk rather than indicators that improved resiliency (Printz, Shermis, & Webb, 1999; Werner & Smith, 1992). This original framework assisted in providing a means of defining and identifying some characteristics of an at-risk student. Those characteristics were initially labeled as risk factors and identified as adverse circumstances that increased the probability of

negative developmental outcomes (Segal, 1983). These factors generally related to the areas of family, school, and community (Bernard, 1991).

Research over time has examined resiliency in terms of various factors of influence in helping children overcome risks and adversity in life. Resnick (1997), for example, concluded from a national longitudinal study that religious identity, school connections, and parental involvement all served to have a compensatory effort on not just at-risk behaviors but also on the use of such gateway substances as alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. A study by Wills and Cleary (1996) also verified these factors. Both parent support and academic competence were discovered to directly impact decreased levels of substance use in students. In a later study by Wills, Yaeger, and Sandy (2003), religious activity and belief (religiosity) were also found to decrease adolescent drug use, another at-risk behavior.

During the past 25 years, other researchers also have completed longitudinal developmental studies of large groups of children growing up in community settings. Within these groups, many characteristics of the children and families were examined. In most cases, the life course of the child was charted into adulthood. These large studies contained hundreds of children with outcomes varying from successful to extremely poor.

One such study was done by Werner and Smith (1992) and involved 700 at-risk Hawaiian residents born under adverse circumstances such as prenatal stress, poverty, parental psychopathology, and disruptive family environments. Approximately 200 of the sample were considered to be at high risk. The parents and grandparents of the sample residents had immigrated to Hawaii from Asia or Europe.

Approximately two thirds of the sample had various problems during childhood, while one third showed no problems at all. By the time the study participants had reached their mid-30s, almost all had become responsible adults. A distinguishing factor shared by the sample was a close relationship with a caring, responsible parent or other adult. This study has implications for continuation high school settings in that a caring, responsible adult in the form of a teacher, an administrator, or other school mentor may make a tremendous difference in the lives of the students.

The theory of resiliency focuses on two major variables. The first involves risk factors - stressful situations and unceasing adversity that put children's successful development at risk. Examples include poverty, child abuse, neglect, divorce, living in violent communities, and poor care giving. The second variable is a protective factor. Protective factors are those that reduce the chances that a child will develop abnormally. Examples are strong family supports, a strong sense of self, and participation in the community or church. According to Constantine, Bernard, and Diaz (1999), resilient children have four common attributes. These include (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving skills, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose.

Social competence is evidenced in terms of a sense of humor, communication skills, empathy/caring, flexibility, and other pro-social behaviors. Resilient children are also able to establish positive relationships with others. Problem solving refers to the ability to make decisions in a critical, creative, and reflective manner. In addition, resilient children seek help from others. They recognize that there are alternative ways to solve problems and resolve conflicts.

Autonomy refers to independent ways, self-discipline, self-control, and/or a sense of power. Autonomous individuals can detach themselves from others engaged in risk or dysfunctional behaviors. Resilient children are aware of their identity and have a sense of purpose. They are optimistic about the future and move forward toward educational and personal achievement regardless of adversity.

Clearly, schools have fewer problems with behavior of resilient students and experience higher academic success because they have the ability to overcome barriers. Understanding the characteristics of resilient children can help schools reinforce those characteristics within the child that will help foster resiliency. Schools can also direct their efforts to strengthening characteristics that foster resiliency in the family and the community.

One source of building resilient young adults is the degree of social capital in the schools in which they are students. If social capital, with its emphasis on relationships, can be increased in school settings, the resulting student resiliency will increase the probability of school success.

*Maslow's theory and hierarchy of human needs.* In Maslow's work throughout his early career, he discovered that some needs take precedence over others (Nock, 2000). Maslow felt that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and that certain lower needs must be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied. According to Maslow, there are general types of needs that must be satisfied before a person can meet higher level ones and act unselfishly. Maslow characterized these as physiological, safety, belonging, and esteem needs. As a need is satisfied, it ceases to be motivating, and motivation can be turned toward the next higher level of need. The

fifth need he characterized as *self-actualization*, which is the continuous desire to fulfill one's potential.

In Maslow's view, basic human needs are organized into a hierarchy, starting with physiological needs. These are biological in nature and are basic for human survival. These needs consist of oxygen, food, water, and a constant body temperature. When not satisfied, an individual will feel sick or irritated and experience pain and/or discomfort. If physiological needs are met, there then emerges a new set of needs, which Maslow categorizes as safety needs (Nock, 2000). The safety needs include interests people have in finding safe circumstances, stability, and protection. In our culture, this set of needs manifests itself in the form of our urges to have a home in a safe neighborhood, some job security, a good retirement plan, some insurance, and so forth. Love and belonging needs involve feelings to have friends, a significant other, children, affectionate relationships in general, and a sense of community. Humans have a desire to belong to groups such as clubs, family, religious organizations, work groups, gangs, and other types of social groups. People in general need to be loved and accepted by others. In day-to-day life, people exhibit these needs in their desire to marry, have a family, be part of a community, or by taking part in some other organization. After this need is met, the next level involves esteem needs (Nock, 2000).

Maslow noted that humans have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based high evaluation of themselves by others and for self-respect. He described two versions of esteem needs. Lower self-esteem needs involve receiving respect from others. The outcomes of fulfilling this level of esteem are reputation, status, recognition, attention,

dignity, and fame. Higher self-esteem needs are fulfilled with a sense of self-respect. The outcomes of fulfilling this level of esteem are confidence, competence, achievement, mastery, and freedom. Satisfaction of these needs lead to feelings of worth, strength, capability, and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world.

Maslow described self-actualization as a person's need to be and do that which the person was born to do. Its place is at the very highest level of the hierarchy. Self-actualization is the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming. Maslow refers to actualization needs as the growth motivation. It is this growth motivation concept that is so powerful in the context of the continuation high school student experience. If families, communities, continuation high schools, and students can work together so the students fulfill their general needs, the students will be more likely to be motivated to pursue self-actualization needs. One of those needs can be high school completion. This quest will require vibrant social capital in continuation high school settings.

The theoretical frameworks of social capital, resiliency, and Maslow's hierarchy of human needs are complementary constructs that, in this study, relate directly to the continuation high school student experience. Maslow's research concludes that people have the need to have genuine relationships and have a desire to belong. Proponents of social capital and resiliency theories stress the importance of relationships and the potential these relationships have on a student's ability to thrive, even in the most at-risk environments. As Berliner and Bernard (1995) stated, "resiliency research reveals that just one positive relationship, whether at home, in the community or at school, can make a major difference for a child whose life is

otherwise traumatic” (p. 2). In addition, in the social capital and resiliency theories, one finds support for the importance of a student having a relationship with a caring adult (Bernard, 1991; Coleman, 1988). One way this might be manifested is through a mentor relationship.

### *Mentors’ Role for High Risk Youth and Families*

The role of the mentor is crucial in working with high-risk children. There are many studies that have quantified the positive impact of an adult mentor on children with multiple risks. One of the consistent findings in studies of resilient high-risk children is that those who did well nearly always had a long-term relationship with a caring adult outside the immediate family to provide support and guidance (Muller, 2005).

School-based mentoring programs can provide high-risk students with emotional support, connect them to their schooling, and can help prepare them for life after high school. There is a great deal of research that supports the positive impact of mentoring programs which have been created to support at-risk high school students. Mentors can be positive role models that can offer friendship and guidance and instill the societal skills needed to be a successful adult. Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) found that students with the highest risk of dropping out of school benefited the most from mentoring. They found that students involved in mentoring relationships had better attendance, had improvement in grades, and had a better chance of going on to higher education. They also found that students who had a positive mentor relationship experienced greater student outcomes.



Another study supporting the increase in academic achievement was done by Abcug (1991). This study looked at a specific mentor program, Teachers Achieving Success with Kids (TASK). This mentorship program paired 25 high-risk students with 25 teachers. Students met daily with their mentor outside of the classroom setting and had weekly hour-long sessions. Teacher mentors met weekly to coordinate topics for the weekly mentor sessions. These topics ranged from study skills to appropriate school behaviors and choices. At the conclusion of the first year, students completed a self-assessment. Data from the self-assessment showed that there had been improvement in attendance, discipline, academic achievement, and a positive change in student attitudes about school.

Although Jekielek et al. (2002) and Abcug (1991) found a correlation between mentors and academic improvement, there are few other studies to support their findings. There are, however, studies that support the positive impact that mentor programs have on young people and their decisions not to engage in high-risk behaviors. Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, and Bontempo (2000) studied the relationship between high-risk behaviors and the presence of a mentor. They identified five high-risk behaviors that young people engage in: (a) carrying weapons, (b) using illicit drugs, (c) having sex with more than one partner, (d) smoking five or more cigarettes per day, and (e) the consumption of alcohol. A sample of 294 young people were surveyed and asked to first identify if they had an adult mentor to whom they could turn for advice and counseling; 68% of the participants said yes. Students who had an adult mentor versus those who did not, were statistically less likely to engage in two or more of the identified high-risk behaviors. The only high-risk behavior that

was not significantly impacted by having an adult mentor was the consumption of alcohol.

### *Student Voice*

The present research study is reliant on students giving voice to their experiences. According to Mitra (2003), student voice is the “individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education” (p. 292). It is identified in schools as both a metaphorical practice and as a pragmatic concern and involves engaging students as educational decision makers. This type of engagement involves the practice of actively teaching young people responsibility for their education by systematically engaging them in making choices about learning, schooling, and the education system in areas ranging from what affects them personally to what affects an entire student body to what affects the entire school system (Muller, 2005).

Choosing curricula, calendar year planning, school building design, teacher hiring, and many more issues are often seen as the duties of a school principal or teachers. Today those roles are increasingly seen as avenues for student voice. Students are joining boards of education at all levels, including local, district, and state boards. Some education agencies engage students as staff in programs where they make decisions about grant making, school assessment, and other areas. Students are also participating in decision making by establishing and enforcing codes of conduct and in personal education decisionmaking, such as choosing classes and deciding whether or not to attend school (Mitra, 2004).

Carver (1997) identified what is called the *ABCs of youth development*. These ABCs (agency, belonging, and competence) are the assets that young people need to possess to be successful in school and in their lives. *Agency* refers to the influence and power they feel they can exert in an experience or situation. *Belonging* is the need to create meaningful relationships with their peers and significant adults in their school setting. *Competence* refers to the need to develop new abilities and the need to have these abilities appreciated. These ABCs, according to Carver (1997), need to be developed to keep young people motivated in school and positioned for academic success. By engaging students in conversations about their schooling and listening to what their “voices” are saying, educators can help students to be more successful and connected to school by developing their ABCs.

Schools must have some basic tenets in place before they begin to elicit student voices (Lincoln, 1995). First, teachers must be willing and ready to listen and to hear student voices and to honor what those voices are saying. Teachers must be convinced that both the act of listening to student voices is a worthwhile activity and that the process of listening will have a positive impact on the lives of the student and the school program. Second, teachers must be knowledgeable and trained on how to elicit student voices. Little attention has been paid in teacher training programs on the power of student voices and the contributions these voices can have in structuring learning experiences (Mitra, 2003). Lincoln (1995) continued Mitra’s (2003) view by stating that teachers must be ready to share the power in decision making and in the development of programs and instruction as students’ views and perceptions may be quite different from their own.

As a researcher observer of a grant initiative examining the emergence of student voice at Whitman High School located in Northern California, Mitra (2004) found that students who had previously been isolated and disconnected from their school experience had marked growth in the assets that young people need to be successful in school: agency, belonging, and competence, after participating in student voice activities.

In Mitra's study, two student groups were created; the first group, Pupil School Collaborative (PSC), focused on how to support the needs of first generation Latino students. Students selected to participate in the PSC were students who themselves were disconnected from school. They had high absenteeism, poor grades, and did not participate in any extracurricular student activity. The second group, Student Forum, focused on the ninth grade academic success. Students selected to participate in this group were a cross section of students representing the different ethnicities and social economic status of the school population as a whole.

Both groups were facilitated by a teacher on staff and met weekly. Ultimately, the PSC created a program to support struggling first generation non-English-speaking students, and the Student Forum collaborated with teachers on the school's leadership team and created programs and policies to reform the school's decision-making process. As a student in the PSC stated, "We're not just people anymore. We're not just students. We aren't just names anymore. We're actually important and teachers have to listen to us now, as they didn't before. They do now" (Mitra, 2004, p. 663).

Although Mitra (2004) did not find an increase in student achievement, there was a greater connectedness to school as evidenced by the interviews conducted with

the student participants. Being connected to a caring adult was the greatest developmental assets for the students in the PSC. Other areas identified as significant increases were improving interactions with teachers, gaining respect and attachment to the school, developing problem-solving skills, and getting along with others.

A study done by Lehr and Lange (2000) used student voices, generated through focus groups, to understand the perceptions of students about the goals that were set for them by the schools in which they were enrolled, accommodations made to help them achieve these goals, and about the barriers they believed were present that would keep them from reaching the goals. This study included at-risk students enrolled in a variety of alternative education settings, students at-risk enrolled in comprehensive high school settings, and students not identified as at-risk enrolled in comprehensive high school settings. The researchers used focus groups to gather their data, versus a quantitative approach such as a survey, to gather a broader perspective of the goals and perceived barriers as reported by students in their own voice.

#### *Gap in the Literature*

This section addresses the gap in the literature that led to the research problem examined in the present study. The gap was that much of the literature on social capital is based on data collected from an adult perspective. Little data on social capital was strictly based on the data from a student's perspective (student voice). It was clear from the review of literature and the activity involved in the present investigation that conversation on social capital with students can begin with their involvement in photographic activity. In other words, photographic activity can be the starting place from which students can begin their conversation as well as recognition

of social capital. Adolescents sometimes struggle with speaking to an abstract theory. Thus, the purpose for the photographic activity was to provide the students with a concrete example, a photograph taken by them, to begin the conversation as to why the photograph represented a support or barrier to their academic success.

### *Chapter Summary*

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature pertinent to the major components of the study. Social and financial consequences of dropping out were examined first, followed by an overview of the purpose and work of continuation high schools. Theoretical frameworks were explored in the next section. The theory of social capital, resiliency theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs were reviewed in depth. Another major section reviewed research on the mentor's role for high risk youth and their respective families. A gap in the literature was also identified. It was noted that much of the literature on social capital is based on data collected from an adult perspective. Little was found to be related to the student perspective.

This review has laid the groundwork for the remainder of the study. The following chapter explains the methodology used to collect and analyze the data.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study is to describe and analyze the presence or absence of social capital as perceived by continuation high school students. The research questions that guided the present study are:

1. What do continuation high school students perceive as existing supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion?
2. To what degree do the perceptions of the continuation high school students' peers in a comprehensive high school setting agree or differ from theirs?

The purpose of this portion of the study is to describe the methodology used to collect the data related to the research questions in this study. The first section explains the research design. The following sections focus on site descriptions, description of the student participation selection process, data-gathering activities, photography activity, interviews, and document review.

### *Research Design*

A case study approach was used in the research study to examine social capital through identification of supports and barriers as perceived by students in North County Continuation High School (NCCHS). NCCHS is a pseudonym used to identify the continuation high school in this study. Using a case study approach allowed me to focus on the central concepts of the research problem and to stay within the boundaries of a specified timeframe. Yin (1994) described a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 13).

According to Jaegar (1988), a case study is an exploration of a bounded system. Merriam (1998) further explained that a bounded system is a single unit of study during a specific period of time. This may include an individual, many people, a group, many groups, or events. The purpose of studying a bounded system is to search for patterns of meaning. In this study, the bounded system can be considered the students attending NCCHS.

Data were gathered through four processes: (a) student-generated photographic representations of social supports and barriers which represent the presence or absence of social capital, (b) individual interviews with students who took the photographs, (c) a type of a focus group known as a “student inquiry group,” and (d) document review. A description of each process is included in Data-Gathering Activities.

### *Site Descriptions*

The research sites were a continuation high school in a large urban school district, referred to as North County Continuation High School (NCCHS), and one of the two comprehensive high schools located within the same district referred to as East Side Comprehensive High School (ESCHS). These sites were chosen based on demographics, geographical proximity to me, and ease of access based on my position in the school district. In addition, these sites were chosen because there exist significant disparate student outcomes at NCCHS as evidenced by adequate yearly progress, standardized test scores, and graduation and drop-out rates when compared with the two comprehensive high schools and the school district as a whole. These disparate student outcomes within the same district require investigation in order to understand what factors may be impinging on the academic success level of students



in the continuation high school setting. Student achievement in the continuation high school may be positively impacted if we can come to understand the presence or absence of social capital and the resulting level of resiliency that can affect student progress. This school presented an opportunity to begin such an inquiry. Following is a description of the two sites.

*North County Continuation High School.* North County Continuation High School (NCCHS) is located in northern San Diego County and draws students from four cities. The district in which NCCHS is located is the fastest growing city in the county and the school district has experienced a substantial increase in enrollment during the past decade. There are approximately 80,000 residents in city in which NCCHS is located and approximately 17,000 students are enrolled in the district. NCCHS enrolls approximately 207 students at any one time and serves about 360 students per year. In addition to NCCHS, there are two comprehensive high schools in the district, one of which, East Side Comprehensive High School (ESCHS), is part of this study.

NCCHS is located in the furthest north section of the city. It is approximately one and a half miles from the freeway and five miles north of the center of the city. There are no public transportation routes that run near the school and students must either be driven to school by personal transportation or live near one of the two district provided bus stop locations. The school was built in 1985 and is constructed solely of relocatable classrooms. There is no permanent structure on the campus. NCCHS has a large grass area for physical education and extracurricular sporting events. The school is freshly painted, has a large, modern outdoor structure in the center of the school

which is used by students during nutrition and lunch. NCCHS campus is extremely clean and well maintained.

NCCHS has a full time principal, a teacher on special assignment who has an administrative credential and works as a quasi administrator, a full time counselor, and 12 classroom teachers. Eight of the 12 teachers have worked at NCCHS for over 10 years. Two of the 12 teachers have transferred to NCCHS from the other comprehensive high schools and the remaining two teachers are new to the profession and NCCHS is their first teaching assignment.

Students are referred to NCCHS from the two comprehensive high schools primarily for credit deficiency. Some of the students have also behavioral or truancy issues. Prior to the placement of a student at NCCHS, the principal of NCCHS and the assistant principals from the two comprehensive high schools meet to discuss the pool of referrals. The NCCHS principal takes in only the number of students for which there are spaces available, keeping the total number of students at approximately 207. In addition to the referrals from the two comprehensive high schools, NCCHS takes in students transferring from court schools and other alternative, continuation high schools. Students transferring out of NCCHS, transfer to one of the two comprehensive high schools in the district or to other programs in the county or state. Some students become incarcerated and attend court schools.

All new students and their parents attend a mandatory registration meeting before students enroll at NCCHS. This meeting covers important details regarding the school culture, opportunities for involvement, graduation requirements, California State requirements, student services and rules of the school. A new program at

NCCHS, which was implemented in the 2005-06 school year is the Orientation program. The successful completion of Orientation is required for all new students. According to the course outline, Orientation is a key piece to changing the student's paradigm and habits, so that they can successfully fulfill their goals. It is a three-period, 4-week course that equals 60 hours and 5 credits. The goal of the course is to emphasize the importance of education, to mediate and change prior ineffective attitudes and behaviors and to prepare all students to be successful at NCCHS. Once the students have successfully completed the four-week Orientation they receive a regular 5 period schedule.

NCCHS has a student enrollment of 217, of which 76% are Latino and 17% are Caucasian. Looking at NCCHS enrollment by gender, 69% are male and 31% are female. While student populations at NCCHS based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender are similar at the two comprehensive high schools in this district, one striking difference exists: NCCHS has a significantly higher Latino male population. As discussed in the literature review, Latino students are at the highest risk of dropping out of school, and oftentimes continuation high schools are the last resort for students headed for school failure.

In addition to the concentration of an at-risk student population--Latino male students--NCCHS also presented research opportunities because the academic achievement of students in all demographic groups attending NCCHS is substantially different from their peers attending the two comprehensive high schools. These data indicate that the entire NCCHS student population is a vulnerable population in need of research attention.

In sharp contrast to the two comprehensive high schools in this district, NCCHS has a much lower graduation rate. Only 46% of NCCHS students graduate compared to a district graduation rate of 91%. In addition to the problematic graduation rate, aggregate student achievement is of concern. As measured by the federal and state-mandated student achievement measures, NCCHS has a 2006 Annual Performance Index (API) score of 464 as opposed to the district 2006 average API of 785. In addition, NCCHS has not met its adequate yearly progress targets for the past 3 years. In comparison, both comprehensive high schools in the district have met their annual targets.

*East Side Comprehensive High School.* ESCHS has a student enrollment of 2,372, of which 43% are Latino and 46% Caucasian, 51% are male and 49% are female. According to the demographic make-up of NCCHS, three quarters of the NCCHS students enrolled were referred to the school from ESCHS. Since ESCHS is the home school for a preponderance of NCCHS students, I decided to use this site as the source for the student inquiry group.

#### *Student Participant Selection*

Students from NCCHS and ESCHS participated in the study. Specifically, NCCHS students engaged in a photographic activity and individual interviews, while students from ESCHS participated in a student inquiry group.

I am employed as the superintendent of the school district in which this study took place. To address concerns of coercion of participants due to my position of authority in the district, a colleague who is in an Educational Leadership Doctoral program and not associated with the district, met with the students in my place on two

occasions The first occasion was the initial interest meeting, during which all eligible students were invited to hear about the study. The second occasion was the participation agreement meeting.

The criteria used to identify the NCCHS participant pool for this study were threefold: (a) junior and senior students, (b) enrolled at NCCHS for a minimum of 6 months, and (c) lived in the same attendance area as students attending ESCHS. Of the 217 students enrolled in NCCHS at the time of the study, 46 students met these criteria. All 46 students fulfilling the selection criteria were informed of the study after a regularly scheduled school assembly by the researcher colleague. This “homogeneous sampling” allows for studying the experience of a subgroup with defining characteristics—in this case, the participants are defined by their continuation high school enrollment (Creswell, 2005).

During the initial meeting, students were informed that the purpose of the study was to ask their opinion about existing supports and barriers to their academic success and expected high school completion. In addition, students were provided a general outline of the photography activity and interview questions that were part of a student’s participation. Of the 46 students who qualified to participate in the study, 23 returned a statement of interest to the researcher colleague.

The following week, the researcher colleague met with the 23 students selected to participate to review again the intent of the study and provide a timeline for the photographic activity and interviews. Of the 23 students who were interested in the study, 18 committed to participate and completed an assent to participate form. All 18 participants were given a parental consent form which was completed and returned

prior to their participation in the study. Identities of participating students were protected through the use of pseudonyms in the form of numbers, as recommended by Merriam (1998).

The ESCHC student inquiry group participants were selected from seniors who had been students at ESCHC since their freshman year. This criterion guaranteed that the participating students had a breadth of experience in the comprehensive high school setting. Of the 460 senior students enrolled at ESCHS, 333 students met the criterion of having been a student at this site since their freshman year.

Because I was the superintendent of the school district in which this study took place, a researcher colleague, who is in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program and not associated with the district, met with identified students on two occasions; the first was the initial interest meeting and the second the participation agreement meeting.

The 333 students who were identified as possible participants were notified of the information meeting by letter. Thirty-seven students attended the first meeting. During this initial meeting, the purpose of the study was explained. It was further explained that I was interested in their perception as to the differences and similarities between their perceptions and the perceptions of continuation high school students in the district.

Of the 37 students who attended the information meeting, 14 completed statement of interest. From the 14 completed interest forms, five students were selected to participate. The five students were selected to be representative of the student population at NCCHS. The largest population at NCCHS is Latino males,

followed by males of all other ethnicities. Therefore, two of the five selected students were Latino males, one was white/non-Hispanic male, one was Latina female, and one was white/non-Hispanic female. The researcher colleague met with the five participants to review again the intent of the research. All five participants were given student assent form to participate and a parental consent form which needed to be completed and returned prior to their participation in the study. All five returned the consent forms.

This “confirming or disconfirming sampling” selection process allowed for the exploring of the data gathered in the interviews of students at NCCHS (Creswell, 2005). By comparing and contrasting the perceptions of continuation high school students with those of their counterparts attending a comprehensive high school, the nature of social capital in the continuation high school setting may be further illuminated. Identities of participating students were protected through the use of pseudonyms in the form of numbers, as recommended by Merriam (1998).

#### *Data-Gathering Activities*

Data were gathered through four specific processes: (a) support and barrier photography activity, (b) interviews, (c) student inquiry group discussion, and (d) document review. As noted above, I did not participate in the recruitment or informed consent processes of participant selection. I entered the research process during the data-gathering activities.

#### *Photography Activity*

The use of photography in social science research has been best described by Wang (2005): “one medium such as photography, for example, can be used to reflect

the community or school environment back upon itself, and to reveal the everyday social and political realities that influence peoples' lives." In this study, I wanted to marry both text and image where each would provide a unique perspective to the other. Participating NCCHS students generated photographic representations of social supports and barriers which they identified as representing barriers and supports to their school success.

I met with the 18 NCCHS students and provided each of them with a disposable camera. Each student was asked to photograph within his or her school those supports and barriers to their academic success. Students were provided examples of literal and symbolic supports and barriers. A literal example was a curb without cut-outs is a barrier to a person using a wheelchair, whereas a curb with a cut-out is a support for a person using a wheelchair. A symbolic example was a patch of weeds which communicates a lack of attention. Students were directed that if they wanted to take a picture of a particular person, they were to take a picture of an object that reminded them of the person. In this way, the identity of anyone the students wanted to speak about as either a support or barrier to their academic success would be protected. Students were told that they would have three days to complete their photographic activity. At the end of the third day, I met with the students, collected their cameras, and set individual appointments with the students.

I had the photographs developed, and the photographs were identified by a number identifying the student who took the photographs. The assigned number of each student was known only to student and me.



### *Interviews*

According to Patton (2002), interviews are valuable because the researcher can “go beyond external behavior to explore feelings and thoughts” (p. 306). Interviews were useful for this study because they allowed me to examine the students’ perceptions as to the supports and/or barriers to their success, which exist on their continuation high school campus.

I conducted the one-on-one interviews over a 3- day period. Each of the 18 interviews were audiotaped and ranged in length of time from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Students were asked to interpret each photograph they took. The photographs were used as a starting place for each interview. Interview questions included the following: (a) what is this photograph of? (b) do you see this as a support or barrier to your academic success? and (c) why? The interviews took place within the school day to better ensure the students’ availability.

### *Student Inquiry Group Discussions*

The student participants from ESCHS were placed in a *student inquiry group*. According to Jones and Yonezawa (2002), the use of the student inquiry group structure is an attempt to generate authentic dialogue from students about issues that impact their school lives, such as teaching for learning, relationships, racism, and so forth. They further explained that “student inquiry groups differ from traditional focus groups in that they are not bounded by a set of questions but are, in contrast, loosely structured” (p. 247).

In a long-standing partnership with 18 low-performing elementary and secondary schools, researchers at the University of California, San Diego, have used

student inquiry groups as a viable method of gathering data. Student inquiry groups have also been used as a forum for students to take apart and analyze the meaning of school structures and cultures. Data from these inquiry groups are then used with the partnership researchers and the site administrators within the partnerships to frame future conversations with teachers on the subjects of school climate, teaching for learning, and curriculum and instruction (Jones & Yonezawa, 2002).

A student inquiry group is a form of a focus group. According to Patton (1990), focus group interviews represent an organized discussion with a selected group of individuals. The purpose is to gather data about their views and experiences on a particular topic of research. Focus group interviewing is very useful for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic from a select number of people. The benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others within a group situation (Yin, 2003).

I selected the student inquiry group process instead of a traditional focus group as a better match for this study in order to have a more loosely structured format to generate more authentic dialogue on comprehensive high schools students' perceptions regarding supports and barriers to their academic success.

Prior to meeting with student inquiry group participants, I reviewed the 219 photographs taken by NCCHS students and the interviews associated with each photograph. I categorized the photographs into 34 common themes. A representative photograph from each theme was selected. By *representative*, it is meant that I selected a photograph that clearly illustrated the theme.

The five students selected to participate in the student inquiry group met with me during the school day. Alternative times were discussed with the students during the agreement to participate meeting. All five students requested the inquiry group meet during the school day because each had different extracurricular commitments before or after school.

I reviewed the purpose of the study, which was to obtain their perception of supports and barriers to their academic success as compared to that of other seniors in the district. I showed the 29 selected photographs to the inquiry group and, for each picture, showed a sample of statements made by the NCCHS students as to why these photographs represented a support or barrier to their success. I then asked the inquiry group to discuss how the photograph or the statement made by the student who took the photograph compared or contrasted to his or her own high school experience. This procedure was followed for each of the 29 photographs. The inquiry group discussion was audiotaped and was two and a half hours in length.

#### *Document Review*

Current and archival documents were collected. Documents collected were the NCCHS school plan, agendas from School Site Council meetings, staff meetings, teacher meetings, weekly bulletins, communications between school and home, and student speeches made during the 2007 graduation ceremony at NCCHS. These data were analyzed for evidence indicating the presence or absence of social capital at NCCHS.

### *Data Analysis*

All individual interviews and the student inquiry group discussion were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts were verified by using member checks and inviting correction or elaborations from the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used NVIVO7, a qualitative research analysis software, to analyze and code the data from the interviews and student inquiry group discussions. Using the research questions to guide the analysis, keywords and phrases from the data were identified and categorized. Keywords and phrases that were mentioned multiple times by participants were identified as themes. Twenty-nine themes were generated through this analysis (Patton, 2002).

I analyzed the content of the interviews, student inquiry group discussion, and document data to determine patterns and themes that illuminated the presence or absence of supports and barriers to student success. According to Trochim (1989), “Pattern matching always involves an attempt to link two patterns where one is a theoretical pattern and the other is an observed or operational one” (p. 3). In the case of this study, the theoretical patterns are social capital and resiliency factors while interviews, student inquiry group discussion, and document data are the observed or operational patterns.

Using triangulation, I identified points of convergence and divergence within and between the two participant groups. Triangulation refers to using data sources so that a researcher is not limited to one data source (Yin, 2002). In applying triangulation to this study, I looked for multiple data points in determining themes that emerged in NCCHS student interview content, as well as themes that appeared in data

from both NCCHS and ESCHS student participant responses. Themes emerged out of layering the data. For example, the themes about a particular topic arose first from the photographic representations, second from interviews of students and student inquiry group discussions, and third from the document review.

Merriam (1998) recommended that researchers review what is being collected periodically to determine relationships to the research questions, efficiency, and data-gathering continuation. A periodic review of the data during the process also allows the researcher to triangulate some of the data, such as interviews and documents, to see if there are discrepancies or leads that warrant further exploration. During the data-gathering process, I frequently reviewed the data in relationship to the research questions and began making connections between data generated from the participant interviews, student inquiry group discussion, and documents. Once themes had been established, I created a graphic organizer which I used to provide a visual representation of the data that assisted in presenting patterns and relationships of themes, as well as providing a structural foundation for reporting the data.

#### *Study Data Trustworthiness*

The trustworthiness of this study is anchored in the sampling procedures, interview protocols, and data analysis processes. Two purposeful sampling protocols were used, as described by Creswell (2005). Homogenous sampling was used to identify the NCCHS participants before data collection began. Confirming/disconfirming sampling was used after data collection began to identify ESCHS participants. The participant populations were those that could best help to understand the phenomenon of social capital in a continuation high school setting. There is,

therefore, a match between the research questions and the participants whose experience can help develop a detailed understanding of social capital in a continuation high school setting.

The interview processes, both for the individual interviews and the student inquiry group, were based on three protocols related to degree of trustworthiness. The interviews took place at a time and place convenient to the interviewees. This increases the participant's comfort level and, therefore, the quality of the interview. The same interview questions were used with all participants, thus assuring continuity and congruity of the conversations with the participants. The transcripts of the interviews were reviewed by the participants and were subject to refinements by the participants. This assures that the participants' views are accurately reflected in the data.

The data analysis involved two processes: coding and triangulation. The coding system allowed me to clearly track various patterns among participant interviews, focus group discussion, and document review. The coding system also enabled me to repeatedly review these patterns without starting at the beginning each time. Using multiple points of data through triangulation from interviews, inquiry group and document review strengthened my ability to determine the presence or absence of social capital in the continuation high school setting.

### *Ethical Concerns*

When working with a population of minors, there is a concern that participants will not view the activity as truly voluntary. In this study, there was an additional concern in that I was the superintendent of the district, so the issue of

coercion needed to be carefully addressed. These issues were addressed through the participation of a researcher colleague in the initial stages of the project and through the informed consent process.

In my role as superintendent and due to my position of authority, I wanted to reduce any sense of coercion on the part of the students who were invited to participate. I enlisted the assistance of a researcher colleague during the initial two stages of participant recruitment. The researcher colleague met with the pool of participants at both schools for the initial information meeting during which the project purpose and activities were discussed. The researcher colleague also hosted the second meeting of students who had decided they wanted to participate. At that meeting, the researcher colleague answered questions and distributed the informed consent letters. It was only after students had agreed to participate that I entered the process. The informed consent letter explained the potential risks and benefits of the study. Parental consent and student assent was obtained for each student participating in the study. Each participant was informed that his/her participation was voluntary and that at any time during the study, he or she may decide to discontinue participation. I addressed with each participant the issue of ensuring confidentiality. Participants were informed that private data that might identify the participant or school site would not be used in the study and, if names were needed to report the data, pseudonyms would be used.

### *Limitations*

This study used one continuation high school and a small sample of students from that setting to explore student perception of the presence or absence of social

capital in the school culture. As a point of comparison, the study also included an exploration of comprehensive high school students' response to the perceptions of continuation high school students relative to types of social capital that the continuation high school students viewed as supports or barriers. The participants in this study were selected through purposeful sampling described in the section on selection of participants. The localized setting in which the study took place is a limitation of the study.

The findings in this study are useful when trying to understand what forms of social capital are perceived by continuation high school students as supporting or impeding their school progress. The inclusion of the comprehensive high school students' response to the continuation high school students' perspective may assist school leaders in discerning the differences and similarities relative to student perspective of social capital in the two settings. However, the findings may or may not apply to other continuation or comprehensive high schools.

### *Chapter Summary*

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the methodology that I employed to collect and analyze the data to be used in answering the research questions. The research design was described first, followed by site descriptions, selection of student participants, data-gathering activity, and photography activity. Study data trustworthiness was also examined in addition to ethical concerns. The final section of the chapter outlined limitations.



## Chapter 4: Report of Findings

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of continuation high school students as to the existing supports and the existing barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion. By analyzing the identified supports and barriers through the theoretical framework of social capital theory and the related theories of resiliency and motivation theory, the student perception would be revealed. The social capital theoretical framework of Putnam (2000; 2001) identifies various features of social organization such as trust, norms, and networks as elements that promote the presence of cooperation and coordination for mutual benefit. Situated within this “bowling alone” culture described by Putnam are continuation high schools. The characteristics of the student population in these schools magnify the probability that students will be “bowling alone” unless care and attention is given to the presence of social capital in these schools.

Prior to Putnam’s work on U.S. society, Coleman (1990) applied the social capital framework specifically to school settings. He identified six crucial types of interpersonal relationships in the school setting: (a) among students, (b) among teachers, (c) among parents, (d) between teachers and students, (e) between teachers and parents, and (f) between students and parents.

The theoretical frameworks of Putnam and Coleman suggest that the culture of a school can provide social capital to the students through sources of interpersonal assistance. When one considers the detrimental effects of not completing high school and the risk factors that often accompany students into the continuation high school

setting, the benefits of a high social capital culture become clear. For practitioners interested in increasing the probability of high school completion for continuation high school students, the perceptions of high school students relative to sources of interpersonal assistance toward attaining the goal of a diploma could assist in accentuating the most important forms of social capital in the school setting. In addition to the presence of social capital, application of resiliency theory and human motivation theory could provide added school culture factors helpful to students in this setting.

In order to discover the student view of the presence of social capital in a continuation high school setting, I talked with students about their perceptions of supports and barriers to their success. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of continuation high school students as to the existing supports and the existing barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion. By analyzing the identified supports and barriers through the theoretical framework of social capital theory, and the related theories of resiliency and motivation theory, the student perception would be revealed.

In this chapter the collected data are presented and analyzed. Both research questions are answered and findings are delineated. Demographics of the participants are discussed first. The demographics provide a picture of the sample groups as a whole. Research questions are answered next for both the continuation high school students and student inquiry group. Similarities and differences are examined. The next section focuses on the photographs taken by the continuation high school students, followed by a discussion of findings in terms of student perceptions of

supports and barriers to success and how those supports and barriers can be understood through the frameworks of social capital, resiliency, and human motivation frameworks.

### *Demographics of the Sample*

The study sample was composed of two groups: students enrolled in North County Continuation High School (NCCHS) and students enrolled in the East Side Comprehensive High School (ESCHS). Demographics of the sample in terms of gender, as indicated in Figure 1, of those students enrolled in NCCHS indicated 31% were female and 69% male. Of those students enrolled in ESCHS, 49% were female and 51% male.

*Figure 1: Gender of Students Enrolled in NCCHS and ESCHS*

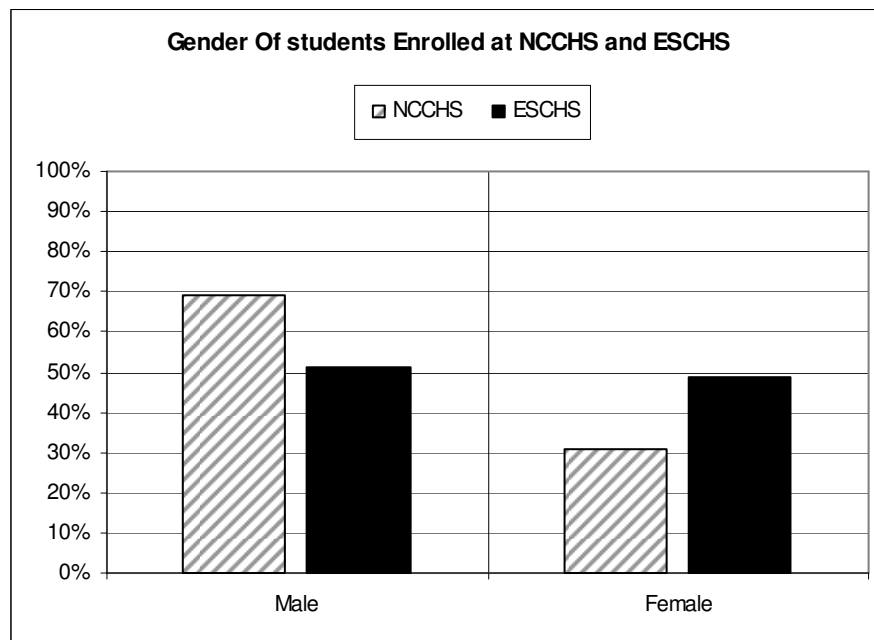


Figure 2 displays difference of the ethnicity of students enrolled in NCCHS and ESCHS, which reflects the students participating in this study. As indicated in the bar

graph, the majority of NCCHS students were Hispanic (69%). The remainder of the students were Caucasian (31%). Of the ESCHS group, 43% (n = 3) were Hispanic and 46% (n = 2) were Caucasian.

*Figure 2: Demography of Students Enrolled at NCCHS and ESCHS*

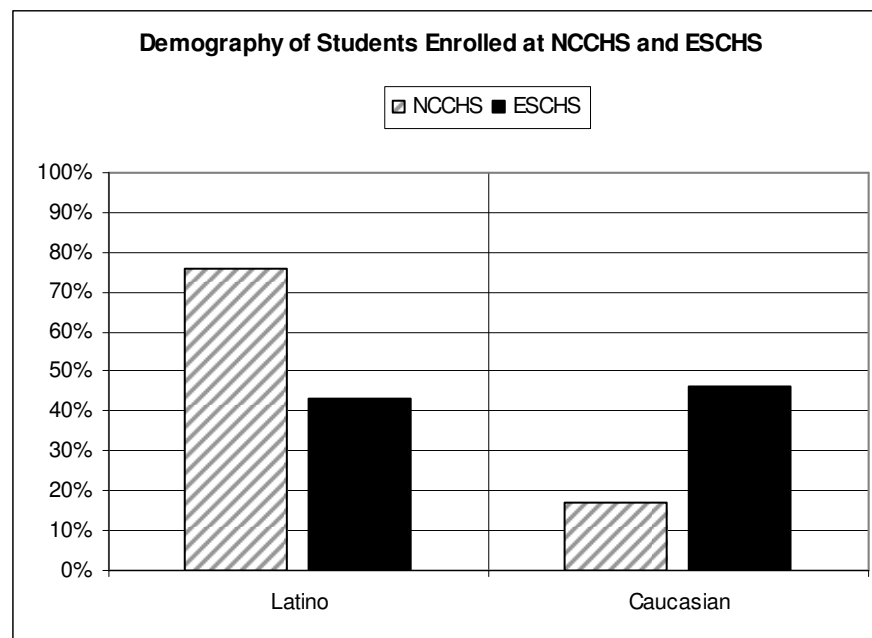
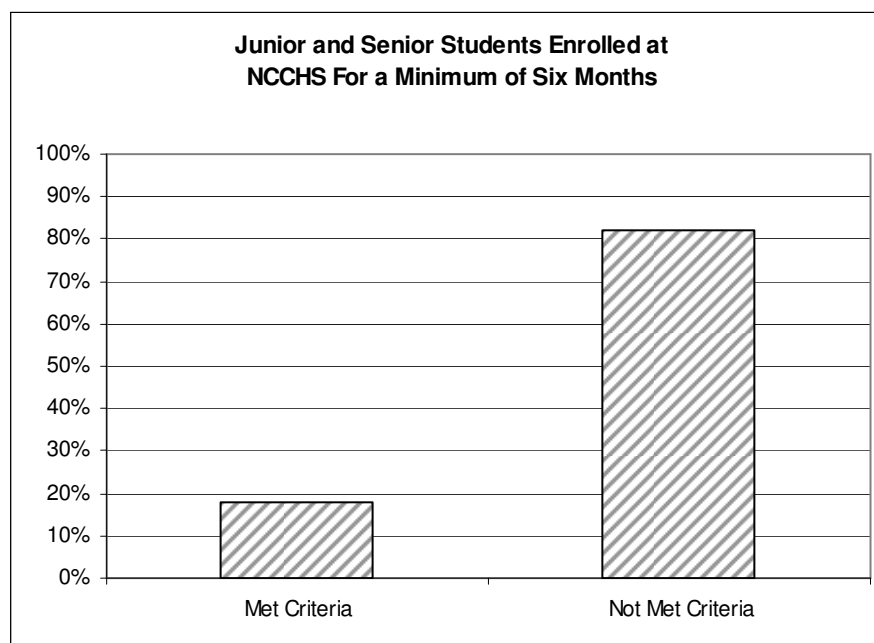


Figure 3 displays the collected information for the study's Junior and Senior high school students. These only included those high school students who had been enrolled at NCCHS for a minimum of 6 months. This was one of the criteria in the present investigative research study.

As indicated in Figure 3, those who did not meet the criteria represented 82% of the total of NCCHS students enrolled. That meant that only 18% of those Junior and Senior NCCHS students had been enrolled for a minimum of 6 months and thus met the present research study criteria.

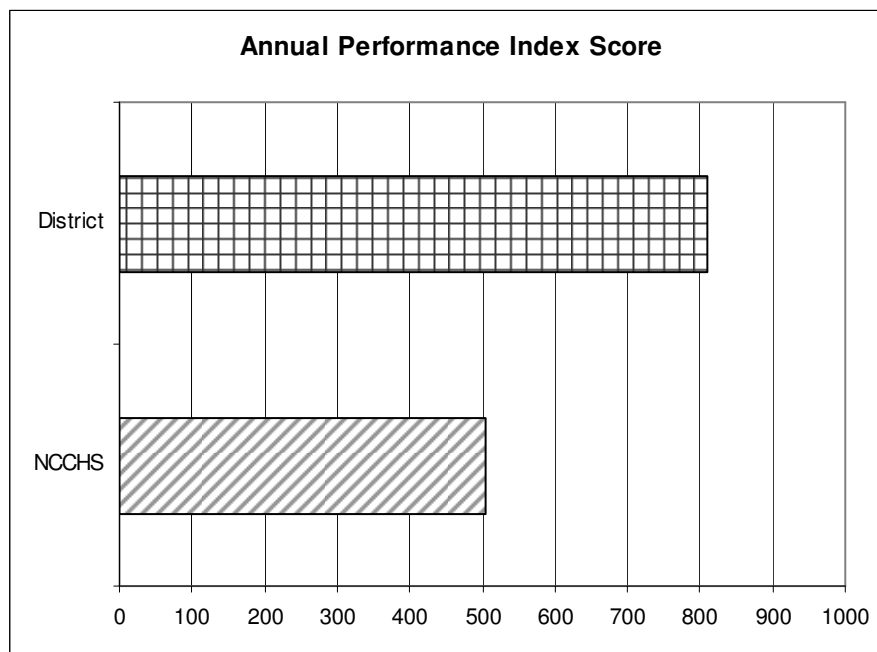
*Figure 3: NCCHS Students Enrolled for Minimum 6 Months*



The annual performance index score is presented in Figure 4. The annual performance score of NCCHS students was compared to that of the school district included in the present study as a whole. As graphically displayed in Figure 4, the index score for NCCHS students produced a value of a little over 500 points on the annual achievement test. This compared to an annual performance index score of about 810 for the other district high school students.

This annual performance score indicates that achievement was lower for the NCCHS students. In terms of GPA, NCCHS students had an average of 1.94 (range of 0.79 to 2.47) compared to an average GPA of 3.34 for ESCHS students (range of 2.89 to 3.75).

*Figure 4: Comparison of Annual Performance of NCCHS and District Students*



### *Initial Data Analysis*

I analyzed the data in three phases. The first phase involved determining categories that reflected the continuation high school students' perceptions of supports and barriers to academic success. The initial analysis revealed 34 categories. The second phase involved refining the initial categories to sharpen the focus of the analysis and discussion of the supports and barriers. The refinement process revealed 17 categories. The third phase involved reviewing the comprehensive high school student inquiry group transcript to determine if comprehensive high school students had similar or dissimilar perceptions of supports and barriers. Following is a discussion of these three phases.

Using NVIVO7 software, I imported all of the transcripts from the eighteen 1:1 interviews, student inquiry group discussion, and continuation high school graduation speeches. NVIVO7 provided me the means to develop a graphic organizer while analyzing the data in terms of supports and barriers identified by the student participants. I first analyzed the 18 continuation high school student transcripts. Each student transcript was analyzed individually and keywords and phrases describing supports and barriers to their academic success were identified. By *keywords and phrases*, it is meant that I found details about the students' perceptions that concretized their perceptions and allowed me to understand their experience relative to supports and barriers.

After identifying the keywords and phrases, I analyzed the frequency of keywords and phrases in order to begin shaping categories of supports and barriers. During this phase of analysis, I clustered keywords and phrases that were mentioned multiple times into 34 original categories. Those categories were: *administration, aspirations, campus environment, caring relationships, college bound culture, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate, direct instruction, drugs and alcohol, electives, ESCHS, family, friends, gangs, guest speakers, motivation, NCCHS, nutrition, office staff, organization, personal choices, physical education, pride, resources, rewards and incentives, RISE, rules, school size, summer school, support, teacher, time, and visual representation.*

Twenty-three of the category titles were taken directly from the terms used by the continuation high school students to identify supports or barriers: *administration (principal and vice principal), computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate, direct*

*instruction, drugs and alcohol, ESCHS, family, friends, gangs, guest speakers, motivation, NCCHS, office staff, organization, physical education, RISE, rules, school size, summer school, support, teacher, and time.*

I titled the remaining 11 categories based on interpreting the student comments.

1. The category *aspirations* reflects student comments that included the idea of “I want to be like that.”
2. The category *campus environment* embodies student comments such as “...it’s really clean.”
3. The category *caring relations* is based upon comments such as “...really cares about me being successful”
4. The category *college bound culture* communicates comments such as “...they all want us to go to college.”
5. The category *electives* responds to comments such as “Yoga is one of my favorite classes,” and “I really like my art class.”
6. The category *nutrition* captures comments such as “I do a lot better if I’m not hungry.”
7. The category of personal *choices* embodies comments such as “It’s hard for me to say no,” and “I know I shouldn’t drink and smoke, but sometimes I do.”
8. The category of *pride* refers to comments such as “I love it when I get an A.”
9. The category of *resources* links to comments such as “We have everything we need here.”



10. The category *rewards and incentives* captures comments such as “I hope one day I qualify to go on a field trip. I really want to go on one,” and “If you’re here everyday you go into a raffle and you get to win an IPOD or other stuff like that.”

11. The category *visual representation* reflects comments such as “the picture in the principal’s office gives me hope,” and

This is a picture of all of the seniors at NCCHS. I’m somewhere in there.

The rows of people are the ones who are on track to graduate. I’m not on the top row, but somewhere towards the bottom. I’d like to move closer to the top so I know that I’ll graduate on time.

I continued to analyze the data in order to determine if the categories could be further refined. I used the process of “layering the data” within and between each category. By layering the data within and between each category, I began to notice some overlap between categories. Because of the overlap, I was able to refine the initial 34 categories to 17 refined categories. The refinement process resulted in the following combination of initial categories:

- *Friends* includes initial categories of *gangs, drugs and alcohol and friends*. I based this decision on student comments such as “These two guys are my friends and are part of a gang. Sometimes I hang out with them and get in trouble so they keep me from being successful.” While another student stated, “...she’s not good for me. She likes me to drink and I always say yes.”

- *Teachers* include initial categories of *college bound culture, guest speakers, direct instruction, rules, summer school, support and teachers*. I discovered that all

these initial categories referenced teachers in the comments. For example, one female continuation high school student stating, “My teacher always tries to find a guest speaker who we can relate to, someone who’s been through what we’re going through.” Another continuation high school student reported that, “...he wants us to go to college. Actually, all my teachers push us to go to Palomar or some other college.” Based on discovering that teacher references were pervasive in these comments, I made the decision to reduce these 6 initial categories into a refined category of *teacher*.

- *Visual representation* includes the initial category of *aspiration*. Student comments such as “I want to be like the kids in the poster,” and “I want my picture on the top row of graduates.” These aspirational statements were made in response to visual representations. I determined that the support being referenced was the poster or picture, which are characterized in this study as visual representations.

- An initial category, *motivation*, became part of two refined categories, *visual representation* and *credits to graduate* based on comments such as “...it motivated me to get my credits. I wanted my picture on top of this poster.”

- *Personal choices* includes the initial categories of *pride* and *organization*. The inclusion of *pride* and *organization* in the *personal choice* category is based on comments such as “...it makes you feel good when the stuff you do is displayed. It makes you want to do even better so next time my work has a chance to get displayed again,” and “This is a picture of my notebook. It’s supposed to keep me organized, but I don’t always follow through.”

- *Campus* contains the initial categories of *NCCHS campus*, *ESCHS campus*, *campus environment*, and *RISE* (a specialized behavior program offered within the continuation high school setting). Many continuation high school students identified their campus by name as a support. In addition, the student inquiry group students identified their campus by name as a support. Continuation high school students' spoke of the general attributes of their school campus and also about the RISE program, which many students felt helped to keep their campus safe.

#### *Answers to Research Questions*

Two research questions were posed in the first chapter. These are restated here, followed by a presentation and analysis of the data gathered from continuation high school students and then from the student inquiry group. In the next subsection of this chapter, similarities and differences between the two groups are identified and discussed.

Question 1. What do continuation high school students perceive as existing supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion?

The continuation high school students provided data on their perception of supports and barriers in two ways: the photo activity and the individual interviews.

*Supports as identified through photos.* The data gathered through the photo activity revealed to this researcher a total of 17 categories of supports. These categories were determined through a visual review of the collected photographs and content analysis of the interview data. The categories include administration, caring relationships, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education,

rewards/incentives, teachers, time, physical campus, and visual representations (e.g. posters, reward activity photo boards, etc.)

Many of the identified supports could be considered as belonging in more than one of the three theoretical frameworks being used in this study; However, for analysis and discussion purposes, nine of the categories are identified as interpersonal support within the social capital framework. Resiliency theory accounts for two of the identified supports, and motivation theory accounts for six of the supports as represented in Table 1.

The nine categories that are interpersonal in nature are administration, caring relationships, counselor, family, friends, office staff, time, credits to graduate information, and teachers. The word *teachers* was the most frequently mentioned with 69 references. The next most frequently mentioned interpersonal support was the generalized category of *caring relationships*, with 12 references.

Two identified supports, *personal choices* and *visual representations*, are associated with resiliency theory because these supports relate directly to a student's ability to make independent and sound judgements about his/her life. Six supports, *computer lab*, *electives*, *nutrition*, *physical education*, *rewards and incentives*, and *campus environment*, are associated with motivation theory in that they assist students in meeting various levels of need, which motivates them to address the next levels of development and achievement.

*Supports as discussed in the interviews.* During the one-on-one interviews with the NCHS students, each student was asked to comment on the photo taken of a support. A summary of the key ideas shared in these interviews by category is

provided in Appendix A. In the following discussion, lessons from these key ideas are presented as themes to be considered in terms of building a high social capital culture in a continuation high school when student perception is taken into account.

The comments accompanying the nine supports categorized as interpersonal in nature reveal four common themes associated with the supports. Those themes are *availability*, *personalization*, *information sharing*, and *success orientation*. See Table 2.

For instance, the notions of visibility (administration), taking time to check on me (caring relationships), and meeting during break time (teachers) indicate that students see *availability* of adults as a form of social capital that supports their academic success. The theme of *personalization* is rooted in student comments, such as “Makes me feel like I’m somebody special” (caring relationship), “Meets with me and tells me how many credits I need to graduate on time” (counselor), and “He listened to me and he cares” (teachers). *Information sharing*, especially related to credit status, was repeatedly referenced. Students spoke of keeping abreast of their credit status 41 times in the interviews, many times related to conversations with counselors and other adults or through other sources of information. The fourth theme, *success orientation*, was present in multiple interpersonal categories: “want us to be successful” (administrators), “cares about me being successful” (caring relationships), “want them to be proud of me (family), “we try to keep each other pumped up” (friends), “gave me ideas about how to get along in class when I didn’t get along with

*Table 1: Continuation High School Students: Categories of Support and Barriers Identified Within Three Theoretical Frameworks*

Category	Theoretical Frameworks		
	Social Capital	Resiliency	Hierarchy of Need
<u>Relationship Categories</u>			
Administration	X		
Caring relationships	X		
Counselor	X		
Family	X		
Friends	X		
Office staff	X		
Teachers	X		
<u>Other Categories</u>			
Computer lab			X
Credits to graduate (purposeful conversations to motivate/connect students to their work)	X		
Electives (purposeful intent to provide opportunities to students to connect with school)			X
Nutrition (meeting basic need)			X
Personal choices (each student's individual choice)	X		
Physical education (meeting basic needs)			X
Rewards/incentives (purposeful intent to motivate/connect students)			X
Time (part of staff conversations about need to be on time with student understanding of attendance to earn their credits)	X		
NCCHS campus (environment conducive to build relationships)			X
Visual representations (intentional Strategy to connect students to school)		X	

Table 2: Interpersonal Supports Categorized into Themes

Interpersonal Themes	Examples
Availability	Administration is visible Staff taking the time to check on students Staff meeting with students during breaks
Personalization	Staff making students feel they are special Staff meeting with students Staff listening to students
Information Sharing	Staff telling students about the number of credits needed to graduate Staff telling students what courses are needed to graduate
Success Orientation	Staff wants them to be successful Staff cares about them Friends keep them pumped up

the teacher” (counselor), “they want us to be successful” (office staff), and “they want me to be successful” (teachers).

Two categories of supports--*personal choices* and *visual representations*--can be understood through the resiliency theory lens. In discussing his photo, one student commented, “The school doesn’t want me to drink or smoke, but I do sometimes. So it’s not the school, but it is me that sometimes gets in my own way.” Another student narrated his photo by saying, “I know I shouldn’t hang out with them, but sometimes I do and they keep me from being successful.” The photos these students were discussing had been identified by them as representing supports. The narration might seem counterintuitive to the notion of a support, until one applies the lens of resiliency theory. In the narratives the students are exploring their own abilities to avoid risk

factors--a sign of resiliency--and recognizing that they are vulnerable to the influence of peer pressure and negative habits. It is in the recognition of personal choice that the students have identified a support inside the complexity of peer relationships and life habits.

*Visual representations* also comprise a category that can be examined through the framework of resiliency. Students noted visual representation 19 times in their photos. These representations include pictures of students who graduated early in the year or who were on track to graduate, photos of students winning prizes for productive behaviors, students going on field trips, and various posters in classrooms of inspiring historical figures such as Bob Marley or of cautionary messages such as an individual smoking in a county jail. Seeing oneself in a future state of success contributes to the person's resiliency. One student illustrated this by saying,

Visual representations of students "like me" who have succeeded by graduating and of recognizable figures--either famous due to professional accomplishments such as Bob Marley or infamous due to the wrong path taken such as a nameless prisoner in a county jail--provides points to ponder as students engage in building their ability to stay on track and persevere through the tough times. This school has photos of kids all over the place; photos of kids who are graduating, photos of kids who have gone on the field trips and photos of students who have won the raffle. I got really excited when I was one of the people in the photos that are displayed in the office.



The six remaining categories of supports--*computer lab*, *electives*, *nutrition*, *physical education*, *rewards/incentives*, and *the campus*--lend themselves to analysis through the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation. See Table 3. The support *nutrition* clearly falls in the basic physiological needs level of motivation. This linkage is supported by the student comments, which center on eating, the brain-body connection, and increased energy. The *physical education* support can be linked to both the belonging and self-esteem levels of the hierarchy based on the comments

*Table 3: Supports within Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation*

<u>Human Need</u>	<u>Supports</u>
Physiological	Nutrition
Safety	
Belonging	Rewards/incentives Campus Electives
Self-esteem	Physical education Electives
Self-actualization	Physical education Computer lab Rewards/incentives

relative to earning credits (e.g. a way to gain control over credit deficiency, thus building self-esteem), having fun with friends, and staying out of trouble by playing sports. The *computer lab* support comments about being able to find information at will and going beyond the resources available in books would indicate that a link to level of confidence and independence that would place the computer lab in the self-

esteem level of the motivation hierarchy. The *rewards/incentives* support is connected to the belonging and self-esteem levels of motivation through the student comments describing a link between working hard/doing the right thing and going on field trips and being recognized for their accomplishments. The *campus* support is a manifestation of perceived benefit of the small physical size of the school to the level of individual attention. Inferred from this is a correlation to the belonging element of Maslow's motivation hierarchy.

*Barriers as identified through photos and interviews.* A number of barriers were also cited by the NCCHS students. Appendix B provides the full responses to each category. Of the 17 categories used to organize the photos that students said represented supports to school achievement, 15 of them also appeared after the analysis of photos depicting barriers. The barrier categories are administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus. Counselor and visual representations, previously identified in the support discussion, did not appear as barrier categories.

The nature of the barriers was revealed in the student comments during the interviews. A pattern of inferred "lack of" is evident in the comments: lack of attention, lack of computers, lack of choices, lack of sports, and lack of cleanliness. References were made by the students to the quality of exchanges between students and adults. "He's always coming down on us," "She is mean to me," and "He didn't care if I got good grades" are indicative of barriers in the area of relationships. The negative impact of peer pressure was captured in the category of *friends* as barriers

with comments referring to getting into trouble, fooling around, and ditching school. Perhaps relatively tame behavior by contemporary standards, except when a student is significantly credit deficient and cannot waste a single moment of opportunity to catch up.

The fact that students identified barriers that also relate to categories of supports speaks to the range of student perception in the continuation high school setting. This duality—that which is a support can also be a barrier— is useful information about the complexity of the student population and what they perceive as supports and barriers to academic achievement. Educators must understand that there is great complexity and a range of experiences of continuation high school students and what they perceive to be supports and barriers. Understanding the different experiences that each student brings to the continuation high school setting, educators will be better equipped to provide the individual support needed as a support that may have worked with one student may not be the support that works with another.

In summary, the data from this study indicate that the continuation high school student participants find support from 17 different sources: administration, caring relationships, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, the physical campus, and visual representations. The data also revealed 15 sources of barriers: administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus.

### *Conclusion*

The first question of the present research study asked, what do continuation high school students perceive as existing supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school completion? The photos and interviews with the continuation high school students revealed multiple supports and barriers. The supports, as summarized in Appendix A, and barriers, as summarized in Appendix B, provide a rich resource of ideas and guidance to those committed to providing a responsive educational environment to continuation high school students. The student voices reported in Appendixes A and B not only convey individual student perceptions of supports or barriers, but taken collectively, illustrate a larger context as to what students are paying attention to. As stated previously, many supports were seen also as barriers, which relates directly to a student's personal experience. By listening to student voices and understanding the reality of the world in which these students live and what they say, educators can learn makes a positive impact on their success in school.

The second research question asked, to what degree do the perceptions of the continuation high school students' peers in a comprehensive high school setting agree or differ from theirs? The five comprehensive high school students in the inquiry group provided data on their perception of supports and barriers by responding to the photos and comments of their continuation high school peers. Their perceptions are discussed next

*Student inquiry group responses to continuation high school student perceptions of supports and barriers.* Each of the NCCHS students took photos of

images that represented either supports or barriers to being successful in high school. The comprehensive high school student inquiry peer group members were asked to view photos taken by the NCCHS students. The researcher read some of comments that continuation high school students made about the photos in response to the following three questions: (a) what is this photograph of? (b) do you see this as a support or barrier to your academic success? and (c) why?

After viewing the photos and hearing the student statements, the student inquiry group was asked for their responses as to whether their experiences with the support or barrier were similar or different than those of their continuation high school counterparts. Tables 4 and 5 summarize the agreement and disagreement of the inquiry group with the continuation high school students relative to supports and barriers.

The five members of the comprehensive high school inquiry group were in consensus that they experienced 10 of the support categories from the continuation high school student data as supports in their school experience. Those categories were: caring relationships, counselor, family, friends, teachers, computer lab, electives, nutrition, personal choices, and the campus. The inquiry group came to consensus that seven of the support categories from the continuation high school student data were not supports in their school experience. Those categories were administration, friends, credits to graduate, physical education, rewards/incentives, time, and visual representations. The inquiry group interview yielded several comments that shed light on their differing perceptions.

*Table 4: Inquiry Group Responses: Agreement and Disagreement with NCCHS Student Responses to Identified Supports*

Category	Inquiry Group Responses	
	Agreement	Disagreement
<u>Relationship Categories</u>		
Administration		X
Caring relationships	X	
Counselor	X	
Family	X	
Friends	X	
Office staff		X
Teachers	X	
<u>Other Categories</u>		
Computer lab	X	
Credits to graduate (purposeful conversations to motivate/connect students to their work)		X
Electives (purposeful intent to provide opportunities to students to connect with school)	X	
Nutrition (meeting basic need)	X	
Personal choices (each student's individual choice)	X	
Physical education (meeting basic needs)		X
Rewards/incentives (purposeful intent to motivate/connect students)		X
Time (part of staff conversations about need to be on time with student understanding of attendance to earn their credits)		X
The campus (environment conducive to build relationships)	X	
Visual representations (intentional strategy to connect students to school)		X

*Table 5: Inquiry Group Responses: Agreement and Disagreement with NCCHS Student Responses to Identified Barriers*

Category	Inquiry Group Responses	
	Agreement	Disagreement
<u>Relationship Categories</u>		
Administration		X
Caring relationships		X
Counselor		X
Family		X
Friends	X	
Office staff		X
Teachers		X
<u>Other Categories</u>		
Computer lab		X
Credits to graduate (purposeful conversations to motivate/connect students to their work)		X
Electives (purposeful intent to provide opportunities to students to connect with school)		X
Nutrition (meeting basic need)		X
Personal choices (each student's individual choice)	X	
Physical education (meeting basic needs)		X
Rewards/incentives (purposeful intent to motivate/connect students)	X	
Time (part of staff conversations about need to be on time with student understanding of attendance to earn their credits)	X	
The campus (environment conducive to build relationships)	X	

Time was perceived as a barrier by the inquiry group and as a support and a barrier by the continuation high school students. One inquiry group male student stated that he struggled every day with the issue of time. A female student commented, “There really is not enough time to get everything you want to get done, done. If you're a successful student, if you wanted to get somewhere or do something you knew there is not enough time throughout the day.” In the continuation high school students’ experience, time was viewed as a barrier when it came to tardies, but was also viewed as the tool to earn credits; for the comprehensive high school inquiry group, time was always in short supply.

The inquiry group students perceived teachers as a support. As noted by one male student, “I think it's the participation and effort that you put into homework and projects. It's not the teacher that holds you back, it is yourself. You're the one in the class, doing the work, it's your responsibility.” One female added that she saw it both ways. “Well, how I see it there are some teachers - that the way they teach and lecture - that it would be hard for students. But if students are having trouble with that, then they need to go up to the teachers and ask. So it goes both ways.” The continuation high school students placed teachers in both the barrier and support category.

Rewards and incentives in the form of earning field trips and other extracurricular opportunities, earned based on attaining good grades, were perceived as a barrier by the inquiry group. The general consensus was that students who did not get good grades were actually being punished by not being allowed to go on field trips. Posters depicting student progress toward graduation were also seen in a negative light. One male said that he would not want to be on such a poster. He



explained, “I don't want to be compared to other students in front of other students.” A female agreed, adding, “Yeah, that's like the whole field trip thing. It could possibly discourage some people.” Continuation high school students, on the whole, viewed rewards and incentives as a positive aspect of their school experience.

Visual representations in the form of motivational posters were perceived by the inquiry group as a support, as they were by the continuation high school students. One male student in the inquiry group summed up the group response when he said, “In almost every classroom there is some kind of poster to remind you not to do drugs, not to drink, not to smoke. Are the posters a support? I guess you can say so. If they weren't there, we wouldn't be thinking about it.”

Inquiry group participants viewed friends as both a support and a barrier, as did the continuation high school students. As pointed out by one inquiry group female participant, “friends have really been a big support to me. You have someone to talk to you have someone to share things with.” Another male student said, “You can't live without them.”

The downside of friends was described by the inquiry group participants as being related to drugs, alcohol, and gang membership. According to one female, however, “it's really about the friends you have and that you are going to do what most of your friends do. If your friends drink and smoke you are going to . . . I don't hang around with kids that do any of that.” Another agreed. She said that she didn't think schools had anything to do with her choices. “It's me and my friends, and we can choose to do any of it or not to do any of it.” In the view of one male student, “Gang banging is what they think is cool. Sure, in high school maybe it's cool when you get a

reputation, but after high school it doesn't mean anything. You are going to be in jail or dead.” “You can get caught up in what the gang members want,” one female noted. Many gang members “care more about their ganging family than they do about their education or finishing high school.” The continuation high school students observed similar positive and negative aspects of friends and viewed them as both a support and a barrier to success.

The inquiry group students attend a state of the art high school just over three years old. They viewed the campus--the physical plant--as a support to their academic achievement. The newness of the school plus the availability of materials necessary to successfully complete college prep classes such as chemistry greatly impressed the students. One male student commented, “I remember the first day walking into chemistry class and was blown away that we actually had chemicals and everything we needed to do our labs.” Although attending school in a significantly less resource-rich environment, the continuation high school students also noted their campus as a support, especially in terms of its small size and attendant personalized atmosphere. Both the comprehensive high school inquiry group and the continuation high school students noted that the campus can be a barrier due to ill-equipped classrooms and dirty facilities.

Computers and other technology were cited in a positive context by the inquiry group members because they allowed students to access information needed for classroom assignments. Television was cited as a support in that “it helps us understand the content [of the class].” “The videos or film clips break up the class, and it does sometimes help you understand what the teacher is saying. It's just better than a

lecture once in a while,” one male explained. The continuation high school students also found computers a support for similar reasons.

### *Student Vignettes*

The analysis of data revealed many discreet supports and barriers identified by the students. These have been discussed above. In this section, an in-depth description and discussion of four student interviews are presented. These four student stories give insight into the complex and multi-faceted experiences of continuation high school students and help us understand how the presence or absence of social capital in the school culture can determine whether students bowl alone or bowl together.

#### *Student 1*

A female student, who was 17 years old and Latina, took 11 pictures that included photographs of a newspaper article reporting a drunk driving accident, a “You’re On Time” sign that stood at the front entrance of the school, a picture of three of her friends, hands united in the shape of a star, and an anti-smoking poster entitled, “Get Your Butt Out of My Face.” Of the 11 photographs taken, 10 were supports: one picture representing the school counselor, one picture representing her family, one picture of an anti-smoking poster, one picture representing time, three pictures representing her friends, and three pictures representing teachers. One picture, a photograph of a newspaper article, represented a barrier--drinking.

The picture of the newspaper article entitled, “North County High students learn about hard choices,” was the one barrier identified and the hardest picture for this student to speak about. I began with the same question as I did all pictures, “What is this picture of and does this picture represent a support or barrier to your success at

NCCHS?” She hesitated when she answered and then shared with me that it represented a barrier. I asked her what the picture was, and she explained to me that it was a picture of a guest speaker who spoke to all of the students at NCCHS about the death of her son the previous year from a drunk driving auto accident. I asked her how the death of this woman’s son would be a barrier to her success. She responded, “I grew up with him. He has been my friend since elementary school, and he got stupid and got drunk with a bunch of his friends and went driving, and they crashed the car and he died.” As she spoke, her eyes began to fill with tears, and I had to stop the interview for a moment and hand her a tissue. I probed with another question and asked, “So is it his death that is a barrier to your success?” She explained no, that the barrier was drinking and that even though her friend passed away, she continues to drink even though she understands the consequences, “I know I shouldn’t, but I still drink. When I think of him, I feel guilty; at least I make sure I don’t drive.”

### *Student 2*

Another female student, who also was 17 years old but Caucasian, took 19 pictures, which included photographs of the computer lab, a poster which illustrated 10 steps to success, a school-created poster which included photographs of students who participated in a field trip which was a reward for good attendance and grades, and a yoga mat, which represented an elective students were able to select as part of their daily class schedule. Of the 19 photographs taken, 18 were supports: five pictures representing teachers; one picture representing the school counsellor; one picture representing her friends; six pictures of posters which included a poster about loyalty; steps to success; anti- smoking; anti-drinking; the musician Bob Marley with his lyrics

“get up, stand up, stand up for your right, gut up, stand up, don’t give up the fight, get up, stand up, life is your right, don’t give up the fight”; and a poster created by the school which was a pie graph with four equal parts which illustrated the point that if students were in attendance and had good grades, they could participate in two reward field trips; one picture representing the computer lab; one picture of students attending a field trip; one picture of the soccer field which represented physical education; one picture of a boxed lunch; and one picture of a school-created display which had pictures of students on their path towards graduation. One picture, a photograph of a clock on the wall of a classroom, represented a barrier, time.

The picture displaying NCCHS students’ path towards graduation was a photograph this student took great pride in speaking about. When asked if this picture represented a support or barrier to her success at NCCHS, she stated, “This is one of the things that motivates me everyday. I come into the office at least once a week to see if I have moved up a row. Last semester I was in the row just near the bottom. Now, I’m in the second row from the top.” I asked a follow-up question as to how this supported her success. She answered, “I want to be on the top, the very top. That means I have graduated and I’m on my way to college.” As this student spoke about being on her way to college, her face lit up; a smile was evident as she spoke, and the inflection in her voice changed to one of confidence and pride.

### *Student 3*

One of the Caucasian males who participated in the study had a personality that was positive and energetic, which was evident from the moment we began the interview. He was the only student in the study who walked into the interview room,

put out his hand to greet me, prior to my extending mine, and asked if I remembered him from the photography activity: “remember me, I’m Chris” (not his actual name, but a pseudonym used in this example). Chris took 21 pictures, all of which he identified as supports to his success. Five pictures were related to food, which included a picture of the vending machines, a boxed lunch, and a chicken sandwich; five pictures were of the school campus which included the lunch area, an area in the quad where he spent his nutrition break, and a picture of the school name which hung at the entrance of the school; four pictures represented teachers; one picture of the auto shop represented electives; three photographs were of his own school work which was displayed in his English and Art classes; two pictures were of students who had participated in reward field trips for attendance and grades; and one photograph was of the school-created display of students on their path towards graduation.

Chris was positive throughout the interview, but became very animated in his voice and gestures when he spoke about the photographs representing the field trips which were rewards for students with good attendance and grades. When I asked him if this picture represented a support or barrier to his success, he enthusiastically responded, “This is a support, dude. See this? This is me. I got to go because my grades improved.” I followed up by asking how going on this field trip was a support to him. He stated, “It supported me because now I want to make sure I keep my grades up so I can go on the next one.”

After speaking about all of the photographs Chris took, I shared with him that none of the photographs represented barriers to his success. I followed up by asking him, “although you did not take any photographs of barriers, can you think of a barrier

that you maybe did not photograph?” He replied, “No, not really. It’s a great school.” I asked again, in a different way, “So, you’re telling me that there has not been one barrier to your success at NCCHS?” He thought for a moment and finally replied, “Well, the school is pretty far away from my home and sometimes if I miss the bus. . . When this happens, I either miss school or have to call my mom, and she has to leave work to come get me and drop me off. This isn’t really cool with her.”

#### *Student 4*

One of the interviews I conducted will stay with me as an educator for the remainder of my career and will influence my thinking and future decisions. What was revealed through this interview was the high risk environment many of the students who attend continuation schools live in. This interview was with a Latino male who was 17 years old. As he entered the interview room, it was apparent in both his movement and his body language as he sat down that he was very guarded and introverted. He sat with his arms crossed and his shoulders hunched forward, and his legs were held so tightly together that his knees touched. He took only five pictures; two were supports and three were barriers. Of the two supports, one picture represented a teacher and the other photograph was of a drug-free zone poster. The three barrier photographs included one picture of two apparent males (the photograph was taken from the shoulders down), and as he described, throwing gang signs; one photograph was of the school’s vending machines representing what he considered to be the “lousy” food at the school, and the final photograph was of a poster which had the backside of a male, dressed in an orange jail jumpsuit with the caption, “What all of the Best Dressed drug users are wearing this season.”

It was the poster of the male dressed in an orange jail jumpsuit that revealed the greatest emotion from this student. When I asked if this poster represented a support or barrier to his success at NCHS, he replied, “My brother is in jail and every time I see this picture it reminds me that I don’t want to end up like my brother. He was selling drugs and shit like that.” I followed up with a question as to whether this poster was a support or barrier to his success. He sat for a moment and replied, “It’s drugs; it screws everything up. My brother’s in jail, and there ain’t no way I’m going there.” I then asked if the poster, which represented his brother in jail, helped him to make choices to stay away from drugs. He again hesitated before answering and replied, “I’ve done drugs, but since my brother went to jail, I haven’t smoked in months.” Although the picture was of a poster of a man in jail, the photograph he took truly represented that, to this student, drugs are a barrier in his life and he is well aware of the consequences from using and/or selling drugs.

The vignettes above represent the totality of the photographs of supports and barriers to academic success taken by the 18 continuation high school students. In the vignettes, 50 of the photographs represented supports and six represented barriers. It is interesting that the supports identified by these students reside in all three theoretical frameworks of this study: social capital, resiliency, and Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, and the identified barriers also reside in all three theoretical frameworks. Within the construct of social capital, the students in the vignettes identified the school counselor, family, friends, and teachers as supports to their success. The supports as identified by these students can help to shape their values and understand the norms



and expectations of relationships. Also within this construct of social capital, these students identified friends and time as a barrier.

Photographs taken by these students also represented supports and barriers within resiliency theory. Visual representations, meaning students can see themselves in a future state of success, were evidenced through posters of students on their path towards graduation, displayed student work, and school-created visuals of reward field trips for good grades and improved attendance, were all seen as supports. Personal choices, which speak to a student's ability to avoid risk factors and to recognize their vulnerability to the influence of peer pressure and negative habits such as the decision to drink or do drugs, were seen as a barrier. Within Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Motivation there were four supports which assisted the students in the vignettes in meeting various levels of need. There was also an identified barrier that did not meet one student's basic physiological need. Students identified the basic need of food as both a support and barrier. Food was identified six times as a support, as it provided the energy needed for these students to concentrate on their studies and to make it through the day. Food was also identified as a barrier by one student because he thought it tasted lousy and would sometimes go without eating. The need of belonging was identified as a support in three categories: physical education, rewards and incentives, and the school campus. The highest level within Maslow's theory is that of self-esteem. This need was met in three areas of support: physical education, computer lab, and rewards and incentives.

The vignettes suggest that all three theoretical frameworks can assist educators in understanding the nature of supports and barriers, as identified by the continuation high school students in this study.

*Findings in Terms of Social Capital/Resiliency/Human Motivation Frameworks*

Elements of social capital, resiliency theory and human motivation theory were all represented in the student-identified supports. Given the devastating and lifelong detrimental effects of not earning a high school diploma, much less earning a college degree, increasing supports and reducing barriers in the continuation high school setting are critical educational leadership responsibilities. Having a clear understanding of the student perception of supports and barriers to earning a high school diploma can assist in initiating and sustaining environments that are conducive to student success.

To that end, the sources of support discovered in this study have been analyzed through the primary theoretical framework of this study, social capital, and the two companion frameworks, resiliency theory and Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation. See Table 1.

The 17 categories of supports have been further distilled into four overarching themes: *availability*, *personalization*, *information sharing*, and *success orientation*. These themes may be of assistance to administrators at the site and district level who want to increase the sources of social capital, resiliency, and motivation in continuation high school settings. The themes can be used to analyze (a) the level of support as evidenced by the availability of adults; (b) the degree of individual, personalized attention; (c) the mechanisms for information sharing so that students can

take ownership of their own specific progress; and (d) the markers of a success orientation in the culture of the school.

Availability leads to relationships between students and caring, knowledgeable adults. This is the signature element of Coleman's social capital theory as applied to schools. From these relationships the students in this study received information, support, tutoring, and mentoring. Such relationships serve as a resource to the person involved, in this case, the students who were included in the present study (Coleman, 1988). Coleman maintained that relationship benefits include higher expectations, obligations of trust and reciprocity, and establishment of norms and values. These outcomes, in turn, build resiliency and increased motivation.

Personalization can bring about a positive school culture that stresses the benefits of significant, positive relationships between teachers and students. According to Putnam (2000), in many communities traditional social bonds are weakening, and today's youth need positive adult role models to encourage success. Personalization can provide students the sense that they are valued and cared for, and reinforcing the message that whether they succeed or fail actually matters to someone. A goal of continuation high schools must be to help every student to become involved in structured activities that strengthens positive relationships with peers and adults and encourages the student's sense of confidence and belonging in school. Personal relationships within the school setting can provide the guidance, advice, and mentoring that many students may not be receiving in the home.

Information sharing allows the adults on a continuation high school campus to provide students the information they need to be successful. Students in this study

were most interested in what they needed to do in order to graduate. Many of them spoke about the teachers and counselor keeping them informed of how many credits they had and still needed to graduate. According to Maslow's theory (Nock, 2000), information sharing can motivate students to satisfy levels of self-esteem and confidence. As information is shared, students and adults can set short-term goals. As each goal is met, student confidence increases and self-esteem is heightened.

Success orientation is based on the premise that we must establish a culture that is based on "failure is not an option." Continuation school environments need to be places where students have opportunities to experience success prior to failure. School decisions must be made in the best interest of the students they serve. If continuation schools want students to be committed to success, then such a commitment must then permeate that school culture. Continuation school cultures that are committed to student successes will use all resources available to make student success a reality.

In summary, it is possible that continuation high school settings with high social capital, as expressed in the supports identified by the students in this study, can stimulate and sustain student progress toward graduation.

Two variables consistently reported by continuation high school students that they reported led to academic achievement and success, were the motivational effect of incentives/rewards and visual representations of their success. These were not factors that comprehensive high school students needed or wanted. This difference might be plausibly explained by examining the factors through the lens of resiliency theory. As previously noted, the underlying principle of resiliency theory is to

encourage use of protective processes in coping with adversities in life, thus finding ways to adapt and overcome the attending risks. In adapting and coping, continuation students who are credit deficient and who may be functioning in a tight timeframe to graduate may respond favorably to frequent and concrete motivational cues, while their comprehensive high school counterparts see little benefit in them as they are on track for graduation.

From a resiliency and motivation theory perspective, the connection between friends as a barrier and the notion of personal choice is worth examining. Most of the barriers that students associated with the category of friends (e.g., affiliation in gangs or with gangs, drinking or smoking, cutting school), were identified by both comprehensive high school and continuation high school students as personal choices that students made themselves. The recognition that these affiliations are within the power of the student is consistent with resiliency and motivation theory. These affiliations are connected to resiliency theory because the student can access protective factors through talking to a trusted adult before making a bad decision. Using the lens of motivation theory, students' behaviors and responses suggest the belief they have control over how and to whom they will "belong."

#### *Document Review*

In reviewing NCCHS documents such as staff meeting agendas, outlines of intervention groups provided by the counseling department, the school plan, and the course outline for the 4-week orientation class that all incoming students are mandated to attend, the researcher found evidence that social capital exists on the continuation high school campus. In the school plan there were financial resources allocated to

purchase a computer software program, PLATO, which allows students to earn course credit outside of the school day. Also in the school plan monies were allocated to pay teachers stipends to provide tutoring sessions to students before and/or afterschool.

The school counselor coordinated and provide a variety of counseling services such as academic counseling, career counseling, and personal and social counseling. School partnerships have also been established with many local organizations to provide students additional services. An “Unplugged” program is provided by the North County Family Counseling Specialists. This is a group counseling session that focuses on anger management and impulse control. This program is offered one period per week for eight weeks. In addition, the NCCHS counselor wrote and was awarded the TAT: Tackling Alcohol Together grant. The grant money is used to provide three different interventions for NCCHS students. The first intervention, Reconnecting Youth, is a class that all students take that is aimed at reducing or eliminating alcohol use, better control of moods and emotions, and improving academic success. The second intervention, Toward No Drug Abuse (TND), provides 12 one-hour group sessions with students to address the entire drug and alcohol prevention spectrum. The third intervention, Insight Group, provides counseling for students who are struggling with alcohol, drug, and tobacco addictions. A partnership has also been formed, School Community Policing Partnership Program, with the city in which NCCHS is located. This partnership provides staff in-services and parent workshops in the area of gang awareness. The partnership also provides school and classroom presentations on gang violence, drug and alcohol use, and school to career job skills training.

Examples of recent reform efforts that apply to building a culture with meaningful social capital available to the students are as follows: putting in place a 4-week orientation that addresses the norms of being a student on a continuation high school campus, targeted academic interventions and tutoring, and change from “packet learning” to direct instruction.

### *Chapter Summary*

The purpose of this chapter has been to present and analyze the data collected to answer the study’s research questions posed in the first chapter of the present investigative research. Below are the summaries of findings:

1. The data gathered from continuation high school students through the photo activity revealed 17 categories of supports. The categories are administration, caring relationships, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, the physical campus, and visual representations.
2. The data gathered from continuation high school students through the photo activity revealed 15 categories of barriers. The categories are administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus.
3. The data gathered from comprehensive high school students through the photo response activity revealed similarities and differences in perception of supports and barriers from those of the continuation high school students. The 10 categories of supports about which they concurred were caring relationships,

counselor, family, friends, teachers, computer lab, electives, nutrition, personal choices, and the campus. The seven categories of supports about which they did not concur were administration, friends, credits to graduate, physical education, rewards/incentives, time, and visual representations.

4. The 17 categories of supports presented an opportunity for further refinement into four overarching themes: *availability, personalization, information sharing, and success orientation*.

5. Of the 17 categories used to organize the photos that students said represented supports to school achievement, 15 of them also appeared after the analysis of photos depicting barriers. The barrier categories are administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus. Counselor and visual representations, previously identified in the support discussion, did not appear as barrier categories.

6. The comprehensive high school inquiry group determined that 10 of the support categories from the continuation high school student data reflected their school experience. Those categories were caring relationships, counselor, family, friends, teachers, computer lab, electives, nutrition, personal choices, and the campus.

7. The comprehensive high school inquiry group determined that seven of the support categories from the continuation high school student data were not reflective of their school experience. Those categories were administration, friends,



credits to graduate, physical education, rewards/incentives, time, and visual representations.

8. Nine of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in the concept of social capital. They are administration, caring relationships, counsellor, credits to graduate information, family, friends, office staff, teachers, and time.

9. Six of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation. They are computer lab electives, nutrition, physical education, rewards/incentives, and the physical campus.

10. Two of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in resiliency theory. They are visual representations and personal choices.

Chapter 5 concludes this study by offering conclusions that may be of assistance to educational leaders interested in building continuation high school cultures which have high social capital in order to promote student success.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

### *Introduction*

As noted by Putnam (2001), there are many different types of social capital currently in existence. Some are highly formal (e.g., labor unions, the Parent Teachers' Association [PTA]), and some are highly informal, such as a group of students who meet at a neighbor's house to discuss homework assignments and compare notes. Of these, some are interconnected multiple forms of social capital, while others are very loose, almost invisible forms. But they all have one important characteristic in common, namely, "[They] constitute networks in which there can easily develop reciprocity and in which there can be gains . . . [however,] not all social capital has good consequences for everyone" (Putnam, 2001, p. 2).

Coleman (1988) recognized two distinct components of social capital: (a) a relational construct and (b) a source of providing additional resources to others through relationships with individuals. In Coleman's work, social capital is specifically defined by its function and refers to an asset that a person or persons can use as a resource. Social capital is any kind of social relationship that is a resource to a person. In addition, Coleman highlighted various benefits of social capital, including expectations and obligations of trust and reciprocity and the establishment of norms and values in relationships.

This study was undertaken in order to understand what continuation high school students perceive as supports and barriers to their success. The theoretical framework of social capital was used to analyze the data. Two companion theories, resiliency and human motivation, added two additional lenses to the analysis. The

conclusions and recommendations of this study provide insight to policy makers, such as school boards, policy implementers, and school site and district level administrators, about how to initiate and sustain continuation high school cultures that increase the probability that students will be successful. The findings imply that increasing the probability of student success occurs by increasing supports and reducing barriers through the presence of social capital and the skillful application of resiliency theory and human motivation theory. Through use of student voice in the data gathering, the supports and barriers are rooted in the experience of continuation high school students and have been compared and contrasted to the experiences of their comprehensive high school peers.

The purpose of this chapter is to bring together the separate chapters of the research into a unified whole. To achieve this objective, an initial subsection below summarizes the more important aspects and phases of the investigation. The next subsection presents conclusions that resulted from the data analysis and the review of the related literature. In the final section, recommendations are provided. These pertain to school management, school direction, and future research investigation direction.

### *Summary of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze patterns in the perception of social capital, as manifested in identified supports and barriers among continuation high school students. To achieve this purpose, two important research questions were explored: First, what do continuation high school students perceive as existing supports and barriers to successful academic attainment and high school

completion? Second, to what degree do the perceptions of continuation high school students' peers in a comprehensive high school setting agree or differ? These research questions were addressed through student-generated photographic representations of social supports and barriers which represent the presence or absence of social capital.

A case study approach was utilized to examine development, characteristics, and features of social capital as perceived by students in a North County Continuation High School (NCCHS). In addition to analyzing the data gathered through the photo activity, interviews were conducted with students attending NCCHS. Data were also collected through transcripts and recording of the focus group, referred to as a student inquiry group. The group consisted of similar peers attending a comprehensive high school within the same school district. As previously noted, focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic (Patton, 1990). In summary, 18 students from NCCHS and 5 students from ESCHS participated in the study. NCCHS students participated in a photographic activity and individual interviews. Students from ESCHS participated in the student inquiry group.

Data were gathered through support and barrier photography activity, interviews, student inquiry group discussions, and document review. All interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed to determine patterns and themes that illuminated the presence or absence of supports and barriers to student success. Points of convergence and divergence were identified through the use of triangulation among various data pools and among participant groups.

### *Summary of Findings*

Summaries from the data analysis and the literature review are stated below.

#### *Support*

1. The data gathered from continuation high school students through the photo activity revealed 17 categories of supports. The categories are administration, caring relationships, computer lab, counselor, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, the physical campus, and visual representations.
2. The 17 categories of supports presented an opportunity for further refinement into four overarching themes: *availability*, *personalization*, *information sharing*, and *success orientation*.
3. Nine of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in the concept of social capital. They are administration, caring relationships, counsellor, credits to graduate information, family, friends, office staff, teachers, and time.
4. Six of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in the concept of Maslow's hierarchy of human motivation. They are computer lab electives, nutrition, physical education, rewards/incentives, and the physical campus.
5. Two of the continuation high school students' supports are rooted in resiliency theory. They are visual representations and personal choices.
6. The data gathered from comprehensive high school students through the photo response activity revealed similarities in perception of supports from those of the continuation high school students. The 10 categories of supports about which

they concurred were caring relationships, counselor, family, friends, teachers, computer lab, electives, nutrition, personal choices, and the campus.

### *Barriers*

1. The continuation high school students identified 15 categories as barriers. The barrier categories were administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus.

2. The comprehensive high school inquiry group determined that seven of the support categories from the continuation high school student data were not reflective of their school experience. Those categories were administration, friends, credits to graduate, physical education, rewards/incentives, time, and visual representations.

### *Supports and Barriers*

Of the 17 categories used to organize the photos that continuation high school students said represented supports to school achievement, 15 of them also appeared after the analysis of photos depicting barriers. The categories that were seen as both a support and barrier were administration, caring relationships, computer lab, credits to graduate information, electives, family, friends, nutrition, office staff, personal choices, physical education, rewards/incentives, teachers, time, and the physical campus. Counselor and visual representations, previously identified in the support discussion, did not appear as barrier categories.

### *Recommendations*

The findings of this research study, lead to eight specific recommendations. These are presented in separate sections below.

#### *Recommendation 1: Relationships*

Relationships matter--continuation high school administrators, teachers, and staff need to be intentional in their efforts to connect students to school. While reform efforts have been initiated by the current principal and teachers of the continuation high school, more effort needs to be exerted to establish and sustain a high social capital environment. A well-planned professional development effort to address issues of *availability, personalization, information sharing, and success orientation* may increase the supports and reduce the barriers identified by the students.

#### *Recommendation 2: Advisory Groups*

Advisory--In terms of personalization, administrators at continuation high schools may consider establishing advisory groups, which are given intentional time built into the master schedule during which an adult advisor meets with a small group of students. The purpose of the advisory group is to build supportive relationships between adults and students, improve students' social and emotional skills, and to increase academic performance. Advisory groups can be structured into the master schedule as a period per day or as a block of time weekly or biweekly. The advisor could work with the same group of students throughout their continuation school career. Schools would need to establish a system for communicating information about each student in the advisory group regarding attendance, grades, discipline, sports events, and so forth. By establishing an advisory group, continuation high

schools might ensure that every student has a sense of personalization so each student is known well by at least one adult in the building, an adult whom the student can use as a resource.

*Recommendation 3: Success Orientation*

Failure is not an option--In terms of success orientation, continuation schools need to establish a culture that is based on the motto “failure is not an option.” Student data indicated that the encouragement and support provided to them by adults on campus gave them a sense that they could be successful in school. Continuation schools need to establish an environment where students have opportunities to experience success prior to failure. One of the simplest signs of failure is an “F” on an assignment or a grading period. Continuation schools may want to institute new grading criteria whereby students receive an “I” incomplete rather than an “F” while requiring them to show proficiency via an alternative course. A major paradigm shift would need to happen, but a K-12 system that was ungraded and credit was given by demonstrating proficiency with standards along a continuum would motivate students to progress. Another strategy to create a “failure is not an option” culture is to closely monitor each student who has less than a proficient score on any given assignment/quiz/test. These students would be required to immediately attend support sessions during a shortened lunch period or after school to learn the information in which they are not proficient. Immediate support provides students another opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency, which provides students the motivation to stay engaged.



*Recommendation 4: Culture of Success*

Culture of Success—Continuation schools should create a culture of success based on intentional conversations between adults and students. This culture of success can be established through specific conversations that focus on an area of student weakness (e.g., attendance, credits, grades, behavior) with the intent of providing students with information, mentoring, tips for success, and immediate feedback when success is accomplished. This culture can include rewards and incentive programs which would be meaningful to the student population.

*Recommendation 5: Theory Application*

Apply the principles in the social capital theory, resiliency theory, and human motivation theory. The theories complement and magnify each other, resonate with the student identified supports, and in the hands of informed and committed professionals, can contribute to a culture of success where failure is not an option. Schools that are intentional in creating environments with high levels of social capital by purposefully building strong relationships with a caring adult helps students to build their confidence and self-esteem. Confidence and self-esteem, according to Maslow, are the highest levels of motivation and are also the protective factors in students which enable them to navigate their way through adolescence.

*Recommendation 6: Future Research Direction*

To expand the understanding of student supports and barriers to success and the role of social capital in the success of students, future research should broaden the sample size and increase the diversity of the sample group and number of schools participating in the study. A research study of significantly more students in different

grades who are enrolled in both comprehensive and continuation high schools would yield greater insight. Such a study would also provide additional and substantial support to the growing body of empirical evidence exploring the presence and impact social capital from multiple perspectives, including students, administrators, teachers, superintendents, and school board members.

It is also important to mention a consideration for future research direction that stemmed from a curious circumstance that needs attention. In reviewing demographics of the students participating in the study, I noticed that two of the students from the comprehensive high school and two of the students from the continuation high school resided in the same apartment complex which is situated in a part of the community with low SES levels. This caused me to pause and consider the issue of poverty as a factor in the lives of continuation high school students.

There are four students who, based on an educated hunch based on housing factors, come from the same SES background, yet two are successfully pursuing their diploma in a comprehensive high school setting and two are in the continuation high school setting. It raises the questions, what is the difference in the conditions outside of school that impact these students? If SES is such a powerful determiner of academic success, what has allowed the two students to be successful in the traditional school setting? Do parental perceptions of their personal socioeconomic status and future prospects have an influence on the student which influences motivation toward successful academic achievement?

The issue of SES impact on school success is situated in many other family factors. It would be beneficial if students from the same SES strata who are taking

different paths could be studied over time to better understand these factors and use what we know about social capital, motivation, and resiliency to counteract them.

*Recommendation 7: Incorporation of Photographic Activity*

I recommend that future research regarding at-risk adolescents incorporate a photographic activity. Photos taken by students reflect their realities and can act as a catalyst to begin conversations that are more authentic to the student and, therefore, for the researcher.

*Conclusion*

The ethical imperative of making continuation high schools the place of maximum opportunity, rather than the place of last resort, rests with the educational professionals responsible for student success. The application of social capital, resiliency, and motivation theories, combined with student voice, produces a powerful boost to a specialized educational endeavour. The future can, indeed, be bright for a population of students who could otherwise end up bowling alone. The students have told us how we can bowl together. Failure is, indeed, not an option.

## Appendix A: NCCHS Students: Factors Supporting Success

1. Administration
  - a. Try to straighten us out
  - b. Friendly
  - c. Visible
  - d. Caring
  - e. Care about us graduating
  - f. Want us to be successful
  - g. Really strict, but most of us need that
2. Caring relationships (all information included in the teacher category)
  - a. Always there for us
  - b. Cares about everybody
  - c. Makes me feel like I'm somebody special
  - d. Encouraging
  - e. Want to see us graduate
  - f. Believe in me
  - g. Care enough to make sure we have the credits to graduate
  - h. Gives me good advice
  - i. Cares about me being successful
  - j. Taught me how to be disciplined
  - k. The way he teaches, he really tries to bring things to life
  - l. Takes the time to check in with me to make sure I am doing well in all of my classes

3. Computer lab

- a. Gives me a lot more information than the books that we have in class
- b. I can go there and find the information that I need for class projects
- c. It's better than the library, I can find the information faster than if I went to the library
- d. It helps me in my other classes and I get 5 credits
- e. If I don't know something, or if it's not in a book, I just go onto the computer
- f. I think faster on the computer than if I were writing by hand.

4. Counselor

- a. Meets with me and tells me how many credits I need to graduate and has helped me create a plan to graduate on time
- b. Gave me some ideas on how to be successful in a class where I didn't get along with the teacher
- c. If you're in trouble or have a problem, you go there to talk to the counselor
- d. I check with the counselor to find out how I am doing in school

5. Credits to graduate

- a. 41 references in the interviews about credits to graduate
- b. Referenced in not being late to school, caring conversations with teachers, administration, counselor, office staff, friends, time, electives, and visual representation of students ready to graduate

6. Electives

- a. Yoga—it relaxes me and helps me get rid of the stress of the day
- b. Technology lab—it helps me learn things that I will need to be able to do in my everyday life (technology, auto shop)
- c. Art class—I can use my artistic freedom
- d. Floriculture—it was something new and something fun

7. Family

- a. Want them to be proud of me
- b. Knowing that they are proud of me and happy for me makes me want to be more successful
- c. My family wants me to do well
- d. They think I deserve to be happy
- e. I want to be a good example for them
- f. The love of my family makes me want to be successful
- g. They want me to graduate so I can be successful in life

8. Friends

- a. The kids here are really nice
- b. My friends and I are all in the same boat; we encourage one another to do well in school
- c. The love of my friends helps me to be successful
- d. We try to motivate one another
- e. Having time to hang out with them helps to relieve some of the stress of the day and allows me to go back to class not all stressed out

- f. They care about me getting enough credits to graduate
- g. We try to keep each other pumped up
- h. We push each other to get our credits to graduate
- i. We all have the same goal to get out of here with a diploma

9. Nutrition

- a. We eat so we can get our brain going
- b. I do a lot better if I'm not hungry
- c. It gets my body and mind going
- d. It allows me to have a healthy body and a healthy mind
- e. It gives me the energy to be able to study and to do my work
- f. When you're not hungry, it helps you to stay focused and do better in class
- g. I know I will do better if I eat

10. Office staff

- a. Always pushing us to not be late....it has changed my attitude and I started to be to school on time
- b. They want us to be successful
- c. They all care about us and want us to stay out of trouble, get our work done and have enough credits to graduate on time

11. Personal choices

- a. The school doesn't want me to drink or smoke, but I do both sometimes. So it's not the school, but it is me that sometimes gets in my own way

- b. I know I shouldn't hang out with them, but sometimes I do, and they keep me from being successful
- c. Getting myself disciplined has really helped me to be successful
- d. Sometimes I watch T.V. so much in the morning I end up missing school
- e. I do listen, but probably not enough

#### 12. Physical education

- a. It keeps me healthy by exercising
- b. I need credits to graduate and sports is a fun way to get them
- c. I can get credits by joining an intramural sport
- d. It's a time to have fun with my friends
- e. I do better in school because I exercise, and I can concentrate better
- f. By doing after school sports, it helps us stay off the streets; instead of going home and getting in trouble, I stay here and play on the school's sport teams

#### 13. Rewards/incentives

- a. I hope one day that I can qualify to go on a field trip; I really want to go on one
- b. I'm trying harder in school to get good grades, be on time, and come to school each day; it's the kids who do these things that get to go on the field trips
- c. I was able to go on the O'Riely's farm field trip because I worked really hard to get good grades, and I really want to go on the next one



- d. I try to come to school every day so I have a chance to be in the raffle for prizes and to qualify to go on the field trips; I work really hard at it
- e. We have raffles for attendance, so I try to come to school each day so I can win something
- f. The field trips motivate me; I want to get good grades so I can go on the field trips
- g. I work really hard in class because I want good grades so I can graduate, get the credits I need, and go on the field trips
- h. You say to yourself, I want to go on that trip; so it gives you motivation to get the work done and to get your credits
- i. I want my picture on that poster and to be recognized for getting 36 credits

#### 14. Teachers

- a. 69 references to teachers
- b. She cares about everyone and makes me feel like I'm somebody special
- c. She talks to me about things I need to do to graduate
- d. She really cares and wants me to be successful
- e. They want me to be successful
- f. They're the biggest support all the students at Twin Oaks has
- g. I get personal help from the teachers
- h. They give me advice on what I need to do to graduate
- i. The teachers have been really helpful
- j. They care enough to make sure I have all my credits to graduate

- k. Tells us to do our best and how to pass our classes
- l. He gives me good advice and really cares about me being successful
- m. She took her own time to help me understand things after school
- n. She meets with me on her own time and talks to me about my grades and tells me what I need to get my credits
- o. He is someone who I listen to; he listens to me and he cares
- p. He is someone I don't ignore
- q. This teacher would help me before school or after school or anytime I could get to school so he could tutor me
- r. She really took an interest and was always asking if I needed extra help
- s. I meet with her during my break time, and I really began to understand the material
- t. She allowed me to start believing in myself, and it has built up my confidence that I can do well in school
- u. He takes his time and he cares; he cares that we learn
- v. She's always there to let me know if I need to step it up
- w. She really cares and takes the time to check in on me
- x. She is always pushing me so I don't slack off
- y. They're not like the teachers at the other high schools who don't care
- z. The teachers here are great about telling us about all of our options

#### 15. Time

- a. We get out of school earlier than the other high schools so I have time to get my homework done and still have time to go to work

- b. If you're late, you go to lockout; in lockout, you can't go to class and you can't get your credits to graduate (lockout referred to 9 times as a reason for not getting your credits, but not mentioned as an obstacle, but instead as a support to be to school on time)
- c. I have to use my time wisely so I can earn enough credits to graduate on time
- d. Everyone cares about us being here on time so we can get to class, do our work, and be successful

16. NCCHS campus

- a. Size of campus referenced 6 times
- b. Smaller campus, teachers know you better, students know teachers better, more individualized attention
- c. When students spoke of the school, they always referred to the size of the school and the caring relationships of teachers and staff, and the support of teachers and staff

17. Visual representations

- a. Students referred to visuals 19 times
- b. This picture in the principal's window gives me hope (actually a piece of wood that states a student's goal from "Orientation")
- c. Spoke of the graduation poster that has pictures of all the students who have either graduated early that year or are on track to graduate at the end of the year

- d. This school has photos of kids all over the place; photos of kids who are graduating, photos of kids who have gone on the fields trips, and photos of students who have won the raffles; I got really excited when I was one of the people in the photos that are displayed in the office
- e. It motivated me to get my credits; I wanted my picture on the top of this poster
- f. 10 students took pictures of different posters in their classrooms: smoking, county jail, Bob Marley, responsibility, freedom, and a site-made poster of a pie chart showing grades, credits, and attendance gets you to graduation

## Appendix B: NCCHS Students: Barriers to Success

### 1. Administration

- a. The assistant principal is always coming down on us
- b. He's so strict, we have no choices

### 2. Caring relationships

- a. Referenced twice as a barrier
- b. I know they care, but they get in the way. They are always out at lunch and break and I can't even hold my girls hand.
- c. He doesn't care, he just lets us do whatever we want

### 3. Computer lab

- a. There aren't enough computers at this school. At my old school, there were computers in the classroom and in the computer lab
- b. The computers are always broken or down when I go into the lab

### 4. Credits to graduate

- a. I'll never get the credits I need to graduate
- b. It's all about the credits. I don't get enough each semester to go on the field trip

### 5. Electives

- a. We only have shop and art. It's not enough.
- b. My old school had so many choices. This school is so small we don't get much to choose from.

### 6. Family

- a. My dad's in jail so I have to go to work to help out my mom.

b. My brother was killed last year. He was in a gang

7. Friends

a. It's hard for me to say no. it's easy for me to get in trouble

b. She's not good for me. She wants me to do things, and I always say yes.

It's usually something I shouldn't be doing

c. Sometimes there is a lot of negativity.

d. My friends are always fooling around at lunch

e. They ditch school, and they want you to ditch school with them.

8. Nutrition

a. The food here sucks. We have chicken sandwiches and burritos everyday

b. The vending machines have better food than what they give us to eat

here

c. We need a better selection of food for lunch

9. Office staff

a. She's always on us to be here on time, I can't stand her

b. They're not very friendly

c. They are always trying to bust us for being late

10. Personal choices

a. I know I shouldn't drink and smoke, but sometimes I do

b. I stay out way too late

c. I party and can't get my work done

d. Well I get in trouble when I hang out with these guys

e. So it's not the school but it's me that sometimes gets in my own way

f. It's easy for me to get in trouble

#### 11. Physical education

a. We don't get much PE, and we only have one or two sports teams. I think

I would like school more if we had more sports . . . we have a crappy field too

b. I've only taken PE once. I really think that we should have PE every day so we can go out and exercise and get rid of all of our stress

#### 12. Rewards/incentives

a. Referenced only once as a barrier

b. There's nothing to work towards...you know like a prize

#### 13. Teachers

a. I'm not successful in her class because she is mean to me and all other students

b. He's an obstacle; he's boring, doesn't know how to teach, and talks about

random things that have nothing to do with what we're learning

c. She's an obstacle . . . maybe it is because she only knows one way to do the problem . . .she should probably figure out another way to teach us

d. This teacher is an ass. He's mean, he doesn't care, he doesn't like me; he definitely has not helped me to be successful

e. He didn't care if I got good grades and didn't care if I got my credits

#### 14. Time

- a. School should start later; I'm always late to the bus
- b. There never seems to be enough time after work to get it all done
- c. I'm always tardy and have to go to lock out

15. NCCHS campus

- a. The school is too small
- b. The toilet is always full of crap
- c. It's so far away from where I live



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