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College-Going Cultures in Continuation High Schools: An Exploration of Principal Beliefs and Practices

Author
Farris, Dylan

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College-Going Cultures in Continuation High Schools:

An Exploration of Principal Beliefs and Practices

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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Education

by

Dylan Verdo Farris

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSSERTATION

College-Going Cultures in Continuation High Schools:

An Exploration of Principal Beliefs and Practices

by

Dylan Verdo Farris

Doctorate of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair

Professor Richard Wagoner, Co-Chair

More than 18% of students drop out of high school in California each year, and even more students will never earn a college degree. Continuation high schools operate as last chance alternative schools to help underperforming students earn a high school diploma. This paper examines the perceptions and practices of seven continuation high school principals relating to the preparation of continuation school students for post-secondary education. An inductive qualitative approach was used to gain the perspectives of principals from continuation schools in Los Angeles County.

Principals of continuation schools have an extraordinary challenge in readying students for college, as students arrive to continuation schools substantially behind in school and have

little time to catch up. Continuation school students are more likely than their traditional high school counterparts to experience instability in the home, foster care, heavy use of alcohol or drugs, and/or engage in violent behaviors or be the victims of violent behaviors. Principals recognize that for many the challenges are insurmountable in the little time they have in the continuation school setting. Still, there are principals who express strong beliefs in the their ability to adequately prepare those students for the transition to college, and the future of their students relies on the ability of school leaders to transform their organizations into college preparatory institutions.

School leaders who have experienced such adversity in their own lives express stronger belief in their students to overcome challenges and successfully transition to post-secondary education. Continuation schools that exemplify college-going culture are not typical; however, where principals expressed strong beliefs in student ability to succeed in college, more attributes of college-going culture are evident including college talk with students, clear expectations for students for post-secondary education, information and resources available to students and parents, comprehensive counseling, high levels of faculty involvement, college partnerships with the local community college, articulation with the comprehensive high schools, curriculum required for students to access college, college readiness testing, and high levels of family involvement. This study supports the thesis that principals play a powerful role in shaping the culture and outcomes of their schools and that they can influence student beliefs and outcomes given their preexisting experiences.

The dissertation of Dylan Verdo Farris is approved.

Robert Cooper

Kevin Eagan

Jaana Juvonen

Eugene Tucker, Committee Co-Chair

Richard Wagoner, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2014

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DYLAN VERDO FARRIS

EDUCATION

Master of Education, Education Leadership and Policy Studies, Michael D. Eisner College of Education, California State University, Northridge, Ca. June, 2006.

Single Subject Teaching Credential, Social Studies, Secondary Education. Michael D. Eisner College of Education, California State University, Northridge, Ca. June, 2004

Bachelor of Arts, History, University of California, Los Angeles, Ca. August, 2001.

EDUCATION LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

2011-2014	Principal – Culver City High School, Culver City, Ca.
2008-2011	Summer School Principal – Culver City High School, Culver City, Ca.
2007-2011	Assistant Principal – Culver City High School, Culver City, Ca.
2005-2007	AVID Coordinator – Culver City High School, Culver City, Ca.
2004-2007	Department Chairperson, Social Studies – Culver City High School, Culver City, Ca.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2001-2007	Culver City High School: Social Studies / AVID Teacher, grades 9-12.

Professional Affiliations

Association of California School Administrators, Region 14, 2010-present.

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2012-present.

Computer Using Educators, 2014-present.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Today's public education system presumes a college degree is the prerequisite for success, and as such, preparation for post-secondary education is a driving mission of high schools in America. Educational attainment has implications for job security and earning potential, health and life expectancy, crime rates, and for the economic development of the nation. A person with a Bachelor's degree can expect to earn 84% more than a person with only a high school diploma (Carnevale, Rose, & Cheah, 2011). College graduates can expect to live longer, too; while life-expectancy varies across gender, ethnic, and age groups, highly educated people can expect to live an average of 7 years longer than those less educated (Meara, Richards, & Cutler, 2008). During the course of those lives, they are far less likely to engage in criminal activity. Even high school completion significantly reduces participation in violent, property, and drug related crime (Lochner & Moretti, 2001). Education impacts not only the quality and longevity of life it also has implications for the economy prosperity of the nation. An educated populace is necessary for the nation to remain competitive in the global economy and to progress economically, culturally, and scientifically, and recent comparative data raises alarms about low rates of college completion.

In 2008, the United States ranked 21st out of 27 advanced economies in high school completion rates, and 11th in the world in college completion rates. In 2008, the College Board announced an initiative to raise college completion rates to 55% by 2015 in their report, *Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future* (College Board, 2008). The report outlines recommendations for school reforms from pre-kindergarten through college. High school leaders are charged with providing a program that prepares students academically for college and guides them through the admissions process. The report omits any recommendations for helping our most at-risk students who fall behind in high school to return to a college track. Continuation

schools rigorously strive to serve as alternative high schools that exist to rescue students from dropping out of high school, but little is expected from those schools for transitioning students to college.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to assess the experience of continuation school principals, their perceptions and expectations for continuation school students to succeed in college, how they prepare students academically for college, and how they provide guidance for students to prepare them for post-secondary education by establishing a college-going culture at the school. This study explores the experiences and beliefs of continuation school principals and examines their practices relating to promoting college-going culture. The terms college and college-going culture are used actively throughout this paper. While these terms are often use to specifically describe readiness for four-year colleges or universities, in this case the terms are used to describe post-secondary education including four-year schools, trade schools, and most aptly for community colleges.

Statement of the Problem

In the United States, 1.2 million students drop out of school each year (Almeida, Cervantes, Le, & Steinberg, 2010). In California the dropout rate in 2011 was 18.2% as reported by the California Department of Education (CDE, 2011a). Students often drop out with less than 2 years remaining to complete high school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). In the report, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (Bridgeland et al., 2006), students reported a myriad of reasons for failing to complete high school; credit deficiency, excessive absenteeism, parenthood, need to work and earn an income, and the need to care for a family member were the reasons most cited for dropping out of school. For credit-deficient students at risk for dropping out of high school, continuation schools act as the primary resource for

intervention. California state law requires all schools enrolling over 100 students in the 12th grade to provide a means of alternative education for students at-risk for not completing high school. The California Education Code determines that continuation programs must provide services such as independent study, career preparation, career counseling, and job placement services to support students in completing high school. These schools exist as the primary means for preventing students from dropping out of high school, but there is no research that examines the effectiveness of such schools in preparing students for post-secondary education.

Five hundred twenty-five continuation high schools in California serve as many as 119,000 students enrolling in continuation schools each year (EdSource, 2008). Many of those students face challenges in their lives that puts them at risk for dropping out of school. The California Healthy Kids Survey in 2006 revealed that 17% of students in continuation schools change residence two or more times in the given year (as cited in Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Students are three times more likely to be in foster care than students in comprehensive high schools. The heavy use of alcohol and drugs is more prevalent among continuation high school students. They are also two to three times more likely to engage in violent behaviors or be victims of violence. Students that enter continuation high schools are less likely to finish high school and enter higher education than students in comprehensive high schools. As such, continuation schools serve students who are most at-risk for not completing high school and even greater likelihood that they will not complete a college program of study. Though it is clear that a college education is the recommended standard for education attainment, California continuation schools appear to lack the vision or means to prepare and transition students to college.

Problem in the Local Context

College readiness is not a mission for continuation high schools. A college education in California offers increased options for employment, greater earning potential, and lower rates of

unemployment. Students who drop out of high school experience higher rates of unemployment, single parenthood, and incarceration. The goals of continuation schools vary depending on the school and the administration, but dropout prevention is the primary mission of continuation schools in California. Continuation schools work to develop social and interpersonal skills, socio-emotional support, fill gaps in education, post high school career planning and preparation, and post-secondary education preparation (Perez & Johnson, 2008). The primary purpose of continuation schools is to prevent students from dropping out of school and provide an opportunity for students to earn a high school diploma, though the graduation rates of continuation school students remain low. Of the students that graduate from continuation schools, there is little available data concerning college attendance, persistence, or completion of college or career preparation programs.

Continuation school curriculum is designed to promote credit remediation and acceleration. Administrators and faculty at comprehensive high schools perceive that the curricular demands of a continuation schools are inadequate to prepare students for college (Perez & Johnson, 2008). The majority of students who attend continuation schools do so as a result of credit deficiency, and often gaps exist in their learning and academic skills. For students who attempt to pursue a post-secondary school experience after attending a continuation school, many will be dissuaded by poor performance on initial placement exams. The need to complete remedial coursework is a deterrent to college persistence.

Continuation school leaders aren't expected to prepare students for college. Yet, research about increasing graduation rates, student achievement, and college-going rates, particularly in urban settings, recommends the establishment of a college-going culture. School leaders should assume that all students from historically underserved groups possess the aptitude to succeed in college and provide the necessary guidance to assist students and families in navigating the

college system. Little research exists about the efforts of continuation schools to reengage students in an academically rigorous education and to inspire students to persist in education beyond high school. Principals and administrators of continuation schools can provide insights into the challenges of schools and students, strengths and weaknesses of the schools and programs, and the efforts and successes of continuation schools to engage and prepare students for a successful college experience. The study aimed to explore the perceptions and attitudes of continuation school leaders around their beliefs about student aptitudes for success in college and their efforts to motivate and prepare students to pursue a college education.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore and answer the following questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?
2. What guidance support exists in continuation schools to help students prepare for a college experience?
3. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?
4. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals perceive they foster a college-going culture in their schools?

Research Sites

The study focused on continuation schools in Los Angeles County. Continuation schools serve students in school districts of various sizes and demographics. The schools range in size from 50 to 200 students. Often, schools occupy part of the physical space on a comprehensive high school campus on the same property, while others occupy their own building away from the

comprehensive school campus. Graduation rates vary, but continuation schools generally graduate students at rates lower than comprehensive high school.

Research Design

This qualitative study examines experiences, practices, beliefs, ideals, and expectations that continuation school principals have for students beyond high school. I examined the practices of principals for providing guidance and academic preparation to ready students for post-secondary education. I collected data through surveys with open-ended questions, interviews, and field notes/observations. Electronic surveys were disseminated to 85 continuation school principals in Los Angeles County. The survey is design facilitated data collection around demographics, student performance, descriptive school characteristics, and information about principal practices, beliefs, ideals, and expectations for students. Continuation school principals who responded to the survey and who indicated strong beliefs and practices toward readying students for post-secondary education where invited to be interviewed at their school sites. The interview protocol employed a narrative inquiry approach, which allowed principals to share their experiences through storytelling. Subjects were asked to provide narratives of their experiences in education and experiences with successes and failures of students to move from at-risk for dropping out of high school to dedicated and motivated college-bound student. Through the interviews, I recorded the stories, experiences, and beliefs of school leaders, and strategies implemented at those continuation schools to prepare students for post-secondary education. Field notes including notes, photographs, and any available documents were collected during the visits to the school sites for analysis. Documents included student handbooks, contracts, course descriptions, and program brochures. Data was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis and narrative analysis.

Significance of the Research

This research has the potential of informing the continuation high school system in California and more directly the continuation school within my own school district. The information that comes from the study will be presented to the principals, teachers, and school district in an effort to identify ways to increase the number of students who are prepared to pursue college after attending the continuation school program. The study intended to identify key factors of continuation schools, positive or negative, that influence student motivation and ability to continue in the community college system following high school, and most importantly will inform continuation school leaders about how they can transform their schools to prepare students for post-secondary education. The findings will be submitted to the California Continuation Education Association for review and presentation at their annual conference for continuation school educators. I hope the research will contribute to the expansion of continuation high schools from dropout programs to student preparation for continuing education at the community college level. The research design was intended to yield valid findings related to principal perceptions about continuation schools in the areas of student goals and career planning, academic support and preparation, socio-emotional support counseling, and school environment that will be used to identify areas of strength and weakness in the continuation school from the perspective of former students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Continuation high schools provide alternative education settings for students who do not succeed in comprehensive California high schools. The study examines the beliefs and experiences of continuation school leaders with regard to preparing students for post-secondary education. The study aimed to identify characteristics of continuation school programs and school leaders who demonstrate success in supporting students in completing high school and transitioning to college. Since no studies have been identified that specifically address the college experience of continuation school students, the literature review focuses on studies of continuation schools, community college issues of persistence and attrition for underprepared students, and literature relating to increasing student access to college by developing a college-going culture. The review begins with literature that defines and describes the general purposes and models of alternative education programs and continuation schools. I provide an overview of the historical developments and evolving purposes of alternative education and continuation school programs in California over the 20th and 21st centuries. Next, the literature review examines the findings of a series of studies concerning the current alternative education models in California and the United States. The studies account for the demographic characteristics of students enrolled in continuation schools, the perceived purposes of the schools, their instructional programs, and characteristics that contribute to student success in a continuation school. The literature review closes with an exploration of studies that relate to promoting college-going culture in high schools. Through the literature, I provide insights into factors and student characteristics that predict persistence and attrition at the community college level and consider the implications for students from continuation schools. The terms college and college-going culture are used actively throughout the study. While these terms are often use to specifically describe readiness for four-year colleges or universities, in this case the terms are

used to describe post-secondary education including four-year schools, trade schools, and most aptly for community colleges.

Types of Alternative Education

Alternative education refers to educational models that fall outside of the traditional K-12 setting (Aron, 2006). These might include General Education Diploma (GED) preparation programs, home school programs, independent study programs, online schools, experimental schools, or continuation schools. Most often the term is associated with schools serving students who were previously unsuccessful in a traditional high school. The U.S. Department of Education defines alternative education as a

> public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (U.S. Department of Education, as cited in Aron, 2006, p. 14)

Three types of alternative education models exist: schools of choice that offer specialization of study such as in magnet schools or thematic charter schools; last chance schools that offer continuing education opportunities for disruptive students; and remedial schools that focus on academic remediation and/or social rehabilitation (Raywid, 1994). In California, there are four public types of alternative education programs, which are closely aligned with Raywid's last chance and remedial programs: community day schools, county community schools, independent study schools, and continuation schools. Community day schools serve students with disciplinary or behavioral issues that have impeded their ability to be successful in traditional high schools. County community schools enroll students who have been expelled from a school district. School districts commonly offer independent study programs in varying forms including the increasing use of online programs (EdSource, 2008). Continuation school programs provide

opportunities for students who are credit deficient to remediate courses and graduate from high school. For the students who attend these types of alternative schools, the primary goal is to support students in completing high school. Preparation for college is not an expectation of the institutions.

History of Alternative Education and Continuation School Programs

Continuation schools were implemented in 1917 with federal legislation that provided funding for alternative schools (Kelly, 1993). Originally, continuation schools were established within comprehensive schools to provide flexible education programs to working students between the ages of 14 and 18 (Atukpawu, McLaughlin, & Williamson, 2008). The legislation came in response to the growing debate over how to respond to the poor school completion rates at the turn of the century. Only 6% of students graduated from high school in 1900 (Kelly, 1993). A debate ensued about the best way to mitigate the problem. Some argued for a multi track schooling system that placed some students on an industrial education track. Progressives argued against a dual system, stating that separate continuation schools would deny students from working class families an equal opportunity. By 1907, the increasing global competition for industrialization and the high level of immigration contributed to the growing consensus that there was a need for vocational education within the school system, which resulted in the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act of 1917 (as cited in Kelly, 1993), which compelled states to use a portion of federal education moneys for alternative education programs. In the decades that followed states adopted provisions of the Act to develop continuation school models.

Over time, the purpose of continuation schools has shifted with social, political, and economic developments in California. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the decline in industry and availability of jobs rendered the vocational purpose of continuation schools moot. Enrollment in continuation schools declined (Kelly, 1993). At the same time, states increased

truancy laws and enforcement in an effort to keep youth from competing with adults for employment. Curriculum of continuation schools shifted from vocational education to academic subjects and social, civic, and health guidance. A reduction in financial resources caused the number of continuation schools to contract.

In the mid-1940s, the debate about continuation schools continued. The focus became the treatment of students "maladjusted" to comprehensive schools (Kelly, 1993). In California, the Committee on Continuation Education was appointed in 1953 by the Governor's Advisory Committee on Children and Youth. Maladjusted students were characterized as students who were delinquent, disciplinary cases, or mentally challenged. In the 1960s, the role of continuation schools as a place to send students with problematic behaviors increased. In response to a growing trend of long-term suspensions and expulsions, the California legislature determined in 1965 that all school districts must have continuation education (Kelly, 1993). The mandate of continuation programs resulted in a spike in continuation enrollment. Since then, continuation schools have maintained a secure place in the educational system in California and across the nation.

Continuation Schools and Programs

Continuation programs operate within comprehensive high schools, separate schools, and third party schools (Almeida et al., 2010). While the students who access alternative education come from varied situations and have different goals, the vast majority of students in alternative education programs were previously unsuccessful in traditional schools. Alternative education programs are most closely associated with at-risk students who are in danger of dropping out of school and not bound for college.

Some serve disruptive or incarcerated youth, while others educate a wider swath of struggling students. Some grant diplomas, some prepare students to earn a general equivalency

diploma (GED), and others serve as temporary placements that intend to return students to a traditional diploma-granting high school. Too often, alternative schools operate under antiquated policy that treats them as second-rate settings for the "non-college bound" (Almeida et al., 2010).

The expected benefits from alternative programs include reducing truancy, improving attitudes toward school, accumulating high school credits, and reducing behavior problems (Cash, 2004; National Dropout Prevention Center [NDPC], 2014). The NDPC suggests that schools maintain small teacher/student ratios and a small student base not exceeding 250 students. School leaders should ensure their schools have a clearly stated mission and discipline code and foster a caring faculty with continual staff development, high expectations for student achievement, and a learning program specific to the student's expectations and learning style. Leaders should establish a flexible school schedule with community involvement and support, and a total commitment the success of every student. Alternative schools primarily address drop-out prevention and generally do not expect to ready students for college; however, there are some examples alternative education programs that work to support and prepare students for higher education.

Continuation school administrators recognize an array of goals and objectives for their schools and students, including self-esteem building, development of interpersonal skills, motivating students to reconnect with the learning process, providing support for students with social and emotional needs, post-high school planning, technology training, communication skills, and preparation for post-secondary education coursework. This is evidenced in various academic structures of alternative programs (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). A survey of 15 alternative education programs identified program and student goals such as job or vocational credential preparation, learning English, obtaining a GED, earning a high school diploma, entering college,

and earning college credit. Of the schools surveyed, four offered programs that allowed students to earn college credit while completing their high school program. Other models include those schools that focus on earning a high school diploma, providing vocational training, or GED preparation. Of the schools with a college preparation focus, one school reported an 83% post-secondary enrollment rate. Another school reported 70% of students completing the first term, but only 17% completing a credential (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). These rates meet or exceed the college-going rates of comprehensive high schools and warrant further investigation. While schools may be able to motivate students to pursue post-secondary education following high school, students may not be prepared or equipped to persist in the college environment given the likely challenges they experienced in high school and the lack of experience students may have with rigorous academic content and instruction in the continuation school structure.

Continuation School Students and Challenges

Continuation schools provide a second chance opportunity for students on a path toward dropping out. Reasons for student referral to continuation schools vary: need to work, teen motherhood, truancy, credit deficiency, and behavioral issues. Continuation schools are challenged to provide academic remediation, social guidance, life skills, career preparation, and education and career guidance to a population of students facing adversity. Today they are most commonly identified as dropout prevention, "last chance" schools that help students earn a high school diploma. Not only are continuation high schools a last chance for students to earn a high school diploma, they are also a last chance to prepare students for higher education.

The focus, size, and demographic constitution vary across schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In California, reportedly 10% of students attend some form of alternative school. There are approximately 980 alternative education schools, 525 of which are continuation schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). According to the California Basic Education Data System

([CBEDS]; as cited in Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008), there were 68,371 students enrolled in continuation schools when schools reported enrollment data in October during the 2005-2006 school year. By May of the same school year the number grew to 116, 551. Students commonly transfer to continuation schools mid-year as they are identified as appropriate candidates for a continuation school and as they become eligible to attend. California requires a minimum age of 16 to attend a continuation school. The demographic make-up of schools reflects the overrepresentation of historically underserved groups. Hispanic/Latino students make up 55% of the continuation school population compared to 42% Hispanic/Latino statewide. African-Americans make-up 11% compared to 8% statewide. White and Asian students are underrepresented. English Learners are 21% of the population compared to 14% statewide. Not only are the demographic characteristics of continuation schools inconsistent with comprehensive high schools, continuation school students also face substantially more challenges than their comprehensive high school peers.

There are significant challenges facing students who attend continuation schools. According to the California Healthy Kids Survey for 2004-2006, 17% of students attending continuation schools changed where they lived two or more times in the past year compared to 7% in comprehensive high schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Eleven percent of students in continuation schools reported being in foster care compared to 4% in comprehensive high schools. The rate of alcohol and drug use is twice as high. Eleven to 14% of continuation school students reported being involved in a violent altercation in some capacity, such as being a victim of a crime, fighting, carrying a gun, or being a gang member. This is two to three times the rate at comprehensive high schools (EdSource, 2008). Continuation school students face environmental challenges that may impede educational progress toward high school graduation

and higher education. These challenges also put continuation school students at a disadvantage when pursuing higher education.

Challenges for Continuation School Students in Higher Education

There is no available research on the experience of continuation school students in post-secondary education. The educational community has identified at-risk students in community colleges, and there is extensive research on factors that influence attrition and persistence in the community college setting. Although these at-risk students may share characteristics with the continuation school population, there is no direct research about the experience of continuation school students in college. There exists no data that delves into the statistical accuracies regarding college performance or completion rates for continuation students.

Much like the continuation high school experience, community colleges act as a second chance institution for people previously unsuccessful in school. A substantial number of poor and minority students who leave high school without a diploma or academic skills in reading, writing, and math turn to community colleges as their only option for pursuing college; however, students require a basic set of academic skills to be successful (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). Students of continuation high schools likely fit into this category; underprepared, under-informed, and a higher percentage of poor and minority students. The academic experience of students is a better predictor for their success.

Rigorous academic coursework in high school is the most significant indicator of college degree attainment, especially for African-American and Latino students (Adelman, 1999). The strengths of high school curricula, GPA, and student test scores are primary indicators of student performance in college. Advanced Placement and math courses are strong predictors of college performance. Students who complete one course beyond Algebra II in high school, such as trigonometry or pre-calculus, more than double the likelihood that they will complete a program

leading to a Bachelor's degree. A student's academic profile (curriculum, test scores, and GPA) supersedes socio-economic status as a predictor of college success. This does not bode well for continuation high school students, who are likely to have completed only minimal coursework in math, no Advanced Placement courses, and typically have a low GPA (Cabrera, Burkum, & La Nasa, 2005; Gamoran, Porter, Smithson, & White, 1997; Nora & Rendon, 1990; Orfield, 1992; Roderick et al., 2008; Roderick, Nagaoka, & Coca, 2009; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Many students are unaware of the need to engage in rigorous college prep coursework to be successful in community college, in part because of the false perception that community colleges have no academic requirements (Person, Rosenbaum, & Deil-Amen, 2006). Students are likely to enter the college system without skills for entry-level coursework.

Students entering community college from a continuation high school are likely to require remediation before pursuing coursework that counts toward a degree. More than 60% of first-time community college students took at least one remedial course compared to 29% of first time students in public 4-year colleges or universities (Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2005). Courses taken for remediation are necessary to develop needed academic skills for students entering degree programs, though the courses do not count for university credit toward a degree. Remedial coursework adds to the number of classes, amount of time, and expense required for students to earn a degree, which can discourage students from enrolling or continuing their college education (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Levin & Koski, 1998; Rosenbaum, 2001). The adverse conditions that many continuation school students experience can be compounded by a lack resources to pay for college and/or a lack of encouragement and support from their circle of influence, which makes them more likely to drop out of college. Continuation schools are challenged to provide academic preparation, realistic college planning and goal setting, and mentoring and guidance to prepare students for the pending challenges.

Even for schools striving to meet these needs, few students are likely to earn a college degree or credential.

High attrition rates in community colleges have long been a problem. A half-century ago, Clark (1960) and Thornton (1966) reported that community college students did not complete their objectives or did not return after their first year of school at a rate of 40%. Attrition continues to be a problem today with many students who enter community college not remaining longer than a semester, not completing a program, or earning a credential (Bailey, Leinbach, & Jenkins, 2006; Goldrick-Rab, 2010). Within 6 years of transitioning to college, only slightly more than one third of community college entrants complete a credential of any kind (Calcagno, Bailey, Jenkins, Kienzl, & Leinbach, 2006). Recent estimates indicate an average attrition rate of 41% from first to second year and a 34% persistence-to-degree rate (ACT, 2007). For those who are academically prepared, financing college and navigating the college system are barriers for transitioning and persisting in college.

Economic factors play an important part in student decisions to attend or remain enrolled in college (Mumper, 1993; Perna, 2002). Students face challenges in determining how to finance college (Hossler & Vesper, 1993; Roderick et al., 2008; Roderick et al., 2009; St. John, 1991). Economically disadvantaged students often have to rely on their high school counselors for information about college and how to pay for it often because no family members of close friends have attended college (Cabrera et al., 2005; McDonough, 1997; Roderick et al., 2008; Roderick et al., 2009). As continuation schools are smaller in size they tend to have less resources. Continuation schools often lack a college counselor if they have a counselor at all. Continuation school students are disadvantaged in terms of college planning from both an academic standpoint and a financial one.

Research on College-Going Culture

Despite the myriad challenges that continuation school students face, school leaders must assume students are capable of success if there is any possibility of transitioning students to higher education (College Board, 2008). High schools that cultivate a culture where students, teachers, and staff embrace a primary goal of college readiness can raise not only college-going rates, but reduce high school non-completion rates, improve student achievement, and even improve student behavior (Axelroth, 2009). McDonough (1997) suggests that exposing disadvantaged students to the same systems and structure that support college preparation for higher SES students can increase access to college. Fostering such a culture is challenging, particularly in continuation schools where students have already experienced academic failure. Still, schools should strive to develop cultures where all students and staff embrace the role of high school as preparing all students for continuing education, a college-going culture. McDonough (1997) describes college-going cultures as one that provides students a college preparatory curriculum, focused college counseling, a culture of high academic standards, communication that supports college expectations, and a school staff committed to students going to college. The U.S. Department of Education ([USDE], as cited in Horn, Nevill, & Griffith, 2006) declared a need for school reform efforts to better prepare students for college. Four areas that can be used to assess student readiness for college are content knowledge and basic skills, core academic skills, noncognitive skills, and college knowledge (Achieve Inc., 2004).

Academic preparation is critical for student success in college (Tierney, 2005). Intensity and quality of school curriculum is the best predictor for college completion and is an indicator of content knowledge (Adelman, 1999). Continuation schools face a significant challenge in this area. Students come to continuation schools credit deficient and behind in academic development. In order to accelerate credits, curriculum is delivered with emphasis on speed of

completion rather than providing a rigorous academic experience. Coursework is an indicator of student readiness in the area of content knowledge and academic skills (Horn et al., 2006). At minimum, students must complete the A-G sequence, the 15 courses required to qualify for college admission. Continuation schools, then, need to provide students with college preparatory coursework, rather than offering the minimum requirements for a high school diploma. Advanced classes in math, science, and foreign languages are often unavailable in continuation schools. Schools must expose students to rigorous academic coursework and expect students to perform at or above grade level. Students must be provided access and encouragement to advanced levels of coursework, even in a continuation school setting.

Achievement tests are a potential measure of college readiness. Student performance on exams is an indicator of core academic skills, such as critical reading and writing (Achieve Inc., 2004). Though continuation school principals report less restrictions associated with student performance on standardized assessments, the California Public School Accountability Act (PSAA), the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM), and the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) are state and federal measures that hold all schools accountable to standards of education (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; CDE, 2013). Some instructional improvements are attributable to the implementation of the CAHSEE. Still, the CAHSEE is a low bar for student achievement. It is not aligned with college entrance requirements, and passage of the exam is not an indicator or college readiness. Graduation assessments are often well below grade level and are not adequate measures of college preparedness (Achieve Inc., 2004). Schools need to align high school achievement tests with college entrance requirements and use them as benchmarks for college readiness (Horn et al., 2006).

Student grades are typically a measure of noncognitive skills, and for continuation school students such skills may be the area of greatest challenge. Noncognitive skill sets include student

self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control. They also include study skills, work habits, and time management. Students are typically referred to continuation schools for credit deficiency, and have demonstrated a general lack of these noncognitive skills to be successful in high school, suggesting a need to further develop such skills in order to persist in college. Noncognitive skill sets also include help-seeking behavior and social problem-solving skills.

College knowledge is another indicator of student readiness for college. Focused college counseling provides crucial information for preparing students to navigate the college system (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). The size and scope of continuation high schools leaves them without many of the resources available in a comprehensive high school, such as full time counselors. Even in comprehensive high schools, college counseling takes a backseat to the demands of scheduling, discipline, and preventing students from dropping out (McDonough & Perez, 2000). In continuation schools, those issues are amplified. As a result of the size of the school, most under 200 students, many do not employ a counselor at all. Administrators and teachers assume the responsibilities of the counselor. It is even more crucial, then, for school leaders to establish systems wherein the entire staff, administrator(s), teachers, and support staff work together to address the needs of the students. To prepare students for postsecondary education, school leaders must develop a school-wide culture where all staff work together to prepare students for college (McClafferty et al., 2002).

School leaders cultivate college-going cultures deliberately by developing the nine principles. McClafftery et al. (2002) identified the principles, and they include college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. Secondary schools that effectively develop these nine aspects of education better prepare

students for college. If continuation schools embrace these attributes, they are likely to raise not only college-going rates, but decrease dropout rates.

If students transition to community college and fully integrate into campus life, they may overcome the odds and persist in higher education. If they are able to overcome the challenges of cost, remedial coursework, and academic skill deficiency, their ability to integrate into the college community offers a chance for students to succeed in college. Student interaction, knowledge, and socialization within the institution can be used as predictors for student persistence (Tinto, 1987, 1995).

The Influence of Principals

The school efficacy is influenced by a large variety of factors, but principal leadership is a significant predictor for school success. School principals that are effective in promoting success or improving school performance likely exhibit strengths in the following three areas: setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principals who are able to foster a shared vision or purpose are likely to help teachers or others to better understand and embrace goals. They promote motivation and productivity by developing people; principals need to know their teachers' strengths and weaknesses and utilize staff to in their areas where they are strongest. Effective school leaders develop organizational practices that fit the goals and desired outcomes of the school to effectively support students, teachers, and school leaders. Principals who are transformational leaders are likely to establish strong systems and school cultures (Northouse, 2012). Transformational leadership theory posits that organizational leaders can transform the culture of an organization through individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Such a leader attends to individuals by acting as a coach or mentor that listens to the needs of the follower and provides supports while simultaneously

challenging the follower. In this way, the leader fosters an intrinsic motivation in the follower that increases their aspirations. Transformational leaders also provide intellectual stimulation by allowing followers to approach situations and problems creatively. They value all situations as an opportunity to learn, and respect the contributions and idea of followers. These leaders also foster inspirational motivation by articulating a vision that inspires followers and provides clear goals and a strong sense of purpose. Such leaders are effective communicators and provide a role model for ethical behavior, instilling pride and garnering respect and trust. School leaders who employ such characteristics and strategies, then, can direct change and reform in school culture that positively impacts student success.

Conclusion

Continuation school principals lead the final charge for saving high school students on a path toward dropping out of school and discontinuing their education. Schools refer students at highest risk for not completing high school to continuation schools as a last chance effort for intervention. These students face significant challenges that keep them from succeeding, including lack of academic skills, problematic home lives, experiences with violence or trauma, need to work from a young age, or teen pregnancy. These challenges have kept them from succeeding in high school courses. By the time they reach age 16 and become eligible to attend the continuation school, many students have become credit deficient and often have not acquired the academic skills necessary to be successful in high school, much less college. Students are transferred voluntarily or involuntarily to a continuation school that provides an instructional program that allows students to acquire credits at an accelerated rate. Continuation school programs support students in completing high school, provide vocational education, and some offer preparation programs for entrance to community college. There is a high rate of attrition from community colleges in the first year of study often due to underpreparedness of students

and the need for students to complete remedial coursework. Continuation school students are likely to lack skills necessary to persist in college. Schools can influence student access and success in college if they develop basic skills, core academic skills, noncognitive skills, and college knowledge. Continuation schools can make a difference in the lives of continuation school students and help them transition to college, but only if the school leader foster a college-going culture among the students and staff where college preparation is the primary goal of the school institution.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This qualitative study explored the experiences of continuation school principals, their perceptions and expectations for continuation school students to succeed in college, how they prepare students academically for college, and how they provide guidance for students to prepare them for post-secondary education by establishing a college-going culture at the school.

Research Design and Questions

The design of the study was a fundamental descriptive study using basic qualitative methods. I employed narrative inquiry to examine the experiences and beliefs of principals. Qualitative descriptive studies offer a comprehensive summary of an event. In this case the event is the narrative of principals documenting their experiences, beliefs and expectations, and their practices around establishing college-going cultures. Qualitative descriptive studies seek descriptive validity, that is, while there is always some degree of perception and interpretation that occurs from the lens of researchers, descriptive validity seeks to identify that which is fact (Sandelowski, 2000). The task, then, was to gather evidence from continuation school principals about their lived experiences and beliefs and verify and summarize and describe their practices that validate the stated beliefs or not. The study sought to query and provide responses to the following set of critical inquiries:

1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?
2. What guidance support exists in continuation schools to help students prepare for a college experience?
3. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?

4. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals perceive they foster a college-going culture in their schools?

Thesis

Two theoretical frameworks guided the study. The first is the theory that principals play a substantial role in shaping school culture, and that transformational leadership can effectively change the culture of an organization (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Northouse, 2012). Student behavior, values, and beliefs are directly influenced by the morale, routines, and conscious and unconscious conventions about how things are done in their schools. Transformational leadership theory posits that organizational leaders can transform the culture of an organization through individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Principals who operate as supportive mentors for faculty and staff, trust and challenge faculty and staff to tackle school issues, effectively communicate a vision, and are perceived as an ethical leader are likely to influence change at the school. The study sought to identify principals whose practices reflect those transformational leadership qualities. While principals were viewed through a lens of transformational leadership, the experience of students was examined from a perspective of constructivism.

Constructivist theory posits that learning occurs in the context of the learner's pre-established framework (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2005). Students live in a world constructed by their cumulative experiences, and they apply meaning to new experiences through that lens. Students enter the continuation school setting primarily due to prior academic deficiencies, which may be influenced by language acquisition problems, learning disabilities, behavioral and emotional problems, socio-cultural influences, poor home environment, drug abuse, and pregnancy. As such, their lens is shaped through repeated lack of success in school, and likely lack of desire or lack of confidence in the their ability to succeed in higher education. This study

aimed to analyze the extent to which principals believe they can influence student beliefs and outcomes given their preexisting framework and experiences. As such, a qualitative approach to the study provided the best means for conducting research.

Research Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach that included surveys, observation, and interviews using narrative inquiry to understand the beliefs and perspectives of continuation school principals about their students and practice. The study explored the experiences of principals at multiple schools and compared their beliefs and practices. I identified characteristics, beliefs, or practices of principals at continuation schools that contribute to college-going cultures within the school setting. The inductive and flexible nature of qualitative data collection makes it the preferred approach in for this study (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2012). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to probe into responses as needed to answer questions of how and why. Open-ended questions often elicit information that was not anticipated by the investigator. To that end, narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach by which the researcher asks the respondent to share stories that illustrate their experiences. The conversational approach provided a great deal of flexibility in probing for information that could yield significant information.

Data from principals was gathered by listening to the administrators share their experiences or stories of their experiences; inquiry through narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The narrative inquiry approach is one in which the respondent shares detailed accounts of their lived experiences. Their accounts provide the researcher with a vivid description of their personal and professional experiences and heir perspectives of the continuation high school experience (Riley & Hawe, 2005). The principals shared their experiences relating to their own with students and faculty as it related to preparing students for post-secondary education. My

intent was to understand the experiences that have shaped principal beliefs and understanding about students' ability to succeed in higher education. Continuation school principals were asked to share their own educational story, as well as stories that illustrate the experience of continuation school students with whom s/he has worked. Narrative inquiry is useful because it provides contextual richness, those details and nuances that may not be revealed through simple responses to direct questions (Kurtz, 2010). The long form interview also reduced the likelihood that the subjects would give responses that they felt was the desired response or one that would appear favorable (Kurtz, 2010). The approach was valuable in that I was able to probe deeper on topics and ask for elaboration. Narrative inquiry provides a presentation of the story with greater detail and depth that will then be re-storied by the investigator.

To inform that story, data were gathered through surveys, in-depth interviews with continuation school principals, and observations at school sites. Electronic surveys were used to gather information from principals about their sites, beliefs about student college trajectories, and practices for supporting and motivating students to pursue higher education (research questions 1-4). The survey was used qualitatively; it was intended to gather data and evaluate diversity of information instead of frequency of data. In-depth interviews with principals provided detailed and nuanced responses from subjects using a narrative inquiry approach. The approach allowed principals to give thoughtful and reflective responses and may reveal information not apparent from surveys or statistical reports. Field notes were taken when visiting school sites to observe any visible evidence of practices that reflect college-going culture.

I conducted the research in four phases. In the first phase of study, I piloted a survey and interview protocol with local school administrators to develop the most effective instruments for data collection. I adjusted the instruments before distributing them. In the second phase, I delivered an electronic survey to approximately 85 continuation school principals. Invitations

were sent to candidates by e-mail with a link to an online survey. In the third phase, I interviewed willing participants at their school sites. I arranged meetings of approximately 1 hour during which I interviewed principals and toured the school site, making observations about the physical environment. In the final phase I coded and analyzed transcripts using inductive thematic analysis. I categorized responses, quotes, and data by categories, anticipated categories and those that emerged unexpectedly.

Research Sites

I gathered data from multiple continuation school sites in Los Angeles County, and disseminated surveys to 85 principals at all continuation schools in Los Angeles County listed at the California Department of Education website.

The school sites range in size from 50 to 200 students. Some schools are located on the same campus as the comprehensive high schools and others are satellite sites of their own. The schools serve diverse student populations from different ethnic backgrounds, levels of English language acquisition, and socio-economic backgrounds. The circumstances of the schools offered case studies that were appropriate for comparison. The findings of the study may have implications for urban continuation schools that desire to prepare and support continuation school students in higher education.

To protect the anonymity of schools this report omits specific descriptive demographic profiles of schools, the description provides some demographic overview of the schools included in the study. Of the seven schools I visited, four schools were predominantly white and Hispanic with little representation of other ethnic groups. At each those schools the white and Hispanic populations ranged from 45-55%. Two schools served populations almost entirely Hispanic (over 80%). Only one school had an African American population exceeding 5%. That school had an African-American population at a rate near 20%, a Hispanic population around 65%, and a white

population around 10%. All schools served students who are socio-economically disadvantaged. The lowest rate was 25%, four schools reported rates between 40 and 50%, and two schools reported rates higher than 65%. Four schools served students with disabilities who made up between 10 to 15% of students at those schools. Five schools served 50-100 students, while two were considered larger schools serving 200 or more students.

Parent education levels of the students in the continuation schools were reported as follows. At three schools five to 15% of parents did not earn a high school diploma. At three other schools the rate of parents not earning a high school diploma was 20-30%, and at one school the rate exceeded 50%. On the other end of the spectrum, at five of the schools, 25-35% of parents reportedly earned college or grad school degrees, while at two schools the rate was less than 10%.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected for all research questions through an electronic survey, interviews with selected candidates, and observation of practice during site tours. The electronic survey was composed of 22 questions, both closed and open-ended, designed to gather data for all four of the research questions. The questionnaire was used to gather information about the infrastructure of the school, such as staffing ratios and available classes. The survey collected data specific to academic preparation and college readiness for students. To gather evidence pertaining to question 4, the questionnaire included questions about the highest level of coursework available to students, and any structure that supports students in completing college entrance requirements. For question 3, participants described school resources such as access to college and career counselors. For questions 2, 3, and 4, the survey asked participants to identify any further structures or resources provided for students to support transition to college, such as placement

exam preparation, financial advisement, or support with college applications. The survey asked questions specific to the principal's expectation and estimation of the rate that students leave the school adequately prepared and motivated to be successful in higher education (question 1).

The second data collection method included interviews conducted with targeted participants at their respective school sites. Candidates for interviews were those respondents to the surveys who indicated high graduation rates, high college-going rates, and a prioritization of preparing students for post-secondary education. The interviews facilitated the exploration of the efforts of the school leaders to establish systems and school culture that would influence and prepare students for higher education. The interviews took approximately an hour each, and were conducted at the school sites of the principal. The interview protocol was developed to explore the research questions in greater depth with the respondents. In the interviews, principals were asked to go into greater detail about their experiences, their practices for developing a college-going culture, and their beliefs in students' abilities to succeed in college. Principals were asked questions that allowed them to not only describe their beliefs about student trajectories and the structures and systems that exist at their school sites, but also to share the challenges they experience in preparing students for life beyond high school. Ultimately, the interviews allowed principals to provide detailed accounts of their efforts to provide an environment that would support student success through a college-going culture, exploring the constructivist nature of their work. The interviews garnered important data for all four research questions, and were followed by a tour of the facility for the final piece of data collection observation.

The final data analysis was comprised of observations of the actual school site through a tour from the principal or designated staff member. I sought evidence of practices at the school site that support an environment promoting a college-going culture (questions 2-4). I documented regalia on the office and classroom walls, such as student work, college information,

posters, college specific announcements, etc. I documented the physical structure and appearance of the school site with attention to resources and supports for students, such as on-site counselor and administrator offices. to cross-reference and support the information provided by the principal in the principal interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis began with a thorough review of gathered data from surveys, interviews, observations, and available documents. Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic approach and narrative analysis. Inductive thematic analysis consists of reading textual data, identifying themes, coding them, and interpreting the content (Guest et al., 2012). The process is primarily concerned with presenting stories of participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible. The intended outcome of inductive thematic analysis is not a theoretical model, but recommendations for program or policy. In this case, the study intended to identify recommendations for schools and school district that would inform practices for continuation high schools. The four primary categories for coding were: principal beliefs about college success for continuation school students (questions 1 and 5), evidence of college-going culture (question 2), evidence of guidance and support for transition to college (question 3), and evidence of academic preparation for college (question 4). Additional themes and sub-categories emerged through the data analysis process. The categories for analysis ultimately included college counseling, college-going culture, college partnerships, academic preparation, structures for instruction, faculty and staff issues, graduation and college-going rates, student challenges, student engagement, success stories, and valuable principal experiences. I analyzed the relationships between principal beliefs about student potential for success in college and the infrastructures and resources available to students for academic preparation and guidance for transition to college. Survey data were recorded and responses were categorized thematically.

The surveys included open-ended questions to gather detailed responses from respondents. Interviews were transcribed and presented to participants for review to check for accuracy. Responses were then analyzed and coded. Field notes were also analyzed and coded for interpretation. The three data sources were used for triangulation, in addition to any available documents that emerged, which included records of graduation or college-going-rates, school policies, or college counseling documents.

Narrative analysis is the approach used for analyzing the stories that are told during interviews. The narratives were analyzed for evidence of those experiences that shaped principal beliefs and practices. Narratives were categorized initially by the aforementioned themes; and stories that provided clear insight into how or why phenomena existed, such as higher levels of belief in student success, were re-storied. A narrative was developed by the researcher that was informed by respondent narratives, researcher perspective, and field notes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) conceptualized narrative inquiry in a frame of three dimensions drawn from Dewey's ideals. Personal and social interaction is taken into account in one dimension. Continuity of experience over time is a second dimension for consideration. The place and situation is the third dimension taken into account. The researcher also considered his/her lived experiences and how they influenced the narrative. The researcher considered that they were part of the landscape being studied and, therefore, become part of the narrative (Clandinin, 2006).

Credibility

Data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted in a careful manner. With a relatively small sample size, 20 surveys and 7 interviews, the depth and detail of data were highly important for the validity of the study. The data collection instrument, the survey, interview protocols, and observation notes were carefully designed and piloted to ensure that they

generated data with sufficient detail. I provided sufficient detail to establish findings are transferable to related school settings.

As a school principal I am cognizant of my own beliefs and desires for students to be supported and directed toward higher education, as well as my own experience with students who enroll in continuation schools. My familiarity with the challenges of developing an effective college-going culture in a comprehensive school environment provides perspective that informs my understanding of how to foster such a culture and the impediments to developing a college-going culture. My experience informs my understanding of the challenges students face, the challenge to provide adequate intervention services for all of the needs of at-risk students, and the magnitude of the challenge to effectively guide and prepare students academically for college in such a limited amount of time. While my experience informed my understanding of the data, as I conducted data analysis I ensured that my findings were informed only by data formally collected and analyzed through the study.

Ethics

Interviews with school leaders about their practice could cause feelings that their work was being called into question. Participant emotions needed to be considered for the study. The interviews called on participants to identify and discuss aspects of their work that impact the ultimate success or lack of success in pursuing higher education. In some cases, participants might share experiences that bring up negative or difficult emotions as they reflected on challenges, successes, or perceived failures. I aimed to establish a safe environment for participants and made clear the topics covered in the interviews before the interviews were conducted. I have taken great liberties to devote considerable time to explain the purpose of the interviews, the protocols I followed, and ensured the participants were completely aware of their right to participate only to the extent that they were comfortable.

Another ethical consideration was that participants needed to be able to speak freely about faculty or staff and make critical comments about faculty or staff from the school or district office when necessary. I took steps to assure anonymity, including establishing aliases for all schools and participants. I provided transcripts of interviews to the participants to ensure accuracy, and I provided feedback to participants as the study neared completion. When findings were ultimately presented, I only presented information that would inform findings relevant to the research questions. Any information that was critical of specific individuals was omitted from reports made available to site and district staff.

Faculty and staff might also have concerns that negative impressions of them will be reported to district administrators. I ensured confidentiality with all participants. I clarified this with faculty, staff, and administrators. I also included it as part of the memorandum of understanding.

Role

I operated solely in the role of researcher and had no other collegial relationships with potential participants. I established a climate in which the participants felt comfortable being candid and open with me. I impressed upon participants that their contributions to this study could result in improved practices for conditions for continuation schools.

Summary

This study yields important information about the practices of continuation school principals who exhibit strong beliefs in the abilities of their students to successfully transition to college. Detailed accounts of individual principal experiences with continuation high school students and their efforts to prepare students for college were collected through descriptive qualitative methods. The data were analyzed to identify beliefs, experiences, and practices relating to providing guidance and academic preparation for college success for continuation

school students. Specifically, the research identified practices in continuation schools that are intentional in promoting college for our most-at-risk students and factors that influence principal expectations of students. By identifying those attributes and examples of principals and continuation schools with college-going cultures, other continuation high schools may be able to increase student supports that will expand potential for student success in college.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

With high numbers of students dropping out of high school each year in California, continuation schools serve as a last chance opportunity for students to remain on a path to high school graduation. Students who attend continuation schools are typically challenged with issues that hinder their academic success and their chances of success in college are diminished. The purpose of this study was to assess the experience of continuation school principals, their perceptions and expectations for continuation school students to succeed in college, how they prepare students academically for college, and how they provide guidance for students to prepare them for post-secondary education by establishing a college-going culture at the school. This study explores the experiences and beliefs of continuation school principals and examines their practices relating to promoting college-going culture to identify strategies for increasing college readiness for continuation school students. My work was guided by four research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?
2. What guidance support exists in continuation schools to help students prepare for a college experience?
3. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?
4. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals perceive they foster a college-going culture in their schools?

Data collection began with a survey that was sent electronically to 85 continuation school principals in Los Angeles County. Contact information was gathered through the California Department of Education website. The survey was used to gather descriptive data about schools

including size of the school, perceived graduation and college-going rates, and practices for college preparation. The survey also asked principals to state their beliefs regarding the ability of continuation schools to prepare and guide continuation school students for college. Twenty principals responded. Respondents were contacted for a follow-up interview if on the survey they reported graduation rates above 75%, college-going rates over 50% and/or strong attributes college readiness focus, and affirmed their belief that continuation schools can successfully prepare students for college. I contacted seven school principals who met those criteria, and four agreed to participate in an interview. During each interview I asked principals to identify any schools they regarded as high performing successful continuation schools, which led me to three more interviews.

Responses from the interviews with the selected principals resulted in four distinct categories. The first category was the relationship between the personal and professional experiences of continuation school principals and their expectations for continuation school students in post-secondary education. Principal beliefs and desires for student success are influenced by their personal and professional experiences. Second, with limited counseling resources and high need for counseling services, schools that systematically expect all faculty and staff to assume the role of counselor and mentor can increase student engagement and provide access to necessary information for preparing for and navigating the college system. While principals express a desire to inspire students to pursue a college track, they recognize that re-engaging students in the school is the prerequisite for success. They must provide nurturing environments that address all types of student needs. Third, continuation schools are challenged to make up coursework, address academic deficiencies, and accelerate courses in a limited amount of time, while at the same time providing the necessary academic skills for college access. Schools with a focus on college readiness pay special attention to literacy skills and

balance independent study with conventional classroom instruction. Finally, the extent to which a college culture is present on a campus is related to the principal's belief in their ability to ready students for post-secondary education and their effectiveness in developing a faculty that share such a vision. The criteria I used to examine school practice were the nine principles of college going culture. The following pages present the findings as they relate to each research question in order. The findings are presented with a summary response to each research question, an analysis of the survey data, analysis of each of the nine principles of college going culture as they were at school sites, other findings, and conclusions.

Research Questions and Findings

Question 1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?

Principals were cautious about overstating their expectations that students would be successful in college. Two schools emerged that adopted a mission and culture around preparing students for college, and the practices reported by those principals were evidence of developing college going cultures. Other school leaders spoke of their desires to develop such a culture, but lamented that challenges with students and/or staff prevent such cultures from taking route. Principals who reported impediments to developing college-going cultures expressed frustrations with faculty or staff that would not support changing expectations for students and, while all principals recognized that their students had the aptitude for college, they were thoughtful about the challenges students face in becoming college ready in the short time they attend the continuation school. The severity of issues students face are in the way of their education, such as transiency and instability in the home, family issues, domestic violence, substance abuse, early parenthood, and entanglement in gangs, which compound academic deficits that have developed over years and that are often too challenging to overcome in the time that students

have with the continuation school. Though most principals were careful to qualify their expectations that students in continuation schools would be successful in post-secondary education, all of the principals indicated that their primary mission was to re-engage students in their education, which is a prerequisite for college readiness. For those principals who expressed strong convictions about students' ability to be college ready, the differentiating factor appeared to be their own personal and professional experiences and their effectiveness at developing the culture of the faculty and staff.

Whereas most principals expressed that expecting students to be successful in college was unrealistic, principals who personally identified with the experiences of continuation school expressed greater confidence in their students. In my interviews of principals, I asked principals to share their own personal stories of education and to share experiences they believed most prepared them for their roles as continuation school leaders. Principals who experienced adversity or challenges in their lives that were similar to those faced by their students appeared to have greater confidence that students can overcome the challenges they face and succeed in college. Two principals, Dr. Franklin and Principal James described experiences in their lives that jeopardized their educational trajectory in school. Principal James faced challenges in her home and became behaviorally defiant in high school. Dr. Franklin lived in a neighborhood characterized by gang culture and became entangled in gang culture in her adolescence. Both were able to overcome those challenges with the assistance of positive adult influence and support, and in the case of Principal James, through an alternative school experience that was able to re-engage her in education. Both principals were successful in college and carry with them experiences that inform their perceptions of the students they serve. They have great confidence that with a school experience that is highly engaging, caring, and that provides structured and intentional supports that address the problems faced by students, all students can

overcome their challenges and succeed in post-secondary education. Further, Dr. Franklin and Principal James appeared to have developed cultures at their schools that had high expectations for students. There appeared to be strong positive cultures where adults shared a vision and practices that supported student preparation for post-secondary education.

Question 2. What supports exist in continuation schools to help students prepare for college in the areas of guidance?

The effectiveness of guidance and support for students in the area of college preparation appeared to depend on the ability of the school leader to foster a shared vision in preparing students for college. Schools that were highly effective employed a comprehensive approach to guidance and counseling where all faculty and staff shared in the college advisement process. Schools that did not have such a culture relied on the academic counselor to provide college advisement; however, those counselors were typically consumed with other issues that resulted in little time for college going initiatives.

Counselors respond to a the myriad issues students face including the monitoring of academic progress toward graduation, behavior issues, attendance problems, substance abuse, social and emotional counseling, grief counseling, and other motivational issues. As a result, college counseling is typically reserved for only those students who seek it on an individual basis. All schools expressed that every students has a discussion with the academic counselor about preparation for post-secondary education at the time of enrollment; but unless the school established a collective approach to advising all students about college, students who do not express a desire to pursue college upon enrollment receive little more college counseling.

Where schools made progress on establishing a collective approach to college counseling, teachers were deputized as pseudo-college counselors in the classroom. Principals reported that college readiness was the context of classroom discussions and lessons. In one school I was able

to observe the weekly assembly where students were recognized for their academic progress and successes for the week. The principal gave a motivational talk where she emphasized student readiness for college and recognized a student who had recently completed concurrent college coursework. Teachers shared in the presentations and there appeared to be strong collegiality that reflects a shared culture and practice. An example was made for other students to observe that reinforced the idea that continuation school students were not non-college bound. At the two schools led by Principal James and Dr. Franklin, the staff worked together to provide college advisement and counseling, while other schools that attempted to use faculty for this purpose were less successful.

Other structures exist in continuation schools to provide college counseling to students such as college planning elective courses or advisory class periods; however, the success of such structures relies on a faculty that embraces the goal of preparing all students for post-secondary education. When the faculty does not share a belief that students can be successful in becoming ready for post-secondary education they are not appropriate agents for college advisement. Two schools described initiatives where they attempted to assign faculty to lead college advisement for their students. One principal developed a college planning elective course, only to cancel it after the course did not achieve the desired effect. Rather than motivating and inspiring students, students found the teacher to be a discouraging influence. Another principal developed an advisory period in the school day where students could receive daily mentoring and advisement rom their teacher including college planning and preparation, but did not trust that the faculty would use the time to effectively foster motivation and college planning for students. The principal developed scripts for the advisory lessons and requires teachers to read them to their classes. She was tentative about how effective the initiative would be given the lack of cooperation from some teachers. Both principals expressed frustration that their ability to

provide comprehensive counseling is limited by resistance from faculty and staff. While some schools struggled to mobilize the faculty effectively, it was promising that six of the seven schools reported that all students had access to the liaison from the local community college.

Liaisons from local community colleges provided outreach to students at every school. The liaisons worked with schools to provide field trips to the community colleges for tours of the campuses, and they arranged for early registration and placement testing. At least four schools required their students to report their plans for continuing education in preparation for graduation, and principals indicated that students reported plans to pursue continuing education at the local community college or trade school; however, none of the schools had a formal method for verifying student enrollment or persistence in higher education.

Question 3. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?

The structures of continuation school programs are inherently inadequate to prepare students academically for college coursework. Students arrive at continuation schools behind in credits, so their programs allow students to remediate coursework and complete courses at an accelerated pace to help them graduate on time. Courses are typically modified versions of the courses offered at comprehensive high schools and allow students to move at their own pace. While the course descriptions generally align with the corresponding course at the comprehensive high school, the amount of output for students is reduced and the required seat time is substantially less. Typically, students work on an independent basis to complete tasks as fast as possible. While all principals expressed confidence that the courses adequately addressed content standards for each class, principals were less confidence of the rigor of the courses and the adequacy of the courses to prepare students for college. Though most principals were not

confident that instruction was rigorous, two principals described programs that challenged students to be college ready.

Several factors differentiated schools that reported confidence in the rigor of their coursework and instruction from their counterparts. Principals at these schools reported that teachers embraced a culture of collaboration and academic achievement, teachers from the continuation school collaborated regularly with teachers of the comprehensive high school in their subject areas, classes were structured as blended models of whole group instruction and independent study, and the courses at these schools were UC approved. I found that the collaborative culture where teachers regularly shared instructional practices contributed to an environment where teachers sought to continually improve the delivery of instruction. Further, when continuation schoolteachers worked with teachers of the comprehensive high school, they embraced an identity that they teach at the same level as comprehensive high school teachers. This likely influenced the practice of teaching content in the more traditional style of whole group instruction. These three factors (collaboration, working with the comprehensive high school, and whole group teaching style), is what I believe contributes an environment of higher academic achievement than the strictly independent model. Whereas in the independent study model for instruction teacher practice tends to ossify and little change occurs from year to year in instructional practice, teachers who work together and deliver dynamic and engaging lesson plans experience continuing improvement of practice. These practices combined with offering UC approved coursework signals to students that the school believes they can be successful and has high expectations for them.

UC approved coursework is more than a practical means for qualifying for college, it is a signal to students that they have not been deemed non-college material. In order to convince continuation school students that they can and should prepare for post-secondary education, the

must be credible to students. When schools do not offer programming that is accepted by colleges or universities, students receive the message that the school no longer believes that college is viable for them. Four of the schools I visited offered UC approved courses for their students. I found the availability of UC approved courses to be a strong indicator of the school's desire to develop a college going culture. There is no data available, however, about the effectiveness of these schools in preparing students for college.

Question 4. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals foster a college-going culture in their schools?

Principals expressed varying degrees of confidence in the cultures of their schools in regard to preparing and inspiring students to pursue college. There are nine practices that reflect college-going culture in schools (McDonough, 1997). The practices include college talk, clear expectations for students, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and clear articulation among schools in the feeder group (in this case the comprehensive high school, the continuation school, and the local colleges). Evidence of these cultural aspects of the schools are apparent in school websites, college décor, cooperation with local colleges, and emphasis on academic preparation.

Principals expressed desires to build college-going cultures, but cited challenges that prevent them from developing. Principals pointed to faculty and staff who are ineffective or obstinate and who do not believe that their students can successfully transition to college. Principles also discussed the unrealistic expectations for students to be college ready, as they have insurmountable problems and academic deficiencies in the limited time they had at the continuation school. The immediate challenges of continuation schools to manage student behavior, attendance, social, and emotional needs, are the priority for schools, and the successful

re-engagement of students in their education is the true goal of continuation school educators. Still, four of the principals I visited indicated strong beliefs that they fostered college-going cultures at their schools. Two of those schools demonstrated practices that clearly reflected stronger college-going cultures than the other schools visited. Those schools reportedly embraced a mission for college readiness for students, and made the expectation for college readiness clear to students. Faculty and staff reportedly shared in a common belief in success for students and shared in the college guidance role for all students. Courses were UC approved and teachers reportedly challenged their students to develop the academic and literacy skills necessary for college. There were strong cultures of collaboration among the faculty and with the comprehensive high school faculty. There were also connections to the local community colleges to facilitate student transition. The major differences in these schools were not just these practices, but the attributes of the school principals.

The principals of the schools that most embraced a college going culture demonstrated the qualities of transformational leaders. Their beliefs in student ability to succeed in college, which appears to be influenced by their own personal experiences, have been transferred to the faculty and staff who share in the vision and mission of the school. The principals have fostered a strong collaborative culture with and among the faculty that has resulted in a high performing staff who work together to further the mission of the campus. These principals have raised the bar for their schools and influenced the cultures of the schools to embrace a college going focus.

Survey Data and Analysis

The survey was intended to identify principals who described practices and beliefs that reflect preparing students for college for invitation for further study. There were 20 respondents to the survey, and their responses provided some description of continuation schools and practices in Los Angeles County. The following data was yielded from the survey analysis.

Continuation school size depends on the size of the district and the number of high schools that feed into them. Half of the survey respondents reported enrollments less than 100 students. Twenty-five percent hosted between 100 and 200 students, and twenty-five percent of schools were larger schools serving over 200 students. Regardless, of the size of the school, all schools reported the presence of an academic counselor. Half of the respondents reported employing a full-time counselor and half employed a counselor at least part-time. Half of the respondents also reported using teachers to provide college counseling to students. In response to a question about features of the school, four schools reportedly had a college center on campus. When asked about student achievement, half of the schools reported graduation rates higher than 75%. Six schools reported rates less than 50%. Twenty respondents answered a question about perceived college going rates, and seven schools reported rates less than 50%, and only one reported rates less than 25%. Five respondents indicated rates higher than 50%, one of which reported rates higher than 75%. This data suggests that continuation schools have successfully prepared students for college and facilitated their transition to post-secondary education; however, if interview responses are an indicator, schools do not have true data about college going rates, and the actual rates are likely much lower. Still, there were other indicators from the survey that suggested that schools are emphasizing college readiness.

According to respondents, seven schools offer UC approved courses at their schools, which are required for students to be eligible to apply to a UC or CSU. Five of those schools offered all 15 of the UC/CSU required courses. No schools offered Advanced Placement courses. In addition to providing the appropriate courses, five schools reportedly offered college readiness exams such as the PSAT, PLAN, ACT, or SAT. One school reported SAT or ACT preparation classes. In terms of guiding students about the process of applying for and financing college,

sixteen schools reportedly offered guidance for students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Fourteen took students on field trips to college. Thirteen facilitate community college placement exams. Six schools offered college information nights for parents. Nine schools reportedly collaborated with community colleges to offer dual credit coursework or concurrent enrollment. These are promising indicators that continuation schools are taking deliberate steps to support student transition to post-secondary education.

The survey asked principals to describe their vocational training programs. Seven schools administer an interest inventory to students to facilitate college and career planning. Eleven schools offered career technical classes. Three of those had programs that offered a certificate upon completion of coursework. Eight schools offered job placement services. Four feature field trips to trade schools and eleven feature guest speakers from industry. Schools that offered such programs indicated that they emphasized preparation for post-secondary education, and did not necessarily emphasize vocational training over college preparation.

When asked to identify school priorities, nineteen schools agreed that a high school diploma is a priority and seventeen schools agreed that college readiness is a priority. Fourteen indicated that job preparation was a priority and twelve agreed that returning students to the comprehensive high school was a priority. Each area of focus received majority support on the surveys. When asked to describe the mission of the school, there was some variance in the emphasis. There was evidence that principals perceive their mission to include addressing the dynamic needs of continuation school students and prepare them for life after high school, which may or may not include continuing education.

> To help students overcome the barriers they face socially and environmentally and facilitate their return to the traditional high school or graduation with us. To prepare

> students for life after high school both academically, behaviorally and socially.

Some principals specifically mentioned college in their statement.

> All students will graduate from high school on time and be prepared with the skills necessary to be successful in college and/or the work force.

Others avoided specific outcomes related to college or career.

> To help those that the system failed. To inspire the "love of learning." To provide a safe learning environment, to motivate students to be the best they can be and accept responsibility for their actions. To make all students agents of positive transformation in their community.

Though most mission statements were careful to avoid commitment to transitioning students to college, principals were more definitive when asked if building a college-going culture is feasible for continuation schools. Seventeen participants responded to the question. Fifteen responded in the affirmative, one thought it wasn't, and one gave a neutral response. Responses were emphatically affirmative. Respondents indicated that it was necessary to build such a culture and that it takes a concerted effort of the faculty and staff to be successful.

> It is feasible. It is necessary to have the correct staff (mainly teachers) on board to do so. Many districts place weaker teachers at C schools and that practice needs to be changed so that all C schools have the best teachers in the business. Any school program or focus is only as good as the teaching staff in place. Also...the parents/families absolutely will need more support than the average comprehensive high school parent.

It was clear from the survey responses that principals recognize the importance of college readiness for their students and believe that building college-going cultures are possible. It was unclear, however, whether principals had achieved success in these areas at their schools.

Analysis of the Nine Principles of College Going Culture at Each School

In this section I report findings for each of the nine principles of college going principles as were evident from principal interviews, school walk-throughs and document analysis. Each of the principles are defined by the parameters defined by Dr. Patricia McDonough (1997) as presented by MacDonald and Dorr (2006).

College Talk.

Clear, ongoing communication about college so all students develop a college-going identity. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

Four of the principals spoke confidently about their school's deliberate attempts to foster a college-going culture through college talk and having high expectations for students. They communicate to students, mobilize the faculty, and communicate with parents. At two schools where the college going emphasis was pervasive, principals reported that teachers regularly facilitated discussions about college in their classrooms. All discussions around academic planning and preparation for graduation included discussions about planning for post-secondary education. Two principals reported that students were only likely to experience college-talk if they initiated such conversations with teachers themselves, and that teachers would not explicitly drive conversations with all students. Three principals expressed frustration with ineffective or reluctant staff who were discouraged by unrealistic expectations for students or more immediate realities of managing student behavior and combating pressing behavioral, social, and academic deficits.

Emphasis on college talk was further evidenced by the décor at three schools. College decorations reflected overt attempts to send a college-going message to students. Van Buren High School had a UCLA display in the assistant principal's office, which was clearly an individual display of pride for an alma mater, but it provided some recognition of college emphasis. Adams High School and Jefferson High School had large displays of college pennants throughout the main offices that serve as Washington reminders to students and parents about college. Two schools made use of the school website to communicate a college-going message to students and parents.

I was able to observe an assembly at Jefferson High School, where the principal addressed the entire student body. She delivered affirmations to students in the form of certificates for most improved, most work completed, and courses completed. She addressed positive attendance rates, and announced upcoming visits to the local community college and the scheduling of placement test. This was a clear example of the principal setting an example not only for the students, but for the faculty and staff. College preparation became the basis for academic achievement, and she made clear that she assumed all students were on a path toward college.

Clear Expectations.

> Explicit goals of college preparation must be defined and communicated clearly, consistently, and in a variety of ways by families and school personnel. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

All principals indicated that discussions about future goals occurred upon entry to the school through orientation meetings with counselors, though it was not clear that students all students received clear expectations for becoming college ready. All students meet with a counselor to develop a class schedule and academic plan, at which time they discuss student

goals and develop an academic plan to support the goal. At four of the seven schools, principals reported that students only continue to receive college counseling services if they seek it themselves.

Three principals expressed confidence that the faculty and staff carry forward the expectation for college readiness with students. Principal James spoke highly of her faculty and staff and is convinced of their collective effectiveness in developing a school-wide focus on student achievement, and Principal Franklin also utilizes her faculty and staff to push the college message to students. She has trained all her teachers to work with students on college planning. Students maintain a course completion worksheet that clearly identifies what courses they've complete toward graduation and toward college eligibility. Teachers assist students with maintaining the sheets, reflecting on work completed, and planning next steps. Her elective teachers are charged with bringing college representatives and industry professionals to speak to the students about college and career planning with an emphasis in the importance of college in the career path.

> We are mindful that not all students want to attend to college, so our job is to also put them in a position to either enroll into a trade school or land a good job or things of that nature. So, we try to push all facets of it. (Franklin, October 26)

Schools implement formal structures to deliver information about college, such as college planning classes and advisory periods. One principal developed a college-planning elective that guided students through the process of preparing for college, college admissions, and financing college. The principal ultimately canceled the course when an ineffective teacher was not inspiring for students, and the principal feared it would have an adverse impact on the students' likelihood of pursuing higher education. This emphasized the importance of developing a school culture where all teachers believe in their students' ability to be successful in college and in their

ability to motivate and influence them to pursue higher education. Faculty personalities play a role in their ability to influence students positively. Two principals described advisory periods where teachers have time to mentor and guide students, including guidance about college. One principal described her need to develop scripts for the advisory that she expected her teachers to read verbatim, as she did not have confidence in their ability or desire to provide college guidance to students.

Information and Resources.

> Students must have access to up-to-date, comprehensive college information and schools must build college knowledge infrastructures. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

Schools typically had information available to students in the counselors' office for students who sought it. Schools also disseminated information through college planning classes or advisory periods. Information that was provided was generally limited to information about the local community college or trade schools including registration dates, field trips, and placement tests. Three schools, Adams, Jefferson, and Van Buren High School, actively provided information about planning for four-year colleges and universities. Two made use of their websites to disseminate information to students and parents. One school website includes the following introductory message:

> Welcome to Jefferson High School. We are a continuation high school located in the Rocky Mountain Unified School District. Jefferson is WASC accredited and offers UC approved courses enabling graduates to be eligible for the CSU/UC system. Jefferson High School has been awarded the prestigious Model Continuation High School and Exemplary Program Recognition Awards from the California Continuation Education Association and the California Department of Education. Recently, JHS received the

2013 Alliance For Healthier Generation Bronze National Recognition Certification; the first California continuation high school to receive this award.

The website includes a comprehensive slide show of the College and Career Parent Night presentation. The presentation covered college entrance requirements, planning for college readiness, financial information, the role of the student and the parent, applying to college, an explanation of the California college system, and reasons to go to college. The website for Van Buren College included links to information about California colleges and financial aid and scholarship information.

Schools that provide information for students about all possible avenues for higher education are signaling to students that the school believes they can be successful at higher levels. While many students may opt for a trade school or continuation school, there is value in the message students receive that the schools believes in the ability of the student to achieve at high levels.

Comprehensive Counseling Model.

All counselors are college counselors and all student interactions with counselors are college-advising opportunities. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

I found that schools typically had only one counselor to manage a wide array of counseling responsibilities, including academic planning and monitoring, social and emotional counseling, monitoring of individualized education plans, managing peer conflicts, and college and career planning. Administrators share in these responsibilities, but typically college counseling is reserved for students who seek it. In two schools college counseling and advisement was a collective responsibility of faculty and staff, in which cases college counseling and advisement reached all students.

Testing and Curriculum.

> Students must be informed about necessary tests, must be given the opportunity to prepare for these tests, and testing fees must be taken into account. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

An indicator that a school is making clear efforts to make college an option is the availability of UC approved courses. Because students who attend continuation schools are credit-deficient and require accelerated coursework, continuation schools offer courses that are not typically approved by the UC system as courses that satisfy college entrance requirements. Presumably due to little demand from students and parents for access to such classes, continuation schools generally do not seek to have courses meet UC requirements. Schools that take the necessary steps to offer courses that satisfy UC requirements do so to make certain that students who attend the continuation school will not be precluded from a 4-year college. Adams, Washington, Jefferson, and Madison all had courses that are UC approved. Lab Science courses were absent from all schools due to facility limitations, and higher level math (Algebra 2 or higher) was only available through some form of concurrent enrollment in other programs. Providing college prerequisite coursework is a challenge in an environment where students have to accelerate coursework and fill in gaps that exist in their learning. While UC approved courses are necessary prerequisites for admission to any UC or CSU, they are significant even for students who pursue community college or trade school. The presence of UC approved courses signals to students that the school believes in the student's ability to pursue college.

When it came to college testing, community college placement testing was offered to students, but little else. Six of the seven schools worked with a community college liaison to arrange early registration and placement testing for students. No schools that I visited offered the PSAT, PLAN, ACT, or SAT or any preparation courses. However, schools that communicated effectively with connected comprehensive high schools informed students about those exam

opportunities. This is a missing component for schools that are truly pushing a college readiness agenda.

Faculty Involvement.

Faculty must be active, informed partners with counselors, students, and families and professional development must be available. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

I found that the level of faculty involvement directly correlates to the prominence of the college going culture. Where principals reported motivated faculty who are united in their belief that the continuation school can prepare students for college, there was a greater degree of academic rigor and evidence of college-going culture. Three principals spoke with confidence and admiration of their faculty and staff, while other principals expressed frustration with ineffectiveness or reluctance of teachers. In order to develop faculty and staff groups who buy in to the vision and actively engage in increasing expectations for students, principals must be effective leaders who cultivate the vision and develop faculty to support students in their academic and college knowledge development.

Family Involvement.

Family members must have opportunities to gain college knowledge and understand their role. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

While all principals recognized the importance of mobilizing the faculty and staff to carry forward support for students to be successful in continuing education, there was little evidence that principals viewed parents and family as an important asset to team with for supporting students in preparation for college. Only one principal actively attempted to include parents in the college readiness process by conducting regular parent group meetings. The other principals recognized that parents of continuation schools were often ill-equipped to support students and

many times were more of a barrier than an asset. Parents are required to attend the initial intake meeting for students at schools, but beyond the poorly attended back-to-school and open house night events conducted twice per year, little is done to include parents in the educational process. The lack of parental involvement is an impediment to developing a college-going culture.

> We have not . . . we've not had much luck bringing parents in for much of anything. We push it hard for Back to School Night and Open House, and we get a pretty decent turn-out. But, we find that we do better if we just target things like that to the kids. (Carey, October 18)

Schools must engage parents if they are to provide comprehensive support and guidance for students to attend college or high education of any sort. Students will likely require the support of parents as they make transitions to post-secondary education. Students will be at a disadvantage if their parents have no orientation to college structures.

College Partnerships.

> There should be active links between K-12 schools and local colleges and universities that can lead to field trips, college fairs, and academic enrichment programs. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

Partnerships between continuation high schools and colleges are further indicators of efforts to establish a college-going culture. While no schools reported active relationships with any four year colleges or universities, I found that students receive counseling at all schools regarding continuing education at the local community college after high school. Adams, Jackson, Washington, Van Buren, Jefferson, and Monroe coordinate registration and placement testing with the local community college. Adams High School actively coordinates concurrent enrollment with the local community college. Where partnerships were strong with the

community college, there were field trips for students to tour the college, register, and take the placement exam. Communication between the community college and the continuation school can yield important data about the enrollment patterns of continuation school students post-graduation. One principal produced a report he received from a community college that listed former students and their enrollment status in the current semester. Such data can inform principals and schools about their students' trajectories, and inform decisions about their college advising process.

Articulation.

> Students should have a seamless experience from Kindergarten through HS graduation, with ongoing communication among all schools in a feeder group, and work at one school site should connect with activities at other levels. (McClafferty et al, 2002)

No schools indicated that any progress had been made in coordinating and aligning curriculum, student expectations, or instruction among continuation schools and colleges. There was evidence that strong communication and collaboration with feeder high schools influenced the academic experiences of continuation school students. Two schools described collaborative relationships with the comprehensive high schools they partnered with where teachers from the continuation school collaborated with teachers from the comprehensive high schools on a regular basis, resulting in common student outcomes and essential standards for instruction. For those schools, principals indicated that they believed the instruction was stronger as a result of collaboration that occurred between the continuation high school teachers and the comprehensive high school teachers. Principals reported that teachers operated more like teachers of the comprehensive high school by delivering engaging lessons that focused on critical skill development.

Other Major Findings

Principal experience. Each principal provided accounts of his or her personal, educational, and professional experiences that led to their role as a continuation school principal. Through their accounts I identified the experiences that they perceived most prepared them for their role as a continuation school principal and shaped their views and expectations for their students. The accounts of principals revealed three areas of focus: experience that prepared administrators to provide an individualized educational program based on the wide array of student needs at a continuation school, understanding and response to the challenges students face inside and outside of school, and a recognition that the school system can both work in the favor of and at times against students.

In my analysis, I found that behavior management is a significant role of the continuation school principal. Principals discussed their personal and professional experiences that brought them to understand the experiences and challenges of continuation school students and those factors that contribute to behavior. Three principals identified themselves as being at-risk in high school, and as such indicated that they personally identified with the students in their schools and understood their needs. Six of the seven principals had professional experience overseeing discipline in dean and/or assistant principal roles at comprehensive high schools. The one who had not been a disciplinarian had experience implementing professional development for teachers in juvenile court schools.

Continuation school principals are often selected for their experience working in the area of student discipline. Administrators have to be prepared to work with behaviorally challenged students, which requires them to understand the various causes of negative behavior and most effective strategies for managing student behaviors. Principals described experiences overseeing student discipline at comprehensive high schools and expressed frustration with the lack of effective structured support for those students most at-risk. In their roles in the office of

discipline in the comprehensive high school, administrators dealt with at-risk student absenteeism, drug abuse, repeated disciplinary referrals, suspensions from school, expulsions, and even incarceration. In the large environment of the comprehensive high school, those students did not receive the attention they required to adequately treat students. While those same issues are present in the continuation school environment, the small school structure and individualization is more conducive to improving student behaviors. Where there were feelings of hopelessness and an inability to adequately intervene in the large school settings, principals expressed that the continuation school environment was more effective in providing adequate supports and interventions. In the smaller school environment, students can receive individualized attention to closely monitor student behavior and work to for student success.

All principals identified the need to develop individual plans and programs for students. Three principals likened the process to an individualized education plan (IEP) similar to those in special education programs. Two principals had prior experience teaching special education, which they identified as being highly valuable for their approach to both academic and behavioral issues. In special education a team of teachers, counselors, administrators, parents, and the student come together to identify personalized goals—behavioral and academic, and develop an individualized education plan to reach those goals. This team effort is valuable because it is focuses on developing a plan based on the needs of each individual student. Principal Knight describes how her experience with special needs students equipped her to recognize negative student behavior as a possible manifestation of academic deficiencies.

> The whole point is that you work from—you first have a diagnostic viewpoint, and then work from there. And you're always working on the strengths and weaknesses of the child, and conscious of it. (Knight, November 8)

Principals recognized that negative behaviors are often a manifestation of academic deficiencies and frustrations that come from a student's inability to be successful in the classroom. Students who are academically challenged because of gaps in their education may have difficulty understanding instruction, curricular materials, or with keeping up with the pace of the class. Those students without coping mechanisms react poorly, often appearing obstinate or defiant. Administrators who have not had experience working strategically with students who are learning disabled or who have substantial learning gaps may not recognize that the behaviors are a manifestation of poor academic performance, and thereby take a purely punitive approach to addressing student behaviors, which only serves to further the divide between the student and the educational process. Students are better served when administrators and faculty identify barriers to student academic success and build individualized education plans that build on student strengths and weaknesses. Administrators who have backgrounds working with special education populations are better equipped to approach continuation school student education and behavior, as they are well versed in providing a targeted and flexible individualized education plan for each student that is responsive to student need, varying the level levels of support and rigor as the student progresses. The administrator and faculty examine all of the contributing factors to student behavior and performance and treat each student based on their strengths and weaknesses. In addition to experience in student discipline and special education, principals considered how their personal experiences in high school contributed to their perspectives and understanding of students in continuation schools.

When asked what aspect of their background or experience most prepared them for their role as principal, three principals recognized that their experience in high school played a significant role in their perspectives on education for at-risk students. Principal Franklin is a non-nonsense principal who was an experienced coach, special education teacher, and dean of

discipline; still she attributed her personal experience growing up with a single mother in tough neighborhoods as what provided her with the most insight into the lives of her students. She described growing up as a teenager around peers in gangs and becoming entangled in gang life before her mother had to intervene and remove her from a negative path. Her experience seems to assist her understand the outlook and lifestyle of many of her students, but also provides a reference point for how students can transcend that lifestyle and path as she did. When she works with students who are struggling with such issues, she is able to speak to them about her own experiences and gains credibility with them. She speaks to her students as one who has firsthand knowledge and experience with the same challenges they face, and can speak to the potential of how to overcome the negative influences in their lives. As important as understanding the influences that contribute to poor student performance is the belief that students can overcome their challenges and academic deficiencies and be successful in school is imperative for continuation school principals.

In order to improve student behavior, students must be engaged by the instruction and curriculum of the school. Principal James at Adams High School explained that behavioral issues are often caused by a lack of challenge and engagement in the school curriculum. She described her experience as an ill behaved and poor performing student in high school. After completely shutting down in the comprehensive high school, her parents found a private school with a small school setting for her to attend. Ultimately, she found that the primary contributing factor to her performance was the prior school's inability to engage her. Principal James describes her experience in public high school.

I was incredibly bored. The teachers were teaching things that I had read a hundred times . . . and you would think that in OV you'd have a really good educational system, but it

was extremely mediocre, and there was no respect for kids, and there was no understanding of kids who learned a different way. (James, November 18)

After poor performance and defiant behavior, Principal James transferred to a private prep school.

> And, all of the sudden my life changed. I mean, it was huge; small classes, lots of what would be construed as the common core today. There were no multiple-choice tests. Everything was an essay test. Everything was interdisciplinary and connected. . . . And we did interactive projects. We had to really think deeply, and we had to defend what our thoughts were. And so, that was the first time I really saw what a quality education could be—a high-class quality education. (James, November 18)

In the private school environment, Principal James emerged in every aspect, engagement in school, good behavior, high performance, and community service. She had a firsthand account of how an engaging school experience impacts student success. That experience is a basis for her belief that continuation school students can experience success in much the same way that she experienced success in the private school. She exhibited a high degree of belief in her students' ability to succeed in post-secondary education. Her demonstrated efforts to establish a college-going culture in her school expressed a connection and understanding of the chaos that exists in many students' lives. She described her own experience in a family that was unstable and unstructured and indicated that it was extremely helpful for her to relate to her students.

> I get these kids. I get what it's like to need a smaller learning environment where you're treated with respect and where people see your possibilities and your capabilities and push you forward. (James, November 18)

Principals recognized that the inability of schools to adequately engage students is a significant contributing factor for students losing interest in school and growing behind

academically. Principal Robinson at Van Buren High School pointed to his teaching experience at an inner-city middle school as the experience that helped form his philosophy and approach to supporting at-risk students. He recognized that the students who often end up credit-deficient were not necessarily underprepared for high school. He observed students who left middle school seemingly prepared for high school only to get off track in high school and become at risk for dropping out.

> . . . and they would be in middle school and you'd think this kid has all the potential in the world and they're going to be great, and then you check back in with them in high school in tenth or eleventh grade and it's a completely different story. And so when I went into administration that was always something that I focused on is why do we lose kids? I have a quote from Paulo Freire up there that speaks to what I'm talking about. "In reality we do not have children who drop out of school for no reason at all as if they just decided not to stay. What we do have are conditions at school that either prevent them from coming to school or prevent them from staying in school." (Ross, October 11)

Principal Robinson went on to express the importance of continuation school experiences that engage students and teachers who build positive relationships with students. In this context, Principal Robinson suggests that many students have the necessary foundational skills and the right environment will re-engage students and put them back on a path toward higher education.

Challenges of continuation school students. Each principal was asked to describe the common situations that lead to students moving to the continuation school setting. Principals discussed factors that lead to deficiencies. They identified family structures, drug abuse, life disruptions and trauma, as well as an educational system that has not properly served students who are off track, and impede students' ability to progress toward college.

Principals repeatedly described challenged families, broken families, and dramatic changes to the family system as factors that lead to students being at-risk. Principal Knight at Jackson High School described how broken family structures result in an achievement gap for students. Students without strong parental supervision and support often come to school while dealing with family-related stress, or without adequate food or clothing or having slept well the night before. Those students are at a disadvantage compared to students who come from a balanced and supportive family. Some are born into family situations where either the parents were homeless, dealing with substance abuse, domestic violence, incarceration, or simply absent from the child's life. The disadvantage results in a gap in academic proficiency that continues to widen as the student moves through the grades, and by high school they are unable to be successful.

Principal Franklin pointed to disrupted family structures as well. Single parent households and students living with family members other than the parent is common. In single-family households where the mother is consumed with all aspects of maintaining and supporting the family, a phenomenon occurs where the son assumes the role of the man of the house and begins to behave without respect for the mother's parental authority. Students who are living with grandparents or other relatives due to disrupted homes, such as parents who are incarcerated, deceased, drug addicted, or otherwise can also contribute to students who disengage from school. Some students are also impacted by their own substance abuse problems. Such disruptions are traumatic for students and can interrupt their education.

Principals recognized how trauma disrupts a student's education and results in temporary failure that requires intervention. Commonly, the trauma is associated with changes in the family structure, such as divorce, death, incarceration, drug abuse, etc. Sometimes the trauma that students experience seems insurmountable.

> I think of [Calvin] who both of his parents died on the same day in December. Mom overdoses on prescription drugs, and his Step-Dad had a heart attack, and here he is trying to give CPR both of them. He's got a three-year-old sister running around, and both of his parents died. I mean—they died. . . . He's doing well now. We had to do a lot of intervention to make sure he got the therapeutic support he needed. (James, November 18).

In some areas, such disruptions in the lives of students are not confined to a single family. Continuation schools are often charged with serving the needs of entire communities that face challenges. Dr. Carey at Washington High School serves a largely migrant population. Currently, he serves students who come from war-torn countries such as Syria. Students may have come from highly unstable and disruptive circumstances. Families are fragmented due to the war. Students may have observed violence or even still have family members who remain unsafe. Those factors have an impact on the learning environment and the ability of students to be successful.

For some students, the comprehensive high school model is simply not a good fit. Two principals recognized that the comprehensive high school system was unable to adequately serve all students. Principal Ross had a critical view of the K-12 system.

> I think the answer to that goes like this; you're a doctor. You're working in the cancer ward. Well, you see the cancer patients. Continuation schools serve the students who have cancer from an educational system that ignored them, allowed it to fester, and they completely failed in every aspect. So, when they come to you they are damaged—a tsunami of ignorance. 7, 8, 9, years of frustration—futility. And you can add all the adjectives—poverty, gang-relations, violence, drug addiction. Nonsense. The reality is they have never understood the educational setting. (Ross, October 11)

Principal Ross is critical of the education system that was ineffective if educating the students who ultimately transfer to continuation schools. His quote suggests that the burden of intervention and preparation of at-risk students for a college education lays with all schools that serve the students. The movement of students to the continuation school environment reflects a failure of the comprehensive high school and the preceding schools to adequately reach the students, responding to competing influences, and provide successful interventions. By the time students arrive to the continuation school, the deficiencies of skill, confidence, and positive attitudes seem insurmountable.

Re-engaging continuation school students. Through my interviews with continuation school principals, I learned that the primary charge for continuation schools is to re-engage students in their own education. For students who have become accustomed to failure in school, many have given up hope or interest in academic success or advancement. To re-engage students, continuation schools attempt to provide an educational program that is accomplishable, relevant, and of high interest to students.

Before students can be successful, it is necessary to provide intervention for issues that hinder a student's ability to learn in school. Schools commonly combat social and family issues, drug addiction, and gang violence. Students who face substance abuse problems are unable to focus and are often tuned out of school. Principal James discussed her school's approach to drug abuse intervention where they have a program for students with addiction issues. Their program brings former drug addicts to the school to speak with students about the their experiences, the pitfalls of drug abuse, and how to get clean. The program is available to students during the day and in the evenings. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that they are working with people who have no criminal records and school counselors participate in the sessions, but despite the obvious concerns of bringing recovering addicts into the school setting, the administration

believes that the experience has a break-through effect with many students. While students may self-refer or participate voluntarily, they may also be referred after being caught with marijuana, alcohol, or other drugs. The school cooperates with the local Sheriff's Department which may allow students the opportunity to avoid establishing a criminal record by participating in a joint drug intervention education program with the school's drug intervention program. The school also uses the program as an alternative to suspension. Principal James believes that suspensions and criminal charges will only lead students to be pushed out of the school system and into the criminal justice system. She prefers an approach that offers appropriate consequences and support for her students.

After addressing what may be in the way of learning, schools need to get students interested in school again. Continuation schools work to provide electives that are of high interest to students that are also relevant. These might include music classes, career exploration, and graphic design courses. Principal Ross spoke at length about the need to spark interest in students and get them excited about school. His approach was to identify what was of high interest to students and to connect their studies to their interests. This is the opposite of the approach in conventional studies where students learn concepts in an academic manner and later identify how it can be applied in real life. He described it as "life to text, not text to life." The ultimate goal is to help students understand how their education is valuable to them in the world outside of school. Principal Ross describes the program at Madison High School where students are able to earn high school credits for interning in the community. He asserts that his approach provides the context necessary for students to connect their academic learning in real world contexts. He describes how a struggling math student learned to value mathematics.

> A young man hates mathematics [and] really struggles with the Algebra class, doesn't want to participate, and came to us from an environment where he failed miserably. . . .

> Every one of our students has an internship. That means one day or two that they are not on campus at all. They're out in the real world, what we call real world learning. So in this case, this young man went to an auto-shop and asked, can I do an internship here? . . . So, what happened to this kid was he went to the auto-shop and they're doing a brake adjustment. Well, to calibrate the brakes requires mathematics. The very next day he comes to school and he runs to the math teacher who he had problems with, says, you know, I need to know how to do this, so I can calibrate these brakes. Bam. Life to text. Not, text to life. And it happens over and over. (Ross, October 11)

This quote from Principal Ross demonstrates his strategies for engaging students in the curriculum by making the material relevant and connecting their education with real life experiences. When students recognize a value in the material, they are more likely to be motivated to learn. Positive adult relationships are as important as relevant instruction.

In order for the school to be able to effectively provide interventions, make instruction meaningful, or deliver high interest curriculum, they must also provide an environment where students can build positive rapports with adults. While engagement is dependent on the curriculum and model of instruction, all of the principals identified the need to provide a nurturing environment where students are able to make positive connections with students. Principal Franklin at Jefferson High School attributes the re-engagement of students to the relationships students are able to build with adults in a mutually respectful environment. She attributes the strong performance of her students and high attendance rates to the relationships her students have with the adults on campus.

> Even at Jefferson, we have a 94% attendance rate. Which is even much higher than most traditional high schools. And to me, I believe it's because of the nurturing environments

we have here, the collaborative environments, the collegial environments. Students know that they are respected, but they must give respect back. (Franklin, October 26)

Principals repeatedly discussed the need for a school culture where every adult is purposeful about developing positive rapports with students. It is often a lack of positive adult support that results in the student failure to begin with. Students who do not have strong family support structures or functional, consistent, or supportive adults in the home are likely to struggle in school.

By and large the common student who doesn't have those support mechanisms in place falls by the wayside, and hence, you have the dropout rates, the disengagement, the discipline, the violence, the focus on sports. I mean, think about it. (Ross, October 11)

Principals consistently expressed their belief that the primary motivation for students to continue trying even after they have experienced failure is the relationships they have with the adults on campus. This applies to all adults in the school: teachers, administrators, counselors, security officers, custodial staff, and cafeteria workers. There must be a welcoming environment where students believe that the adults support them. With support of adults on campus who express belief in the students' ability to succeed, those students can begin to build confidence in themselves and aspire to succeed in school.

So, it's within a culture of relationships that I think this transformation takes place. (James, November 18)

Remediation, acceleration, and college preparation. The structures for instruction were surprisingly different from school to school. The state requires students to attend school 15 hours per week, 3 hours per day, so schools typically offer students four 45 minute classes each day. Two schools actually had students take six classes each day. The other schools limited students to four classes, and then offered additional coursework only if students demonstrated

that they were productive in their assigned classes. In larger schools, there are staggered start times, and in the largest school, Adams, the day was split in half with a morning session and an afternoon session. Adams also has a night school option, and like most alternative schools, has an independent study option.

Most schools also have an independent study option where students can work from home and are expected to come to school for fewer hours during the week. The different options or models accommodate students who have other commitments, such those who have to work or who are already parents. Typically, before students are able to take advantage of an independent study program, they first have to prove in the continuation school that they are ready for the responsibility. Students must demonstrate that they can maintain positive attendance, complete coursework effectively and on time, and have positive behavior. Students who demonstrate these qualities are allowed to have independent study classes. However, some of the alternative options, such as independent study, are available to students to ensure their own safety. Students with gang affiliations who have enemies jeopardize their own safety and the safety of others. For those students, independent study may be the only safe option. Some students find themselves in positions where not even school is safe to attend.

> . . . so many gangs were after them we had to put them, it was almost like the witness protection program. It wasn't safe for them to be on campus. (James, November 18)

A common criticism of continuation schools is that the model for acceleration sacrifices rigor. How is it possible to achieve mastery in content areas or prepare students for the rigors of college? Principal Franklin asserts that the assessment for mastery stands up to the assessments in the comprehensive high schools. At her school students can earn credits at twice the rate they can in a comprehensive high school. She indicates that the assessments provided in the continuation school are as rigorous as the comprehensive high school, and unlike the

comprehensive high school, students must demonstrate adequate mastery before being able to move to the next learning target. Not only does this allow students to move at their own pace, but it ensures that they actually understand concepts before being required to move on to the next topic, which is often the case in a comprehensive school settings where all students must move to the next chapter or unit regardless of whether they actually learned the previous objective or not. Those students who perform efficiently are able to increase their workloads and move through the learning targets at faster rates and earn the right to take home coursework to complete on their own time.

Principal Houston expects that her students should be able to complete a semester course in a 10-week period (the equivalent of a quarter at the comprehensive high school). She believes there is substantial time wasted in the comprehensive classroom and that focused individual attention to the material in the continuation school is comparable to the concentrated attention to content in the traditional classroom. She expects that teachers waste a substantial amount of time in class management and organization, and that the core instruction and learning that takes place is not vastly different from the amount of time students spend on task in the continuation school environment.

While administrators were consistent in their beliefs that the continuation school model can be an adequate vehicle for effectively covering the content and learning targets required for completing graduation requirements, there was disparity in their confidence in the quality and rigor of instruction. In three of the schools principals reported a strong professional culture where teachers worked together to clarify essential learning targets and to continually develop instructional strategies, assessments, and interventions to improve the learning outcomes for students. Other principals were less confident in the effectiveness of some teachers. One principal expressed her unwillingness to submit her courses for UC approval until she had

greater confidence in the rigor of the content and effectiveness of her instructors. Principal Robinson was also candid about the rigor at his school.

> We're looking at what rigor looks like right now. I would say that it's not rigorous, quite honestly. And, I think that what prepares them for college best is being an independent learner. That's the direction. Like, our kids walk out of here and they know how to do stuff on their own, because they've had to sort of you know—nobody's babysitting them to get everything done. (Robinson, December 6)

Still, there was evidence that some schools were holding their students to high expectations. During my walks through classrooms there was clear evidence in two of the schools of coordinated efforts to teach and assign writing across all classes. All classrooms had writing rubrics posted for students to see. Even math classrooms had bulletin boards displaying student work exemplifying writing exercises around mathematical concepts. Classroom walls at one high school had evidence of a coordinated writing project. At Adams High School, I was able to observe in every classroom lessons that featured writing lessons and direct instruction. This was not clear at the other schools from my observations, but every principal discussed how the implementation of Common Core was expected to yield changes in how each class is taught with an increased emphasis on skill development rather than content coverage. At Adams High School, one would not be able to differentiate the classes from a comprehensive high school. Classes were taught using a mix whole group instruction strategies and independent practice work. Learning objectives were clear in every classroom, and there appeared to be high levels of student engagement.

Results

The most immediate impacts of the efforts of continuation schools is evident in high school graduation rates. As reported by the California Department of Education, the schools I examined have the reported graduation rates as shown in Table 1.

Table 4.1

2013 Graduation Rates as Reported by the CDE (2013)

School	2013 Graduation Rate (%)
Washington	87.22
Adams	90.00
Jackson	88.62
Van Buren	87.33
Monroe	Unavailable (last reported 2011-85.4
Madison	Unavailable
Jefferson	90.00

These graduation rates surpass the average graduation rate in California in 2013, which is reportedly 78.54% (CDE, 2014). According to continuation school principals, these numbers may not completely capture all of their students. Principals exercise every option for ensuring that their students obtain a diploma or the equivalent. Students may transfer to an adult school program for a diploma that requires fewer credits, moving them into an independent study program, or or work toward a general equivalency diploma (GED) equivalent. The moving of students into alternative means of graduation is not always reflected in the school's graduation rate and, therefore, in some instances, students may be completing at a higher rate than what is reported.

No principal utilized a method for tracking students' college enrollment after high school. Though the principals had indicated on the survey that they believed their students were enrolling in college after high school, there was no formal measure of how many, where, and to what extent they succeeded or persisted. One principal expressed her belief in her students' ability to persist and some anecdotal evidence that some students were actually succeeding…

We have to raise the expectations. If we keep the expectations low, students will do the minimum amount. If we raise the expectations much higher, they will rise to that. Maybe not all, but the majority of students will rise to that challenge, and that is what our staff has seen over the years with our students. They have risen to that challenge. Many of our students are doing well, it's even funny because many colleges call us and say, my God, your student is doing so well here, they are exemplary, you know, please send us more students like this. For students who come from continuation high schools, that tells me one thing: that they are resilient people. They are able to bounce back. They've experienced some form of failure, and they were able to bounce back from that. . . . It's one thing I can say about continuation high school students—the majority of them, they are very resilient people and they are able to bounce back through all type of circumstances or what not. That's the beauty of it. (Franklin, October 26)

Conclusions: Key Findings

I collected data to address four research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?
2. What counseling supports exist in continuation schools to help students prepare for a college experience?
3. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?
4. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals foster a college-going culture in their schools?

In Chapter 5, I present a discussion around the findings for each question.

Research question 1. Principals who experienced similar challenges as continuation school students in their own lives expressed greater confidence in their students to be successful in post-secondary education. Their ability to overcome the obstacles and succeed provided the personal knowledge and understanding of the obstacles, and the confidence that overcoming such obstacles is possible. The professional experiences of principals working with at-risk youth influence their expectations for students as well. Principals who previously worked in setting where students successfully overcame such challenges are more likely to have confidence in their students' ability to overcome. Conversely, administrators who have only worked in models where students were unsuccessful spoke with less confidence about their students' likelihood of success.

Research question 2. Continuation schools typically have a counselor that is responsible for all aspects of student guidance including behavior monitoring and intervention, academic planning, college and career planning, and responding to students' psycho-social needs. Principals who prioritize post-secondary education for their students organize the entire faculty and staff to provide guidance and use teachers to communicate with students about the college process.

Research question 3. It is a challenge for continuation schools to provide an academic structure that facilitates credit remediation and acceleration while addressing learning gaps and foundational skills and at the same time develop the skills necessary to succeed in college at the entry level. Schools where the faculty believes in their students' ability to learn at high levels and in their own ability to prepare students for post-secondary education establish systems that balance support and intervention with high expectations for student learning and output. Higher performing schools adopt models

that resemble comprehensive high schools in their classroom structures. They blend traditional classroom instruction with independent study. Schools place an emphasis on developing essential skills and work together to develop literacy skills in students. They also ensure that students have access to courses that will qualify students for a 4-year college or university (the courses that meet the UC/CSU A-G requirements).

Research question 4. Even among the principals who reported strong beliefs developing college-going cultures in their schools, few schools exhibit all nine characteristics of strong college-going cultures. The most successful school in developing college-going cultures promoted college talk among all staff, provided clear expectations for students for post-secondary education through the development of an academic plan, made information and resources available to students and parents, provided comprehensive counseling, had high levels of faculty involvement, established college partnerships with the local community college, and had strong articulation with the comprehensive high schools. Those schools also provided curriculum required for students to access college, but did not provide college readiness testing. No schools had established strong systems for family involvement. These schools appear to be the exception. Even among schools that report a desire to develop college-going cultures, it is common for the emphasis in behavior management and high school completion to take priority of any of the aforementioned areas.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

This study captured seven principal perceptions to better understand how the beliefs and practices of principals contribute to the development of college-going cultures at continuation high schools. The previous chapter included the findings from my study and addressed how they related to my research questions. In this chapter I discuss those findings in greater detail. I will examine the implications the findings have for continuation schools and discuss my recommendations for other schools and principals, school districts, and those interested in furthering this research. This chapter concludes with my position that principals must believe that their students can be successful in college and that the principal has the ability to influence their success before they can cultivate a college-going culture in continuation high schools. The ability of the principal to develop a culture among faculty that share the belief in students to be successful in college is crucial. Finally, the establishment of a college-going culture will result in improved performance in continuation schools and increase the chances that students will continue their education. I begin with a review of the purpose of the study.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to assess the experience of continuation school principals, their perceptions and expectations for continuation school students to succeed in college, how they prepare students academically for college, and how they provide guidance for students to prepare them for post-secondary education by establishing a college-going culture at the school. This study explored the experiences and beliefs of continuation school principals and examined their practices relating to promoting college-going culture to identify practices that lead to increased student achievement.

My study was conducted at seven continuation high schools where principals reported college readiness as a priority. I interviewed principals in their offices and toured the school and

classrooms while school was in session and examined materials that the school provided students and parents about the mission of the school in handouts and on the school website. I examined the achievement data about each school that were available through the California Department of Education website. In Chapter 4, I presented the findings from the interviews and observations and the beliefs and practices of principals across schools. The findings enabled me to analyze emerging patterns and themes related to my research questions. The analysis led to the key findings of my study.

The principal as a transformational leader. College-going cultures can be established in continuation schools when principals are appropriately experienced, believe that students can be successful, and have the attributes of a transformational leader. Principals who effectively articulate a vision, develop faculty and staff, inspire faculty and staff, and model ethical behavior are more likely to make progress in transforming school culture and increase student achievement and readiness for post-secondary education.

Principals themselves must believe that students can become college ready at the continuation school before a college-going culture can be developed. I found that principals were more likely to assert such beliefs when they had personal experiences overcoming challenges that resembled challenges faced by continuation school students. Principals who overcame obstructions to their own education identified with their students and had greater confidence in their abilities to succeed. Principal communications with students about expectations were more authentic. When school leaders transmit authentic messages to students, parents, and staff, they are more likely to be believed, and they are then empowered to inspire and motivate. Authenticity is a pre-requisite for transforming school culture.

Administrators who have not had personal experiences that are relatable to their students develop beliefs and expectations through professional experience. Principal Knight, who could

not relate her own experience with that of her students, expressed empathy and understanding of the problems faced by continuation school students and expressed that it was unlikely that her students would be successful in college because continuation school students tended to perform poorly on the placement test. She believed that the learning gap started early in life and that the chasm was too wide to overcome by the time they reached the continuation school. Accordingly, there was little evidence of college-going culture, emphasis on college readiness, academic rigor, or comprehensive college counseling. Instead, there was a greater emphasis placed on personal support, student engagement through high interest electives, and vocational training.

Principals whose schools reflected higher degrees of college-going focus exhibited qualities of transformational leaders. Those principals spoke with conviction about the mission to prepare students for college setting forth a clear and inspiring vision. Faculty and staff bought in to the vision, but their effectiveness in carrying the work forward relied on having leaders who listen, is supportive, and empowers faculty and staff to make decisions and be creative. Such was the case at these schools, where there was a clear emphasis on college readiness and faculty and staff worked collectively to further the mission of the school.

Developing a college-going culture in continuation high schools.

College talk. Continuation school students need to learn how the college system works, understand the prerequisites for attending, be inspired to pursue college, and see themselves as college material. To accomplish this, students must experience college talk at every opportunity. This is a task that must be shared in by all faculty and staff. Adams and Jefferson reported successful efforts to make college talk part of the culture of the schools. They reported high rates of faculty buy-in. College decorations and pennants that were evident throughout the campus were visible symbols of the schools' efforts to promote college to students. Washington, Monroe, and Jackson all reported efforts to establish a class or advisory period that would provide a

structure for such conversations with students; however, Washington and Monroe both reported that lack of teacher buy-in and teacher personalities hindered the success of the models. This underscores the importance of a collective belief and buy-in of the faculty and staff in the ability of students to succeed in college to successfully develop a college-going culture.

Clear expectations. Students must receive the message early and often that schools believe the student can be successful in college and that they intend to prepare them for post-secondary education. All principals described an induction process during which counselors met with incoming students to discuss student goals and develop their academic plans for high school. College plans inform the high school plan, but schools like Adams and Jefferson with a strong college emphasis provided the expectation that students would be readying themselves for college. When students enter the school with an understanding that college readiness is a priority for the school, there is an acknowledgement that the school believes that student is capable of being college ready, and therefore the student can begin to look at his- or herself as capable of being college ready. When the entire faculty agrees on a mission of preparing students for post-secondary education, the student receives the same message from all adults and is more likely to believe it.

Information and resources. Continuation schools must make college information readily available and must push the information out to students. All schools had a counselor available to students who would provide information about college preparation, financial aid, college testing, and admissions requirements, and handouts and brochures covering such topics were on display in the offices at five of the seven schools. Two schools used the website to make college information accessible. Information is typically disseminated individually to students who seek it. Two schools reported high levels of faculty involvement and the staff disseminates information to all classes and participates in school assemblies that address issues of college

readiness. Three other schools indicated that they use a specific class or advisory period to teach students about college information but did not have confidence in the effectiveness of the classes. The schools that employed a systems approach to outreach were able to get the information to all students. Students are more likely to make use of information and identify available resources regarding college when the school has an actively involved faculty that supports counselors and students by providing guidance regarding college readiness and planning.

Comprehensive counseling model. Counseling is everyone's job in the continuation school setting, and the effectiveness of the counseling for students toward post-secondary education is dependent on a shared mission and staff that are effectively trained to give students tools they need to succeed in higher education. Principals who effectively develop college-going cultures establish a systems approach to college counseling. While schools typically have a person in the role of counselor who provides college advisement, schools that actualize a college-going culture understand that a single person is inadequate to promote college to all students. As the counselor is charged with all aspects of student guidance including behavior monitoring and intervention, academic planning, college and career planning, and responding to students' psycho-social needs, s/he relies on the collective efforts of the faculty to provide consistent guidance that reaches all students. The effort requires all adults who interact with students to counsel and mentor students. All members of the faculty and staff are deputized to provide guidance and advisement about preparing for and navigating college admissions. This manifests through advisory periods where teachers address specific topics related to college, school-wide assemblies, elective classes focusing on college—career planning, parent information nights, and general college promotional information and décor available throughout the school.

While there were varying degrees of focus on college guidance and mentoring, the mission of re-engaging students in education was consistent across all schools. All principals identified the re-engagement of students in school as a prerequisite for influencing college readiness, which requires the collective effort of the faculty and staff. In order to re-engage students in their education, schools work to provide academic structures where students can experience success, provide coursework that students find relevant and interesting, foster relationships with adults where students feel valued, and provide support for the obstacles and challenges that interfere with education, such as drug abuse intervention, anger management, and counseling. Only when students are engaged in school will they be ready to receive guidance to prepare students for continuing education.

Testing and curriculum. Continuation schools that reflect strong beliefs in their ability to prepare students academically for post-secondary education ensure that students have access to college prerequisite courses, focus on skills required for college readiness, and balance the need for credit acceleration with rigorous coursework and instruction that resembles a conventional classroom.

There is little consistency across continuation schools in their instructional delivery. Schools vary widely in the number of courses students take, the duration of courses, the mode of delivery, and the daily schedule. Continuation schools are challenged to make it possible for credit-deficient students to complete coursework at an accelerated rate. Typically, continuation schools provide modified versions of the courses offered in traditional high schools and allow students to work at their own accelerated pace. A criticism of the practice is that the model is designed for courses to be completed quickly and is ineffective in building skills in students. Higher functioning continuation schools successfully integrate conventional classroom instruction with the independent study model and have clearly identified the literacy skill sets

necessary for college readiness that they develop in students. Further, the higher functioning schools provide opportunities for teachers to work together to examine desire student outcomes, establish common assessments, and refine their instruction practices in a collaborative environment.

One indicator of a continuation school's belief in students to persist in post-secondary education is the availability of coursework that is required for college admission to 4-year universities. Few continuation schools offer UC-approved courses to meet requirements for admission to the UC/CSU system. Four of the seven schools I visited offered courses that would be accepted by the UC or CSU system. When such courses are available to students and parents, there is a message that the school is doing the necessary work to provide college-going opportunities to students. Schools that have not undergone the process of qualifying their courses send another message: "We have given up any hope that you are college material, so we have not bothered to provide courses that colleges recognize."

Schools typically work with local community colleges to arrange early registration and placement testing. Other college tests, such as the PSAT, PLAN, ACT, or SAT, are not commonly offered at continuation schools, but students may have access to them at neighboring or feeder high schools. Continuation schools should promote college testing as a means for students to assess their own performance level and to engage in the protocols that lead to college admission.

Faculty involvement. Schools cannot develop college-going culture without the collective efforts of the faculty and staff. Where principals reported concerted efforts to promote college-readiness, there were indicators that the faculty embraced the mission of the school and partnered with the principal and counselors to improve schools systems and strategies for raising student performance and expectations. This relies on school leaders who can inspire, develop,

and stimulate staff, while modeling ethical behaviors that inspire trust. Faculty must have some ownership and investment in the mission of the school, as little progress can be made when faculty and staff are resistant to shifts in school mission. They must be an integral part of developing the mission and strategizing for how to meet objectives.

Family involvement. Even the school that appeared to be the most effective at developing a school-wide college-going culture indicated that working with families was an area of weakness. Only Jefferson expressed a concerted effort to work with parents to inform them about ways to support their students in transitioning to college. The principal indicated that she had facilitated three parent meetings over the course of the previous school year where continuing education was a focus of discussion. The other schools did require parents to attend the initial induction meeting where future plans were discussed but did not have focused meetings with parents beyond that meeting. When parents and family support systems are informed about the requirements and processes of college admission and finance, they are more equipped to support the student, and therefore the student is more likely to successfully transition to college. For schools that embrace the goal of developing a college-going culture, they must provide outreach to parents, an aspect of college-going culture that is absent from the schools that I visited outside of Dr. Franklin's school. The inability or unwillingness of schools to engage families in discussions about college preparation and education about how to navigate the college system is an impediment to establishing a college-going culture.

College partnerships. Partnerships with local colleges increase student opportunities to learn about the college experience and become oriented to procedures for admission. Student transition to college is supported by their orientation to the college admissions process. Principals emphasized relationships with the local community college through liaisons who arranged field trips, early registration, and placement testing. Concurrent enrollment is available

to students, but principals reported that students rarely took advantage of the opportunity. Principals should develop strong visible relationships with their college partners to increase college-going culture on their campuses.

Articulation. Continuation schools increase effectiveness of academic instruction programs when they work in close partnerships with comprehensive high schools. Two schools (Adams and Jefferson) indicated that they worked closely with the comprehensive high schools that students transferred from to develop curriculum and instruction. Both principals described a professional learning community of teachers that the teachers from their school participate in. This allows teachers to clearly develop curriculum and instruction that is driven by agreed upon essential standards, desired outcomes for students, and common assessments. Both principals indicated that the collaboration was beneficial in preparing students who may wish to transfer back to the high school and to be college ready.

Table 5.1

College-Going Principles Interpreted for Continuation High Schools

College-Going Principles	Interpreted for Continuation Schools
College Talk	All students must receive consistent messages from faculty and staff about post-secondary education to affirm student potential for success and to develop a college identity.
Clear Expectations	Students must receive clear and consistent messages that the primary goal for every student is to be prepared to transition to post-secondary education. This message must be consistent from all adults.
Information and Resources	Timely and up-to-date information about continuing education opportunities, requirements, and procedures for admission must be presented to students regularly and in a timely manner.
Comprehensive Counseling Model	All teachers, counselors, and administrators must assume the role of college counselor. All participants must be appropriately trained to be knowledgeable about the college transition experience.
Testing and Curriculum	Continuation schools should provide UC approved courses that meet A-G requirements and challenge students to develop the academic skills necessary for success in college. Students should have access to college testing, including the PSAT, PLAN, PSAT, SAT, EAP, and community college placement exam.
Faculty Involvement	All teachers must buy in to mission of the school to prepare students for continuing education. All faculty and staff must carry forward the message that students have the ability and the goal of being successful in higher education.
Family Involvement	Continuation school administration should team with college partners to provide education to parents about the college going process for students. Information and resources related to post-secondary education should be disseminated to parents early and often.
College Partnerships	Continuation schools should form strong partnerships with local post-secondary schools including CSUs, community colleges, and trade schools. They should work closely with the schools to support students in transition to post-secondary education.
Articulation	Continuation schools should work closely with feeder high schools to align curriculum and instruction and combine college resources including college testing for students.

Conclusions

My main conclusions from my findings from the study are the following:

1. Principals are cautious about overstating their belief that continuation school students would be successful in college. All principals indicated that the students had the ability, but recognized that the challenges they faced diminished the likelihood of college success.
    a. The primary mission of continuation schools as reported by principals is the re-engagement of students in school. Emphasis on college readiness is secondary, and the level of emphasis is dependent on the culture of the faculty and the perception and beliefs of the principal.
    b. Before schools can emphasize college-going culture, they must have adequate systems in place to address challenges students face that interfere with engagement. To address these issues faculty and staff build positive rapports with students, provide counseling to address socio-emotional needs, and provide engaging, relevant, and challenging curriculum and instruction.
    c. Principals who have experience overcoming personal challenges that resemble those experiences of the continuation school students or who have worked in environments where at-risk students were successful are more likely to believe in the ability of their students to overcome the challenges and succeed in high school and college. Such principals are more likely to expect that students will succeed in high school and achieve in college, and foster a school culture that focuses on preparing students for post-secondary education.
2. College counseling in continuation schools is highly limited due to inadequate

counseling resources. To adequately address all student needs, including guidance for college planning and readiness, a systems approach is necessary.

   a. Schools are typically staffed with one counselor who is charged with academic planning and placement, behavior management, psychological, social, and emotional counseling, counseling, and college and career counseling. As a result, the amount of college counseling that can be provided is limited.
   b. A system-wide approach in which the entire faculty and staff provide college counseling services is more effective in increasing student awareness about the benefits of college, process for enrolling, prerequisites, and financial planning for college.

3. To adequately prepare students for college, continuation schools with a college- going emphasis provide students access to courses that meet college entrance requirements and rigorous instruction that effectively builds math and literacy skills necessary for college.
4. Continuation schools that exemplify college-going culture are not typical; however, where principals demonstrate the attributes of transformational leaders, college-going cultures can be developed.

Implications and Recommendations

It is absolutely critical for schools and districts to raise their expectations for continuation school students. Schools and districts must expect more for students, and the urgency with which schools and districts approach continuation school education should be elevated and given attention and resources to re-engage students and prepare them academically for post-secondary education. This requires institutions to invest in highly qualified leaders, teachers, and staff and

provide effective professional develop focused on how to prepare students for post-secondary education.

Implications for principals. Principals can raise the bar for students and develop college-going cultures, but only when they believe in their students' abilities to succeed, communicate a mission of college readiness, and recruit and develop faculty and staff who will partner with principals to create college-going cultures. This begins with the principal's own belief that students can be successful. Principals recognized that continued education beyond high school is imperative for all students, but their belief that students would be successful and that they had the power to influence student success varied. Students have to overcome significant personal, behavioral, emotional, family, and academic challenges to be ready for college, and to adequately serve those students, principals must develop systems that address all student challenges and needs to make them ready for post-secondary education. Success is only possible through the collective efforts of the school faculty and staff who believe the mission of the school is to make student college ready.

Recommendations for principals.

1. Principals should make clear the mission of the school to make students college-ready. The success of the mission is dependent on the principal's ability to communicate that mission and inspire staff embrace the mission. Conduct discussions in faculty meetings about the mission of the school and the belief that the school can be successful in preparing students for college by graduation. The culture can only shift with a collective effort of the faculty and staff.
2. Develop faculty and staff. Principals must act as coaches and mentors to faculty and staff by providing support and investing in professional develop to improve their practice. Teachers require training to identify effective practices for improving

academic instruction. They also require college-knowledge to impart on students. Teachers and staff should receive training about college entrance requirements and pre-requisite skills.

3. Empower faculty to develop support and intervention systems to address student challenges, and implement strategies for improving academic skills. Principals should establish meeting structures that allow teachers to collaborate around these topics both within the continuation high school and with teachers from feeder high schools.
4. With the faculty and staff, evaluate the extent to which the nine principles of college-going culture are implemented effectively at the school. Principals expressed that the principles exist to varying degrees in their schools, but there isn't an intentional approach to comprehensive implementation or evaluation of their effectiveness. With the faculty and staff, identify next steps for increasing the effective implementation of the nine principles of college-going culture.
    a. College Talk—Encourage faculty to host classroom conversations about college as often as possible. Consider strategies for ensuring the conversations occur, such as weekly prompts or ideas for discussions in classrooms.
    b. Clear Expectations—Make clear to everyone—faculty, students, parents, and the community—that the mission of the school is to prepare students for continuing education. Send a consistent message to students of the belief of the school that the student can be successful in higher education, and focus all initiatives with that end in mind.
    c. Information and Resources—Students, parents, and faculty should have ready access to information about college readiness. Teachers should be adequately trained by counselors to present information about college entrance

requirements, college admissions timelines, the financial aid process and timelines, and college testing. Students should have access to this information at multiple points. Information should be provided not only in the office, but in assemblies, announcements, classroom presentations, posters around school, and on the school's website. Parents should also have opportunities to learn about the college admissions process, financial aid, and how they can support their students in transitioning to college. Parent meetings, newsletters, and phone calls are some ways to disseminate such information.

d. Comprehensive Counseling—Students require regular comprehensive counseling about the college-going process. Given the limited resources of continuation schools in the area of counseling, principals should use a systems approach to counseling and utilize administrators and teachers to provide additional counseling to students about college.

e. Faculty Involvement—The successful establishment of a college-going culture is dependent on the collective involvement of faculty and staff. Principals must actively engage the faculty in any efforts to effect cultural change at the school.

f. Family Involvement—Principals should provide information to parents about the college readiness process beginning with the orientation students and parents receive upon enrollment. Information should be continually disseminated through the website, newsletters, and college information meetings. Where possible, parents should be invited to information meetings at the comprehensive high school or community college by the continuation school.

g. College Partnerships—Continuation school principals should work closely with the local community college to provide early registration and placement exams to students, arrange field trips and college visits, and bring the college representative to the school for advisement to students, parents, and staff. Where possible, the college should communicate information such as enrollment patterns and student success rates with the continuation school.

h. Articulation—The continuation school faculty should partner with the comprehensive high school for professional development and collaboration. Teachers should work together to align academic expectations and to examine student outcomes for continued instructional refinement. Both entities should also work with local college to align high school outcomes expectations with college readiness as assessed by the college or university.

i. College Testing—Continuation schools should make college testing and information available to students, such as the American College Testing (ACT), ACT Plan (practice exam), Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), PSAT (SAT practice exam), the Early Assessment Program offered by the California Department of Education for CSU placement, Advanced Placement exams, and college entrance examinations for the local community college.

5. Faculty should establish assessments that measure student readiness for college and use them to assess the effectiveness of instruction. Develop formative assessments that align with college readiness and placement exams in order to accurately assess student academic readiness. The results of the assessments should be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of the instructional program and to guide decisions about the instructional program. Principals should establish regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate and examine instructional and learning objectives, teaching strategies, and measure student learning outcomes. Many continuation schools are small and there is only one teacher per academic content area, which leaves teachers without a partner to collaborate. Principals should arrange for teachers to collaborate with teachers from nearby high schools to examine practice.

Recommendations for school districts. District leaders must view continuation schools as more than institutions for dropout prevention. Schools need to be provided with visionary leaders who have proven effectiveness in cultivating staff and resources for addressing all student needs. As the principals has the greatest influence in leading change at the school, districts should take great care in selecting principals who believe in the ability of students to succeed in higher education.

The most significant finding of this study is an understanding that there is a relationship between the personal and professional experience of principals and their beliefs and expectations of their students' abilities to be successful in college. School districts should examine the beliefs and philosophies of continuation school administrator candidates with attention to how they will foster student readiness for college. School districts should evaluate the candidates' backgrounds and explore how the candidates are able to relate to the experience of continuation school

students. The beliefs of the continuation school principal will have an impact of the culture of the school and the likelihood that a school will adopt a college-going culture.

Recommendations for further research.

The findings of this study suggest questions for further research. Higher performing continuation schools should would be ideal case studies to identify factors that influence higher performing schools in greater detail. While this study only examined the perspective of the principals, there is further need to explore the experiences of students, teachers, staff, and parents to better understand the factors that contribute to effective educational structures for continuation school students. The schools that most reflected a college-going culture, Adams High School and Jefferson High School, are candidates for further research in the form of case studies. These schools may provide further insights into the factors that contribute to college-going cultures in the continuation school environment.

More clarity around student trajectories and college success would come from quantitative study examining college-going rates of continuation school students. There is also a need to follow the paths of students after high school to evaluate the rate at which students are successful in college, and to determine what factors in high school were effective in preparing them for continuing education.

Limitations of the Study

This study was an initial exploration of principal beliefs and practices specific to establishing a college-going culture in continuation high schools. The study was limited by the number of subjects who participated in the study and the limited amount of time spent with each principal and school. The study was also limited in that only principals were interviewed, and there are no perceptions provided from other stakeholders, such as teachers, students, or parents,

about the school culture or efforts of the principal or others in the school establish a college-going culture.

Public Engagement

This study yields information that may be valuable for current continuation school administrators and staff, as well as district administrators who are developing alternative education programs. Initially, the study will be submitted to three entities; the Los Angeles County Office of Education for distribution to continuation schools as they see fit, the California Continuation School Education Association for consideration for a forthcoming conference, and to the local consortium of continuation school principals. I hope to present the findings of these studies to administrators and faculty groups who are desirous of building college-going cultures in continuation high schools.

Appendix

Units of Observation

Research Questions	Data Collection	Units of Observation
1. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals expect their students to matriculate to and succeed in post-secondary education?	• Electronic Surveys • Interviews with staff and students	• Responses from surveys • Principal statements in interviews • Principal practices to promote access to college • Student access to college info • Field trips to colleges • Arrangement of college placement exams • Attempts at academic preparation for college entrance • Available information to students regarding financing college
2. To what extent, if any, do continuation school principals foster a college going culture in their schools?	• Electronic Surveys • Interviews with staff and students • Observation	• Responses from surveys • Principal statements in interviews • Principal practices to promote access to college • Student access to college info • Field trips to colleges • Arrangement of college placement exams • Attempts at academic preparation for college entrance • Available information to students regarding financing college
3. What supports exist in continuation schools to help	• Electronic Surveys • Interviews with	• Responses from surveys • Principal statements in interviews

students prepare for a college experience in the areas of guidance?	staff and students • Observation	• Availability and focus of counselor • Evidence of informational meetings or presentations for students about college access • Exposure of students to college admissions and placement process at local institutions • Evidence of financial advisement
4. What steps do continuation schools take to prepare students academically for post-secondary education?	• Electronic Surveys • Interviews with staff and students • Observation	• Responses from surveys • Principal statements in interviews • Rigor of available courses • Highest levels of math classes available • Arrangements for dual credit courses with community colleges • Preparation efforts for entrance and placement exams

Survey Invitation

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Survey About Continuation School Programs

Dear Continuation School Principal,

I am currently engaged in a study that focuses on the practices of continuation schools in Los Angeles County. I hope will take a moment to share some information about your school in the study. Your participation should take only a few moments (less than five minutes) to complete, and your participation will remain completely anonymous. The results of this survey will be used to identify schools that have programs that are intentional about preparing students for life after high school.

Please access the survey through the following link: survey

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Dylan Farris

UCLA Education and Leadership Policy Studies

Request for Site Visit and Interview

Dear Principal _____,

Thank you for completing my survey about college going emphasis at continuation high schools. Your school rated high among respondents about providing a college going culture at your school. I hope you might grant me an interview with you and any other staff you believe could help me identify what it takes to develop a college going culture in continuation schools? I know you are very busy, so any attention you give my request is greatly appreciated.

The information would be confidential. The information would inform my study about college going culture at continuation high schools.

Best,

Dylan Farris

UCLA, Department of Education Leadership Program'

Interview Protocol for Principals

Introduction:

Interview Protocol for Continuation Schools that Report College Going Emphasis

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will be useful in identifying the practices and ideals that contribute to providing a college going emphasis in continuation high schools. Your contributions may be references in a dissertation on the topic. Anonymity will be maintained throughout the process. The school will not be identified, nor any of the people who provide input from the school. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. The transcripts will be available for you review. We can stop at any time you wish, but this interview is expected last about 30 minutes.

1. To begin with, please tell me about how your history and how you came to be the principal of a continuation school.
    a. How long have worked as a continuation school principal?
    b. What was your high school experience like?
    c. Are there any particular ways you identify with students in continuation school?
    d. What experiences most prepared you for your role as a continuation school principal?
2. Can you describe the experience of continuation school students?
    a. What are their challenges?
    b. What brings them to continuation school? Can you provide any stories or examples?

    c. What does the school do to address non-academic issues of students?

3. With the limited time you have with these students, what do you realistically expect to accomplish during their time at continuation school?
4. Do you have any success stories you can share about students who matriculated to college or university after attending your school?
5. Speak a little about your school. What is the culture here?
    a. What are your core beliefs?
    b. What are your biggest challenges?
6. What model do you use to help students accelerate credits, while at the same time preparing for college level work?
    a. What do teachers do get students ready academically?
    b. What does the school do to motivate students to aspire to college?
    c. What does the school do to partner with parents and provide guidance around college entrance and financing of college?
    d. What resources exist at the school to foster and build college readiness?
7. Does the school partner in any way with colleges? Please describe.
8. How would you describe success for the school?
    a. What is the graduation rate?
    b. College going rate?
    c. Where are you going from here?
    d. Is your model one that other schools should follow and why?
9. Was the school always focused on preparing students for college? What is the history of the school?

a. Does your academic pathway provide A-G approved courses?
b. What is the highest math class available at your school?
c. Are foreign languages available?
d. Are dual credit courses available, such as courses offered by the community college for high school credit?

10. Are there any forces inside or outside of the school that are responsible for the direction of the school?
11. Please respond to how you believe the school has addressed each of the following:
    a. College Talk, Clear Expectations, Comprehensive Counseling, Information and Resources about College, Faculty Involvement, Family Involvement, College Testing, College Partnerships, Articulation with Comprehensive High School and College

Thanks for spending this time with me today.

Appendix: C

Information about Your School

This survey is intended to gather information continuation schools and the efforts of schools to prepare students for life after high school. The information will be used to identify strategies for improving support to schools. Thank you for participating!

1. What is the size of your school?

- ☐ Less than 50
- ☐ 50 - 100
- ☐ 101 - 150
- ☐ 151 - 200
- ☐ More than 200

2. How many teachers are employed at the school?

3. Which if the following best describes counseling resources at your school?

- ○ The school employs a full-time counselor.
- ○ The school employs a part-time counselor.
- ○ The counselor(s) from another school in the district serves our students.
- ○ There is no counselor, but counseling is provided by other faculty and staff.

Please add any other comments that would answer the question.

4. Who provides college counseling to students?

- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Counselor
- ☐ Other staff member

Please indicate any other staff members who provide counseling or guidance about college:

Continuation School

5. Describe the the student body at your school. Write-in an approximate percentage for the following sub-groups:

Asian/Pacific Islander	
Black	
Hispanic/Latino	
White	
Mixed Ethnicity	
Other	

Graduation Rates & College Going Rates

6. What is the approximate graduation rate of your school?

- ○ < 25%
- ○ 26-50%
- ○ 51-75%
- ○ >75%

If you know the approximate percentage, please indicate:

7. By your estimation, what percentage of students pursue higher education after attending the continuation school?

- ○ <25%
- ○ 26-50%
- ○ 51-75%
- ○ >75%

If you know the approximate percentage, please indicate:

Academic Preparation for Higher Education

Please provide information about the efforts of the school to prepare students academically for higher education.

8. Does the school offer courses that are accepted by the UC/CSU system (UC approved courses)?

Continuation School

9. If your school does offer UC approved course, is the entire A-G sequence offered through the continuation school?

10. What is the highest level of math available to students at the school?

- Algebra
- Geometry
- Algebra 2
- Course(s) beyond Algebra 2

Please indicate any courses offered beyond Algebra 2:

11. What Sciences are offered at your school? Choose all that apply.

- Earth Science
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Other Life Science
- Other Physical Science

Please list any other Science courses offered:

12. Are foreign language classes offered at your school?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please indicate what languages and the highest level offered:

13. Does the school offer dual enrollment classes that provide students with college credit? If so, please describe.

14. Do students have access to AP courses? If so, please describe how students access the coursework.

Counseling and Guidance

Continuation School

Please provide information about counseling and guidance at your school.

15. Please identify which, if any, of the following resources are available at your school.

- ☐ Planning for admission to 4-year college or university from high school
- ☐ Planning for admission to community college
- ☐ College field trips
- ☐ Assistance with college applications
- ☐ Assistance with completion of FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)
- ☐ Practice for college readiness and aptitude exams (SAT, ACT)
- ☐ The PSAT or PLAN is offered at the school site
- ☐ Parent information meetings about college planning

16. Who provides college counseling to students?

- ☐ Teachers
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Counselor
- ☐ Other staff member

Please indicate any other staff members who provide counseling or guidance about college:

17. Please describe any efforts or resources available to students regarding planning for college admission.

18. Please describe any efforts or resources available to students regarding financial aid and planning for college expenses.

Faculty and Staff

Please describe your perceptions about faculty and staff as it relates to preparing students for college.

Continuation School

19. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The school has high expectations for students.	○	○	○	○
The faculty and staff are committed to preparing students for college.	○	○	○	○
Teachers encourage students to pursue college.	○	○	○	○
Administrators encourage students to pursue college.	○	○	○	○
Students receive writing instruction that adequately prepares them for college.	○	○	○	○
The decor and regalia in the school send messages to students about college.	○	○	○	○

20. Please rank the following goals and objectives in order of priority.

- Earn a high school diploma or equivalent
- Prepare students for college
- Teach students to be good citizens
- Job training / preparation
- Prepare students to return to regular high school

21. Please describe what you perceive to be the mission of the school.

22. In your opinion, is it feasible to build a college going culture in continuation schools? What cautions or recommendations do you have? Please explain.

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