

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Identifying Principal and Teacher Descriptions of
the Continuation High School Teacher's
"Special Fitness to Perform"

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Nestor Albert Vargas

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

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The objective of this study was to generate principal and teacher descriptions of what constitutes a teacher's “special fitness to perform” in a public urban continuation high school with a concentration of at-risk students. The sample included 6 continuation principals and 15 continuation teachers from a large urban school district in California. This study built upon previous research, providing greater specificity on three key areas of continuation teacher competencies: faculty training appropriate to the student population, faculty background characteristics that support teacher excellence, and faculty support of appropriate social and academic behaviors. The qualitative research design applied document collection and extreme case sampling to generate data related to

these key areas. The findings suggest that continuation teacher “special fitness” is a flexible blending of academic and social, emotional, and behavioral management skills. This blending reflects a teacher’s academic and personal experiences, and his/her own learnings from these experiences, transmitted through instruction and authentic, personal interaction. For the continuation teachers and principals that were interviewed, “special fitness to perform” implies a unique combination of skills, distinct from those attributable to their comprehensive school colleagues. It denotes more than a specific skill set, and it also includes the personal desire to teach in an environment unique from the comprehensive school. While continuation schools may reflect similar academic and behavioral issues faced by teachers at urban high schools, the difference is in the high concentration of these issues and number of put at-risk students attending continuation schools. Principals and teachers both spoke of a dedication needed to teach and support classrooms of put at-risk students; throughout the study’s interviews, participants referred to this quality as “heart.” While “heart” may not be a “special fitness” attribute that can be easily taught, trained, or quantified, it is a common identifier of the committed continuation schoolteacher.

The dissertation of Nestor Albert Vargas is approved.

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DEDICATION

For my wife, partner, and best friend Gloria Paulina Vargas - walk with me.

For my son Tyler Mitchell Vargas - dream great dreams for all of us.

To both of you, I dedicate this work.

Some men see things as they are and ask, "Why?"

Others dream things that never were, and ask, "Why not?"

- George Bernard Shaw

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I wish to thank my committee members, Dr. Alfreda Iglehart and Dr. Thomas Phillip, for their support throughout the research and writing of this dissertation. I also thank my committee co-chairs, Dr. Christina Christie and Dr. Linda Rose, for their assistance and support with revisions and suggestions over the last 2 years.

I thank my wife, Gloria Vargas and my son Tyler Mitchell Vargas, who endured this process with unwavering support and patience.

To these people, and those who deserve my gratitude but are not mentioned here, I thank you.

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Chapter 1

Problem Statement

A 2010 information release from the California Department of Education reported that in the 2008-2009 academic year, the adjusted high school dropout rate was 21.5%, up from 18.9% the previous year. The rates were significantly higher among students of color—the dropout rate among Hispanic students was 41%, and among African American students it was 40.4%. Students who drop out often have a history of absenteeism, academic trouble, suspension, and other forms of disengagement from school (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

These types of dropout rates have a direct impact on the economic and social well being of California and of the United States more broadly. Nationally, increases in educational attainment, along with significant changes to global labor markets, have decreased employment opportunities for dropouts and their access to key employment benefits, such as health care. These two trends minimize the possibility of economic success and social mobility for young adults with low levels of education (Croninger & Lee, 2001). According to the California Department of Education (2007), dropouts earn less than 50% of a high school graduate's annual income, with 89% of dropouts earning an income below the poverty level. Dropouts represent nearly 50% of the state prison population, and comprise nearly half of the heads of households on welfare. Dropouts are likely to have poorer health, less likely to have adequate medical coverage, and more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors. Economists estimate that a one percent increase in high school graduation rates would save the United States as much as \$1.4 billion each year in crime-related costs.

In 2005, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings stated, “America must do more to prepare high school students for graduation, especially those most at risk of dropping out” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b, p. xii). California’s alternative education programs are intended to do just that by supporting the retention of students who are at risk of dropping out of school. As of October 2010, there were 499 continuation high schools in California, reporting an enrollment of 69,510 students. However, the California Department of Education’s (CDE’s) demographic reports from prior school years indicate that the total number of students served by these schools over the entire year averaged over 116,500. The California Legislative Analyst’s Office (Hill, 2007) reports that between 10-15% of high school students enroll in one of the state’s alternative education programs (known in California as “Educational Options”) each year.

In spite of their vital role in stemming the rate of dropouts, little is known about the qualifications of educators who teach in these schools. Are continuation high school teachers adequately trained to deal with the social, emotional, and academic needs of their students? What constitutes an *adequate* level of training? The answers to these questions may have a significant impact on individual student success and influence the economic and societal well being of Californians.

Continuation Schools in California

One way in which California addresses low secondary school retention and graduation rates is through alternative education programs. State law authorizes three types of alternative education schools: continuation schools, community day schools, and community schools. Unlike community day schools and community schools, continuation schools represent long-term student placement. State law also allows school

districts to operate independent study schools as alternatives to traditional or Educational Options high schools (Hill, 2007). Although independent study programs provide individualized instructional planning, they are designed for students who cannot attend school daily. Continuation schools offer daily, face-to-face instruction. Of the various alternative programs in California, continuation schools comprise 59% of available school sites, serving the majority of alternative education students (p. 9).

Continuation schools have existed in California since the early 1900s, and were originally designed to give working students over the age of 16 options beyond traditional comprehensive school classes and schedules. Today, alternative education programs, including continuation schools, are “designed, at least in part to create a safety net for students who are unsuccessful in our regular comprehensive high schools” (Hill, 2007, pp. 3-4). Continuation schools are small school sites, often self-contained, providing instruction for students between the ages of 16 and 18. The goal for each student is to address credit deficiencies and graduate from the continuation school, or return to a traditional, comprehensive high school (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], n.d.). The continuation school population includes put at-risk students “who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their education” (California Department of Education [CDE], 2012, para. 5).

Teachers in continuation schools work with students who often face severe challenges to success, including credit deficiencies, academic disengagement, familial financial responsibilities, pregnancy and childcare, adult caretaking, and a history of suspensions and expulsions (CDE, 2007a). Additionally, rates of heavy alcohol and drug

use—including use at schools—are twice as high among continuation school students than among 11th grade students in comprehensive schools. These group differences increase with the severity of involvement; methamphetamine and daily marijuana use are five times higher among continuation students (Austin, Dixon, & Bailey, 2007).

Working with continuation youth and their families to address these types of challenges requires a school-wide support system built to support put at-risk student retention. Students often cite a lack of social and academic support as one reason for dropping out of school (Croninger & Lee, 2001). This finding suggests that educators may need formal, specific training to effectively address the needs of put at-risk youth attending continuation high schools. Yet, in California, there is no specialized certification, credential, or license requirement for teaching in continuation schools. Unlike in other specialized programs such as special education, anyone with a valid teaching credential authorized or approved by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing can instruct continuation school students. Specifically, Section 44865 of the California Education Code states:

A valid teaching credential issued by the State Board or the Commission on Teacher Credentialing, based on a bachelor's degree, student teaching, and special fitness to perform, shall be deemed qualifying for assignment as a teacher in the following assignments... (e) Continuation schools.

More specific academic qualifications for continuation teachers were addressed by the California Department of Education in 2006 through the state's Verification Process for Special Settings (VPSS). VPSS sets academic qualifications to establish compliance with No Child Left Behind's (NCLB's) "Highly Qualified" requirement for teachers who, in "special settings," teach more than one core subject—English,

Mathematics, Science or Social Science—but only hold one single-subject credential (CDE, 2007b, pp. 4-5).

A shortcoming of VPSS is its limited scope; it only addresses academic qualifications for competency in special school settings. It does not address the significant non-academic challenges students bring with them into the continuation school environment. Of particular interest is the wording of California Education Code Section 44865 and the use of the term, “special fitness to perform.” In *Bledsoe v. Biggs Unified School District* (2008), the Third District Court of Appeals denied petitioner Bledsoe’s assertion that his prior teaching experience in comprehensive secondary schools and one semester in a community day school qualified him to displace less senior community day school teachers during a district-wide Reduction in Force (RIF). Although the court did recognize the academic competencies of Bledsoe, as well as of Gates and Soriano (the two alternative school teachers whom Bledsoe wished to displace), its decision turned on the specific training Gates and Soriano had in applied psychology, behavior management and modification, and mediation skills, as well as their experience working with special needs children and in drug abuse recognition. While *Bledsoe* provides distinct areas of training that may support teacher competency in a continuation school environment, there is scant mention elsewhere of what constitutes the necessary “special fitness to perform.”

In sum, we need to know more about what training and professional experience constitute a California continuation teacher’s “special fitness to perform.” We must gain a better understanding of the measures that can be used to define “special fitness,”

particularly if they require additional training beyond what is currently mandated for a teaching credential.

Limited Empirical Research

Issues specific to continuation schools have not yet received a substantial amount of study. Only within the first decade of the 21st century, Kleiner, Porch, and Farris (2002) published the first national study of public alternative education schools. Their results were based on questionnaire data from a nationally representative sample of 1,534 public school districts. One area of their findings related to criteria for transferring students into alternative education programs. Roughly half of all school districts with such programs considered each of the following as a sufficient reason for transferring students from a comprehensive school to an alternative education program: possession, distribution, or use of alcohol or drugs (52%); physical attacks or fights (52%); chronic truancy (51%); continual academic failure (50%); possession or use of a weapon other than a firearm (50%); disruptive verbal behavior (45%); possession or use of a firearm (44%).

Regarding staffing, Kleiner et al. (2002) state that, “better outcomes are obtained when teachers are well trained, caring, demanding, highly motivated, and responsive to the needs of at-risk students” (p. 25). While the survey did not specify the meaning of the term *well-trained*, it did state that school districts were willing to hire teachers to work exclusively within alternative education programs. The authors note that 86% of districts with such programs hired teachers specifically to teach in those settings. Forty-nine percent of the districts were willing to transfer teachers from comprehensive schools, while 10% assigned teachers involuntarily to alternative education programs.

McLaughlin, Atukpawu, and Williamson (2008) provide an overview of alternative education programs in California from the perspective of county and school district agencies. The authors describe the ambiguity of statutory laws relating to California's 850 alternative education programs (500 of which are continuation schools), and how this ambiguity maintains a "non-system," offering students "significantly different resources and opportunities depending on local priorities and decisions" (p. 2). This loosely coupled non-system ensures that students will be placed in continuation programs of varying scope, resources, and instructional quality. McLaughlin et al. assert that legislative silence on teacher practices and academic rigor ensures that alternative education schools generally lack effective accountability measures and adherence to standards-based instruction.

Compounding the non-system problem, school districts provide varying degrees of support to their continuation programs. McLaughlin et al. (2008) cite three ways school districts manage their continuation schools: using them as "dumping grounds" for unwanted students and incompetent teachers; treating them with "benign neglect," whereby the programs are seen as a necessary evil, and resources are kept to a bare minimum; and embracing a "youth development" stance (pp. 9-13), ensuring that continuation programs are provided with the resources, facilities, instruction, and service support needed for academic growth and success, including pathways to career and post-secondary education opportunities. The authors contend that the "youth development" stance—certainly the most desirable of the three—is not the norm in California.

Kleiner et al. (2002) are not alone in citing the lack of research regarding alternative education programs. Ruiz de Velasco and colleagues (2008) contend,

“continuation high schools remain among the most understudied sub-sector of secondary education in California (and nationally)” (p. 8). Drawing from field research undertaken in winter and spring of 2007 at nine southern, central, and northern California counties, 26 school districts, and 37 continuation schools, these scholars note several key points regarding preparation and training for continuation schoolteachers. First, NCLB requirements for teacher preparation have led to an increasing number of fully credentialed teachers in continuation schools. Second, continuation teachers lack professional development and leadership training specific to work with “vulnerable youth,” finding success only through “on-the-job trial-and-error” (p. 12). Third, continuation school leaders perceive little recognition from state education policymakers of “how work with abused or otherwise vulnerable youth may require special staff training or skills” (p. 9). Both principals and teachers commented on the difficulty in finding existing professional development programs “targeted to the needs of educators who work with vulnerable youth” (p. 9).

Using data from the 1995 National Educational Longitudinal Study, Croninger and Lee (2001) considered whether teachers provide students with valuable forms of social capital—i.e., networks of relationships that enhance the productive capability of individuals—and if this social capital increases the likelihood that put at-risk students will complete high school. The authors examined data from more than 11,000 secondary students who attended over 1,000 public and private schools between 1990 and 1992. They found that students generally benefit from drawing on social capital derived from their relationships with teachers, and that the students who benefit most from a teacher’s social capital are those who are at risk of dropping out of school. They note that “This is

especially true for socially at-risk students who enter high school with low expectations and a history of school-related problems” (p. 568). These researchers found that students who eventually drop out of school frequently complain that teachers do not care about them, are uninterested in their academic success, and are unwilling to help with problems. Access to social capital can provide put at-risk adolescents with valuable resources such as emotional support, information, guidance, or assistance in accomplishing assignments and other school-related tasks—arguably vital services of a continuation high school.

Research Questions

With these issues and concerns in mind, it is appropriate and necessary that we ask whether continuation teachers are adequately trained and prepared to provide the types of social capital needed to promote student retention and student success. If they do not have sufficient training and preparation, is “special fitness to perform” then minimized? As such, this study sought to understand urban continuation high school principals’ and teachers’ perspectives on the following research questions:

1. What constitutes a continuation teacher’s “special fitness to perform?”
2. What types of training for working with put at-risk populations would improve a teacher’s “special fitness to perform” in a continuation high school?
3. How do specific kinds of academic, professional, and personal backgrounds qualify a teacher to be successful in a continuation school?
4. How does a continuation teacher’s ability to teach and support social and academic behaviors in the classroom constitute part of his or her “special fitness to perform?”

The Project

This project was a qualitative study consisting of document collection and analysis, together with interviews of continuation high school principals and teachers. The research was conducted at continuation high schools within the Celaya Unified School District (a pseudonym). The study population included principals and teachers because of the varied perspectives that they offer. Principals are responsible for hiring and evaluating certificated staff. They must also determine a teacher's "special fitness to perform," and whether this is relevant in the hiring and evaluation processes. In contrast, teachers have the closest and most frequent interactions with students. Based on their daily experiences, they may have the greatest understanding of put at-risk student needs, and the specific types of teacher training and characteristics needed to support student success.

Identifying characteristics of continuation teacher excellence can help inform what constitutes "special fitness," support greater clarity in hiring criteria for continuation teachers, and enumerate potential focus areas for in-service professional development. The results of this study can then be used to improve practices at continuation high schools, with the ultimate goal of keeping more students in school until graduation.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Urban continuation schools hold a unique position in public secondary education, serving as either the last chance for successful dropout prevention, or as the final exit point for dropping out. Given the unique academic, individual, and social challenges of the put at-risk student population in these schools, and society's concern for dropout prevention, the skillset of continuation teachers—their “special fitness to perform”—can play a critical role for both student retention and successful completion of a public secondary education.

To understand the unique challenges of teaching in urban continuation schools and their impact on teachers' “special fitness to perform,” we must first consider the context of alternative education, including its intended purposes and types. Contextual understanding also requires assessing the unique academic, social, cultural, economic, and health issues facing continuation school students, and how these may affect behavior, motivation, and the resiliency needed to graduate from high school. I will also explore the literature suggesting that student success requires the transmission of knowledge and forms of capital between teacher and student, and describe what we currently know about the preparation of continuation high school teachers.

The Purposes and Types of Continuation High Schools

It is important to understand the purposes of urban continuation high schools, and how these purposes impact the qualifications and characteristics of the teachers hired to work for them. There are several competing descriptions of the nature and form of alternative education programs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). In fact, over the past 60 years,

the term *alternative education* has been used to describe a number of non-traditional school programs, including home schooling, hospital classes, opportunity schools, juvenile court schools, special education, independent study, community day schools, schools for incarcerated youth, and continuation schools (Ashcroft, 1999; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Despite their variety, most alternative education sites exhibit similar program and structural characteristics. They provide individualized instruction that addresses students' academic and social-emotional needs (Lange & Sletten, 2002), small class enrollments, and supportive environments among student peers and between teachers and students (Foley & Pang, 2006). Raywid (1983) argues that such characteristics serve as a model for educational reform, stressing what comprehensive schools should be. Oakes (1993), states, "this schooling solution is at best a naïve and at worst a pernicious prescription, very likely to perpetuate social, political, and economic inequalities" (p. xii). In both cases, Oakes and Raywid view alternative programs through the lens of school type' Raywid's comments are about alternative education programs as centers of innovation, whereas Oakes is commenting on alternative education as a dumping ground for students considered emotional or academic failures.

No clear understanding of the range of program types existed until Raywid (1994) developed a seminal typology of alternative schools. This typology includes three key models:

- Type I schools: "Popular Innovations" programs are schools of choice, including magnet schools, based on themes with an emphasis on innovative programs or strategies to attract students.

- Type II schools: “Last Chance” programs are not schools of choice. Rather, they are schools where students are given a final educational opportunity prior to expulsion. These schools focus on remediation or behavior management.
- Type III schools: “Remedial Focus” programs target student rehabilitation or remediation, and stimulate their social and emotional growth, often through emphasizing the school as a community.

Raywid concedes that while most alternative schools fall into one of the three types, some may be a mix of two or more types. Lange and Sletten (1995) call for the addition of a fourth type: “Second Chance” programs that provide an additional opportunity for success after some form of problem or failure in a comprehensive high school.

In essence, while there is no consensus concerning how an alternative school looks or acts, the similarities within the alternative education community allow for consideration of common student academic, behavioral, and health needs. This also applies to continuation schools, the largest subgroup of California’s alternative education program. In 1987, the California Department of Education revised goals for continuation school education. According to these goals, students should:

- Acquire a high school diploma or California High School Proficiency Certificate;
- Become productive persons as they learn the importance of vocational preparation and get assistance in acquiring entry-level job skills;
- Develop a feeling of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal satisfaction;
- Develop a sense of responsibility;
- Develop a tolerance and understanding of a variety of viewpoints;

- Engage in meaningful recreational and leisure-time activities;
- Understand and obey laws and participate in constructive civic activities; and
- Understand and practice sound money management and become intelligent consumers.

The Department of Education did not provide specific guidelines detailing how to accomplish their stated objectives, and that has not changed in the intervening years.

More recently, Williamson (2008) has argued that: (a) continuation schools lack any formal structure that can be aligned with consistent statewide policy or standards of accountability, and (b) teachers lack the institutional direction needed to understand their purpose, and how to achieve it. He asserts:

The notion that one organization can achieve all of these un-measurable outcomes requires the continuation educator to be teacher, parent, social worker, therapist, coach, and accountant. Once again, the policy context of continuation education relied on individual continuation educators to interpret and achieve the improbable. Without a formal process, curriculum, or any standardized guidelines, continuation educators found themselves adrift in a decoupled institution unconcerned with the oversight or the evaluation of the largely informal continuation education system. (p. 11)

Williamson's contention exposes a critical disparity between California's stated goal of dropout prevention, the interrelated academic, social, and behavioral needs of put at-risk youth, and the teacher skills necessary to accomplish "the improbable" (p. 10). Although Williamson recognizes that successful continuation school educators must play multiple roles in the classroom beyond that of teacher, further investigation is required to identify what specific roles they must play. To better understand these roles, we must turn our attention to continuation school students, and the nature and factors that constitute their put at-risk status. We begin by considering the topic and scope of dropping out, including its individual and societal impacts.

Dropouts Defined

Since the 1980's, when the national dropout rate became a public concern and a topic of study, there have been differing academic and statutory definitions of what constitutes a dropout (Oakland, 1992; Rumberger, 2011). Lack of a consensus in a definition has led to confusion in standardizing how to compute dropout rates (Rumberger, 1987). A commonly cited federal definition comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which describes a dropout as someone who has not completed high school by earning a high school diploma or alternative credential (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a).

More recently, in the 2007-2008 school year, a definition came from the federal government's Common Core of Data (CCD). The CCD is a program of the Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), and serves as the nation's primary statistical database for public elementary and secondary schools. It defines a dropout as a student:

who was enrolled at any time during the previous school year who is not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and who has not successfully completed school. Students who have transferred to another school, died, moved to another country, or who are out of school due to illness are not considered dropouts. (Stillwell, 2010, p. 9)

Regardless of how the term is defined, it is clear that dropping out is a growing national concern, grounded in the belief that leaving school before earning a diploma is “bad for the individual and for society” (Rumberger, 1987, p. 112). It is considered a form of academic failure, just as graduating from high school is seen as a form of academic success. A number of institutional, individual, familial, and social factors— singly and combined—contribute to the academic disengagement and dropout rate of

students (Rumberger, 1987, 2011). These risk factors are heightened for members of racial and ethnic minority groups, including Latinos and African Americans, who comprise a significant socioeconomic underclass and, in California, represent the majority of students in continuation schools (Timar, Biag, & Lawson, 2007).

California's continuation programs provide significant alternative education options for students who are at a high risk of dropping out of high school. Since 1973, dropout prevention has taken on greater importance in California's K-12 educational planning. It is the officially sanctioned mission of alternative education programs in California, including urban continuation high schools (Kelly, 1993).

High School Dropout Rates

Although the question of how to compute dropout rates has led to some confusion among education policymakers, attempts are underway to standardize definitions of retention, graduation, and dropout status. A service of the U.S. Department of Education, the NCES provides the Averaged Freshmen Graduation Rate (AFGR), and this helps us to arrive at an approximation of how many students are leaving school before earning high school diplomas or the equivalent. Using data from the CCD, the AFGR estimates the proportion of public high school freshmen graduating with a regular diploma 4 years after starting ninth grade (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010; Stillwell, 2010). Based on this measure, excluding South Carolina (a missing dataset for the described academic year), a total of 2,965,286 U.S. public school students received a high school diploma in 2007-2008, resulting in an AFGR of 74.9%. This rate ranged from 51.3% in Nevada to 89.6% in Wisconsin. California's AFGR was 71.2%. The median state AFGR was 76.4%.

Across all reporting states, the AFGR was highest for Asian/Pacific Islander students, at 91.4%. The rates for other groups of students included 81.0% for White students, 64.2% for American Indian/Alaska Native students, 63.5% for Latino students, and 61.5% for African American students. While the AGFR does not specifically provide dropout figures, its use of a 4-year high school cohort serves as a model for California's developing dropout computational model (Chapman et al., 2010; Stillwell, 2010).

In 2002, to comply with reporting requirements for NCLB, the California legislature enacted Education Code ch. 6.5 § 49084 and ch. 10 § 60900. The new codes established the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS), which includes, along with statewide assessment and enrollment data, the calculation of dropout and graduation rates grounded in cohort-based, longitudinal data. This uniform graduation rate is known as a *4 year adjusted cohort rate*, measuring the percent of students in a ninth grade cohort that graduates with a regular diploma in 4 years or less. Beginning in the 2010-2011 academic year, states were required by the federal government to report their 4 year adjusted cohort rates (CDE, 2011).

The assessment and enrollment data functions of CALPADS were formerly assigned to the California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS), using an annual *completer rate* system established by the NCES. The first cohort-based CALPADS group was the high school freshman class of 2006, and 2010 marked the graduation of this cohort. In August 2011, the CDE released its first CALPADS longitudinal graduation and dropout dataset, with additional adjustments scheduled throughout 2012. Based on 4-year cohort information collected about individual students using CALPADS, 75.2% of California students who began high school in 2006 graduated with their class in 2010. In

that same cohort, 17.5% dropped out of high school, 6.4% were still enrolled in school, 0.5% were non-diploma special education students, and 0.4% passed the General Educational Development (GED) test (CDE, 2011).

Latinos and African Americans comprise the majority of California's urban continuation high school population, so they are of particular interest in this research. In California in 2010, 84% of White (not including Latino) students graduated with their class, 11.1% dropped out of high school, 3.8% were still enrolled in school, 0.6% were non-diploma special education students, and 0.4% passed the GED. There was a significant graduation rate gap for Latinos; 68.8% graduated with their class in 2010, 21.9% dropped out of high school, 8.5% were still enrolled in school, 0.5% were non-diploma special education students, and 0.4% passed the GED. Among African Americans, 59.7% of students who began high school in 2006 graduated with their class in 2010, while 29.2% dropped out of high school, 9.7% were still enrolled in school, 0.8% were non-diploma special education students, and 0.5% passed the GED (CDE, Educational Demographics Office, 2012).

These data indicate that in California, racial minority students constitute a higher proportion of the dropout population than White students. This is especially troubling, as these same minority groups are estimated to become the state's population majority by 2042 (California Department of Finance, 2007).

Risk Factors Related to Dropping Out

Although differing formulas exist to determine America's dropout rate, the lack of an agreed-upon measure does not deflect from the general consensus that dropping out of school is a significant national concern. Further, while there is no single standard that

describes a *typical* high school dropout, there are combinations of risk factors that, when taken together, increase the potential for student disengagement and the likelihood of dropping out of school. Dropping out of school is a gradual process of personal disengagement (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). This detachment may take place for academic and/or social reasons that cease when a student physically quits school. The processes of disengagement occur within homes, schools, and communities. The following sections discuss these different types of risk-related factors.

School-related factors. A student's eventual disengagement from school can be influenced by any number of school-based factors (Alexander et al., 2001; Christle et al., 2007; Rumberger, 1987; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). Pervasive among these is low academic achievement. Longitudinal studies have traced key academic struggles to issues that may manifest as early as kindergarten, including lower cognitive abilities, inattentiveness, a lack of intellectual self-reliance, poor attendance, and multiple school transfers (Alexander et al., 2001; Oakland, 1992).

Often, dropouts perceive themselves as being academically weak, and they may extend this perception to general attitudes about school. Rumberger (1987) and others cite additional school-related reasons for dropping out, including poor performance, disengagement, a dislike of school, multiple expulsions or suspensions, and a negative school environment, including poor facilities and inadequate teaching (CDE, 2007a). However, low academic achievement is only partly indicative of put at-risk status (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Social factors, economic and individual factors, and health issues all play a role.

Social factors. Current child-rearing practices in the United States usually ascribe a period of nurturance and development for children and youth; typical adult social and economic responsibilities are mostly delayed until age 18 or 21. Despite legal restrictions and limitations regarding work, sexual activity, and alcohol and drug use, put at-risk youth under age 18 are more prone to engage in behaviors that are typically associated with adults (Oakland, 1992; Suh et al., 2007). Such behaviors for teenagers are affected by a number of social factors and have a significant influence on the likelihood that put at-risk youth will become high school dropouts (Lange & Sletten, 2002). These social factors include the impact of peer groups, family background, and socioeconomic background (Oakland, 1992; Rumberger, 1987; Ryan, 2000).

Peer groups. During adolescence, the peer group becomes a dominant framework for individual development; by high school, adolescents spend twice as much time with their peers as with their parents or other adults (Ryan, 2000). As adolescents develop friendships, they select each other based on similar characteristics. Ryan (2000) argues that, over time, increased similarity among friends generates pressure within the group for change to occur toward increasing similarity. These similarities can represent either socially acceptable or undesirable attributes. Peers directly influence adolescent social and academic outcomes, including the use of alcohol or drugs and frequency of truancy, along with time spent on homework, and college aspirations. In addition, peers can influence student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Kindermann, 1993; Ryan, 2000). As such, a student's put at-risk status can depend, in part, on the positive or negative peer group reinforcements to which he/she is exposed.

Family background. Family background can also have a powerful, cumulative influence on school achievement through its effects on the kinds of schools children attend, their attitudes about school, and the learning that takes place at home (Alexander et al., 2001; Rumberger, 1987). Specific family-related conditions associated with dropping out include: low educational and occupational attainment levels of parents (Suh et al., 2007), low family income, single parent status, and an absence of learning materials and opportunities in the home (Rumberger, 1987). Dropout rates are higher for students from families of low socioeconomic status (Rumberger, 1987; Suh et al., 2007).

Families of dropouts often exhibit intergenerational dropout patterns, with one or more parents having left school without obtaining a diploma (Oakland, 1992). Oakland (1992) posits that these same parents are unable to provide direct academic support for their children, and are less likely to support basic mathematics and reading skills. Older siblings may have already dropped out, serving as negative role models for their younger brothers and sisters. This sibling influence directly relates to the effects of positive or negative peer group reinforcements mentioned earlier (Kindermann, 1993; Ryan, 2000).

Economic and individual factors. A family's economic status can directly influence a student's decision to leave school. For example, employment, particularly beyond 20 hours weekly, is considered to be indicative of put at-risk status (Timar et al., 2007). It is unclear whether employment is a causal factor in dropping out, or is an indicator of increasing disengagement. It is also difficult to determine the frequency with which work is initially seen as a desirable or necessary alternative to school before students drop out, or whether it is more common for students to first decide to leave school and then decide to find jobs.

Health issues. Dropouts who are age 25 or older report being in worse health than adults who are not dropouts, regardless of income (Pleis, Lucas, & Ward, 2009).

Although some aspects of health issues can be ascribed to socioeconomic status and lack of access to quality health care, issues of substance abuse—including alcohol, tobacco, and drug abuse—are more prevalent among put at-risk students and dropouts (Oakland, 1992). Oakland (1992) further reports that teen pregnancy is a direct contributor to the number of female dropouts; eight out of 10 pregnant teens never complete a high school course of study. Lastly, when compared to high school graduates, dropouts are more likely to have been victims of physical and sexual abuse.

Consequences of Dropping Out

Dropping out of school has a significant, direct, and long-term effect on both the individual who drops out and on society. Students at risk of academic failure achieve lower levels of academic skills, and this limits their potential for employment and further educational opportunities (Rumberger, 2011). More precisely, lacking educational opportunities adversely affects an individual's potential for earning the types of certification, licensure, and training needed to remain competitive in today's job market.

Dropouts also face greater difficulty in securing steady employment and an adequate income; dropouts are less likely to find jobs than more educated workers (Rumberger, 2011). Government data show that 30.9% of high schools students who dropped out of school in the 2009-2010 academic year were employed by October 2010; 22.9% were unemployed (i.e., looking for work), whereas 46.2% were no longer looking for work—i.e., not in the labor force (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). When employed, dropouts are less likely to earn a wage that is equivalent to that of high school graduates.

In 2008, the median income of persons ages 18 through 67 who had not completed high school was approximately \$23,000. By comparison, the median income of persons ages 18 to 67 who completed their education with at least a high school diploma or equivalent, such as a GED certificate, was approximately \$42,000. Over a 33-year employment lifespan, this translates into a loss of approximately \$630,000 for dropouts (Chapman et al., 2010).

Students are not alone in facing the consequences of dropping out. Society is also directly affected in a variety of ways, including: lower state and national revenues through generation of taxes, reduced funding available for existing or proposed government services, an increased demand for public and private social services, increased crime, and poorer levels of health (Rumberger, 1987). Taking into account lower tax contributions, higher reliance on Medicaid and Medicare, higher rates of criminal activity, and higher reliance on welfare programs, the difference in cost to society between high school dropouts and high school graduates is approximately \$240,000 over the individual's lifetime (Levin & Belfield, 2007).

Dropping out and special fitness to perform. The urban continuation high school is often the last opportunity for successful dropout prevention. The academic, individual, and social challenges of the continuation school student population are connected to the risk factors described in earlier sections of this chapter. These student challenges require teachers in continuation high schools to be aware of the factors that constitute put at-risk status, and to have the skills necessary to address these issues. They need to be cognizant of possible links between dropout potential, teacher awareness and preparation, and dropout prevention. The following section considers how students'

motivation, resiliency, and validation—and educators’ roles in developing these qualities—may mitigate against some of the risk factors previously addressed.

Theories of Student Motivation, Resiliency, and Validation

While the needs of continuation students may vary from school to school and district to district, they are generally centered on the academic and social stressors described earlier in this chapter. Given the findings of previous research studies, teacher support of key student behaviors—including an internalized locus of control, personal motivation, resiliency, and validation—can encourage positive, healthy social and academic outcomes.

It is appropriate, then, to review several fundamental theories that are linked to student success, particularly within the alternative school context. Specifically, the following sections will review the motivation, resiliency, and validation needed by put at-risk urban continuation high school students to complete their course of study, and how teacher/student interaction affects these elements.

Social learning theory/locus of control. Social learning theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context (Rotter, 1975). It considers that people learn from one another, including through observational learning, imitation, and modeling. Rotter’s (1966) seminal document on *locus of control* distinguished between notions of internal and external controls:

when a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labeled this a belief in *external control*. If the person believes that the event is contingent upon his own behavior or his own relatively permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in *internal control*. (p. 1)

Rotter (1975) argued that the effects of reward for or reinforcement of preceding behavior depend in part on whether the person perceives the reward as dependent on or independent of his or her own behavior. While neither external nor internal controls of reinforcement are inherently *good* or *bad*, internalized control of reinforcement supports student self-perception of personal control and independent action. Concerns for low educational and occupational aspirations are connected to low self-esteem and a lack of or diminished sense of internal personal control. High school dropouts have been cited as having lower levels of self-esteem, decreased internal locus of control, poor attitudes about school, and low educational and occupational aspirations (Timar et al., 2007). These same dropouts are also more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors (CDE, 2007a).

Locus of control and self-perception are particularly important for urban continuation school students, who tend to exhibit the same low levels of academic self-esteem and self-efficacy as others who are at a high risk of dropping out of school. Continuation educators can play an important role in promoting their students' sense of personal control. Teacher modeling of an internalized locus of control and positive self-perception supports observational learning and imitation by students. Therefore, an urban continuation high school instructor must consider and differentiate student-teacher interactions to encourage individual levels of perceived personal control, self-efficacy, and motivation (Anderman, Andrzejewski, & Allen, 2011; Klem & Connell, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Zimmerman, 2000).

Self-efficacy and motivation. Another concept relevant to put at-risk students, particularly those attending continuation schools, is self-efficacy, which refers to the personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to

attain designated goals (Bandura, 1977). According to Zimmerman (2000), people are more likely to engage in certain behaviors when they believe they are capable of executing those behaviors successfully. Self-efficacy has been viewed as a mechanism underlying behavioral change, maintenance, and generalization (Schunk, 1991). For students, self-perceptions of efficacy are related to specific tasks, and are sensitive to variations in experience and context (Zimmerman, 2000). Students who believe in their self-efficacy “participate more readily, work harder, persist longer, and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when they encounter difficulties than those who doubt their capabilities” (p. 86). Schunk (1991) supports this contention, citing evidence that self-efficacy predicts academic outcomes. This finding relates directly to urban continuation students, their self-perception, and their degree of willingness to engage in academic activities.

Furthermore, self-efficacy perceptions are predictive of a student’s motivation and learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Motivation, which is primarily concerned with the activation and persistence of behavior, is also partly based in cognitive activities; for example, the ability to conceptualize potential future consequences is a cognitively based source of motivation (Bandura, 1977). Through cognitive representation of potential future outcomes, individuals can produce their own behavioral motivators. As such, reinforcement can affect behavior by creating the expectation that acting in a certain way will produce either valued benefits or prevent future problems.

For urban continuation students, the ability to link positive self-efficacy perceptions with constructive motivating behaviors is a key aspect of developing academic persistence and success. Schunk (1991) outlined several person and situation

variables that support the role of self-efficacy in academic motivation. Person variables include goal setting and information processing. Situation variables are comprised of models, attributional feedback, and rewards. Both person and situational variables influence student motivation, and serve as predictors of how well self-efficacy predicts motivational outcomes. For example, E. Locke and Latham (2002) found that when goals (a person variable) are self-set, people with high self-efficacy set higher goals than people with low self-efficacy do. Further, people are motivated to set high goals because they expect beneficial outcomes from setting and attaining them. This example shows a connection between internalized, self-setting goals, self-efficacy, and academic motivation.

Resiliency theory. Benard (1993) defines resiliency as the “ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks” (p. 44). It describes a proactive approach to “building capabilities, skills, and assets” (Krovetz, 1999, p. 121). Resiliency theory did not emerge from academic theory, but through the phenomenological identification of survivors, mostly young people, living in high-risk situations (Richardson, 2002). It is based on defining the protective factors within the child, family, school, and community that exist for a resilient child and are missing from the life of a non-resilient child (Benard, 1993; Krovetz, 1999). Resiliency theory is founded on the proposition that if members of a family, community, and school care deeply about an individual, have high expectations, offer purposeful support, and value a person’s participation in the group, that person will maintain a faith in the future and can overcome almost any adversity.

Resilient students usually possess four attributes: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future (Benard, 1993). Social competence includes responsiveness, flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, and a sense of humor. Problem solving includes the ability to think both abstractly and reflectively, and the skill to attempt solutions for cognitive and social problems. Autonomy is identified as recognizing one's own identity, the ability to act independently, and the ability to control, at some level, one's own environment. Having a sense of purpose means possessing goals, an educational direction, persistence, hopefulness, and sense of a bright future.

Krovetz (1999) contends that while many people have these attributes, at least to some extent, the ability to “bounce back” (p. 122) from adversity depends on whether key protective factors exist in a child's life. These protective factors include: a caring environment of at least one adult who knows the child well, positive expectations with the purposeful support needed to meet them, and participation, including responsibilities and opportunities for meaningful involvement with others.

In relating resiliency theory to the K-12 environment, Krovetz (1999) criticizes education for not generally promoting student resiliency, observing three main school situations in which students give up. One is lack of classroom learning, where disengaged students believe that course content is irrelevant to their lives, and they fall behind academically as a result. This is directly related to the earlier discussion of students who are at risk of dropping out, particularly those who find themselves in urban continuation high schools. The second situation occurs when students disengage from the regimented, competitive nature of physical education classes. The last situation is student

disconnection from peer groups, e.g., *in* groups and *out* groups. Students in *out* groups often feel shame and hatred when interacting with *in* peers, leading to disengagement in both academic and social environments.

To support student resiliency, Krovetz (1999) recommends certain conditions: classroom heterogeneity, small group and independent work, a well-defined safety net for students falling behind academically, using common instructional strategies in most classrooms within and across grades, and student application of higher order thinking skills. Support for developing resiliency in urban continuation school students is critical, in order to strengthen their ability to overcome adversity and the risks they face daily, while facilitating their healthy social and emotional development (Benard, 1993).

In researching resilience as a stress coping mechanism, Conner and Davidson (2003) tested a 25-item, 5-point scale on health-based study subjects ($n = 806$). They determined that resilience is quantifiable, modifiable, and can be improved with treatment. In other words, resiliency can be learned. From an education/continuation school perspective, the ability to modify and improve resiliency is an important means to support positive student outcomes.

Validation theory. Rendon's 1994 study, based on interviews of 132 nontraditional college students, led to the development of validation theory. She posited that, "even the most vulnerable nontraditional students can be transformed into powerful learners through in- and out-of-class academic and/or interpersonal validation" (p. 37). Rendon and Munoz (2011) observed two types of validation: academic and interpersonal. Academic validation occurs when in- and out-of-class validation agents, such as teachers, take action to help students trust their innate capacity to learn and acquire confidence.

Interpersonal validation occurs when in- and out-of-classroom agents take action to foster students' personal development and social adjustment. Rendon and Munoz identified six key considerations with respect to validation:

1. Initiating contact with students is the responsibility of institutional agents such as faculty, advisors, and counselors. It is critical that these agents reach out to students to offer assistance, encouragement, and support.
2. When validation is present, students feel capable of learning and have a sense of self-worth.
3. Validation is likely a prerequisite for student development—when students are validated consistently, they are more likely to feel confident about themselves and their ability to learn.
4. Validation can occur in and out of class.
5. Validation should not be viewed as an end, but as a developmental process that begins early and can continue over time.
6. Validation is most critical early on, especially in the first few weeks of school.

Rendon Linares and Munoz (2011) summarize several key findings from validation studies conducted since 2002. First, students benefit significantly from validation, including through the growth of pride and confidence upon discovering that they are capable learners. Second, academic validation can take various forms, such as affirming a student's academic potential, affirming students' cultural experiences, providing opportunities for students to see themselves as capable learners, and actively reaching out to offer support and academic assistance to students. Third, faculty can

benefit from training to provide academic and interpersonal validation. And fourth, validation does not require that faculty lower their academic expectations.

Although the core research of validation theory was initially built upon a study of first generation college students, it has relevancy to urban continuation school students as well. Rendon's initial study (1994) focused on women, immigrants, African Americans, Latinas/Latinos, American Indians, Asians, and non-racial minority students, including lesbian/gay/bisexual students, disabled students, and religious minorities. Many of these same students are a major part of the urban continuation school service population in California.

According to Rendon (1994), research conducted to test validation theory has found that: low-income, first-generation students require both in- and out-of-class validating support strategies and supporters, including faculty, counselors, advisors, peers and professionals; student knowledge and experience should be used as a resource and validated in the curriculum; students' personal identities should be validated; and a team of faculty and counselors can provide students with care, encouragement, and support. These findings are directly relevant to urban continuation school students and their teachers, considering that the ability to validate students' performance may be part of the characteristics of an urban continuation school teacher's "special fitness to perform."

Transmission of Knowledge and Forms of Capital

The previous section considered the connection between urban continuation high school students' at-risk factors and several theories of student behavior that support individual success. These theories address the ways that motivation, resiliency, and validation can facilitate graduation from high school. While urban continuation teachers

can be made aware of the theories tied to these factors, they must also see their role in developing the related qualities in their students. This requires a transmission of strategies to support positive student behaviors, and a further link to the types of capital that support urban continuation student achievement.

Knowledge and cultural capital. Lamont and Lareau (1988) define cultural capital as “institutionalized, i.e., widely shared high-status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviors, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion” (p. 156). Their definition emphasizes two key elements: that cultural capital is institutionalized, and that it is used to distinguish group or class advantage (Wildhagen, 2009). These distinctions become institutionalized when cultural interests and knowledge of the dominant class become recognized as legitimate and superior; once legitimized, the distinctions become the basis for exclusion from job opportunities, resources, and high status groups. For individuals with an entrée to a group’s cultural capital, it can allow access to additional assets, such as educational advancement.

Traditional cultural capital scholars have used Bourdieu’s original theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) to argue that outsiders without access to cultural capital could access the knowledge of the upper and middle classes, and thereby gain the potential for social mobility through schooling (Yosso, 2005). Although Bourdieu’s work sought to establish a critique of cultural reproduction, it has been used to differentiate between some groups as “culturally rich,” and others as “culturally poor” (p. 76). In rebuttal, Yosso (2005) contends that such a perspective assumes the knowledge of a dominant class is superior, and that outsiders, including students of color, come to school with cultural deficiencies. Using a critical race theory (CRT) lens, Yosso challenges

Bourdieu's cultural capital theory with an alternative, referred to as "community cultural wealth" (p. 70), which consists of: "aspirational capital," the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers;" "linguistic capital," the intellectual and social skills attained through communications in more than one language; "familial capital," the cumulative cultural knowledge nurtured among immediate and extended families that provides awareness of community history, memory, and resources; "social capital," or networks of people and resources, which include peer and other social contacts—including teachers—that can provide support and information while interacting with institutions; "navigational capital," or the skills of "maneuvering through the social institutions" not created by communities of color (e.g., resilient Mexican-American students navigating through a hostile education system); and "resistant capital," the knowledge and skills developed through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality (pp. 77-80).

By rejecting traditional forms of cultural capital and their inference of a superior cultural norm (e.g., Hirsch, 1988), Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth theory supports the validity of many students' cultures, including students of color, who constitute the majority of urban continuation high school students. While community cultural capital urges a redefinition of cultural capital boundaries, including within education, its criticism of traditional definitions raises questions regarding how the devaluation of others' cultures may affect high school academic performance, lead to at-risk academic behaviors, and require awareness of critical cultural understandings from urban continuation high school teachers.

Transmission of knowledge and social capital. Social capital exists in the relations between individuals, and functions as a resource that individuals can use to achieve their interests (Coleman, 1988). It can produce “something of value” (p. 101) for those possessing access to resources, with the value depending on the social organization in which individuals are engaged. Often “something of value” refers to information transmitted through social relations; this information is used to facilitate action.

Along with parents, family, peers, and key community members, teachers are an important source of social capital for students. Although the explicit responsibilities of teachers revolve around traditional expectations of developing student literacy, providing academic support, enforcing classroom discipline, and developing student talent, teachers often function beyond their sanctioned duties as pedagogues; they may act as co-parents, informal mentors, child advocates, and informal psychologists for their students (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). They serve as key participants in the social networks of put at-risk students, while playing a determining role in “either reproducing or *interfering with the reproduction of* class, racial, and gendered inequality” (p. 161, emphasis in original). As institutional agents, they also act as “purveyors of unequally distributed rewards and punishments, as gatekeepers and controllers of scarce resources, as self-interested and self-advocating members of unions, and as representatives, and often unwilling ‘agents’ of a classist, sexist, and racialized societal order” (p. 162). This dual role of both *agent-advocate* and *gatekeeper* reflects a key concern of social capital theory; access to institutional support is contingent upon establishing trust between teacher and student (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2001).

The inability to establish trusting relationships within an educational institution is particularly important for students of color, as it represents a key reason why they may disengage from school (Katz, 1999; Murray & Zvoch, 2011; Plunkett, Henry, Houlberg, Sands, & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Yet, teacher support is institutionally contingent upon bureaucratic policies, rules, procedures, codes, and normative practices that the institution prioritizes over individual student needs. This excludes students, including students of color—who, again, comprise the majority of urban continuation high school students in California—who are unwilling or unable to negotiate use of dominant group cultural capital, or who are ambivalent about trusting those whose support is conditional upon assimilation into dominant cultural norms.

While some students of color can successfully manage to “decode the system” (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 33) and learn how to engage institutional agents in mainstream cultures, the majority cannot. This is especially true for the urban continuation high school student, whose very inclusion in the *last chance* alternative education program infers an inability to effectively negotiate dominant cultural and social norms. Access to the continuation teacher’s social capital may also serve as a last chance for students to decode the system, support self-efficacy, and affect internal motivation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

To provide social capital that supports individual growth and success, urban continuation high school teachers must adroitly respect the policies and practices of the institution while transmitting information of cultural and social value to students. In doing so, urban continuation teachers will support their students’ ability to successfully develop what Stanton-Salazar (2001) describes as a “bicultural network orientation” (p.

34), allowing for the successful navigation of multiple cultures. Successful transmission of social capital requires both pre-service and professional development training for the urban continuation high school teacher.

Teacher Training in Urban Continuation High Schools

I have already discussed a range of factors that reflect a student's likelihood of being put at-risk for academic failure. I have also described theories related to student behaviors that support positive academic outcomes. Despite a lack of official clarity on what constitutes an urban continuation high school teacher's "special fitness to perform," addressing risk factors by promoting positive student behaviors is arguably an important continuation teacher function, and doing so effectively likely requires some kind of structured training. Unfortunately, there is scant academic literature specifically reviewing continuation teacher pre-service training or professional development. Aron (2006) reframes the alternative education discussion from an economic/labor perspective. He contends that, despite having as many as 3.8 million youth in the United States out of school without a diploma and not working, "little attention is being paid to the need for scaled efforts to reconnect these dropouts to education options that prepare them for success in the economy of the future" (p. 1). Aron also states that the research base for alternative education programs is still developing; few scientifically-based, rigorous evaluations exist that point to specific practices that lead to student success. He does note that lists of key characteristics are starting to emerge, and these preliminary lists include several desirable attributes. Specifically, teachers should: choose to be part of the alternative education program; routinely use positive discipline techniques; establish rapport with students and peers; have high expectations for students; be certified in their

content areas; be creative in their classrooms; have a role in school leadership and in designing the program and the curriculum; and have access to ongoing professional development that supports an academic focus, enhances teaching strategies, and develops alternative instructional methods.

Teacher training programs. Nationwide, there is currently only one alternative education licensure program. Wisconsin Statutes ch. 115, subch. 2 § 115.28 (7)(e)(2) (2012) grant the state's Superintendent of Schools the right to establish requirements for alternative education teacher licensure and teacher education programs. Certificated Wisconsin teachers can earn a Wisconsin Department of Instruction Education Certification #952 add-on license through in-class or online coursework. Several state-approved teacher education programs offer classes, including the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Alternative Education Certification program (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Education, n.d.). In order to receive a #952 license through this program, a teacher must have a State of Wisconsin Teaching Certificate, complete two classes ("The Student At-Risk," and "Educating At-Risk Students") with a B- or better, and create a mini-portfolio using work completed in the required courses.

Initially, #952 license coursework at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater required completion of five in-class courses: "The Representation of Experience and Knowledge," "Multicultural Construction of Meaning," "Formal and Informal Learning Environments," "The Marginal Student," and "Emancipatory Pedagogies" (Chandler, Freiberg, D'Antonio Stinson, & Nelson, 2002). The Whitewater program was reduced to four two-credit courses covering similar topics, and these are either taught online or

through a hybrid on-line/classroom approach (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, n.d.). The program also requires a summative portfolio.

In California, no such licensure program exists. Ashcroft (1999) describes two surveys conducted in 1992 and 1993 where California alternative, juvenile detention, and correctional teachers were asked to evaluate their pre-service training. Ashcroft reports that most teachers believed they were inadequately prepared for certain aspects of their work. For example, while most felt adequately prepared to teach subject matter, almost all said that their students had legal, social, and psychological problems that they had not received specific training to address. When asked where they received in-service training, the most common response was, "I have basically educated myself in this area" (p. 82). Ashcroft contends, "the issue is not that the students are challenging, but that the teachers have not been trained regarding the specific challenges" (p. 84).

It should be noted that Ashcroft's (1999) participants were teachers who worked with students incarcerated within the juvenile justice system. Juvenile justice schools deal with academic and behavioral issues that are different from or more extreme than other types of alternative school settings, including urban continuation schools. Nevertheless, it can be argued that, like continuation schoolteachers, juvenile justice schoolteachers deal with students who were initially unsuccessful in the urban continuation school environment. As a result, there are relevant lessons to be learned from this research.

Professional development. Throughout the first decade of the 21st century, researchers often prefaced their study results with the admonition that current evidence supporting the effectiveness of professional development (PD) remains largely anecdotal. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) cited a growing body of literature on

PD, along with best practices, yet stated that, “despite the size of the body of literature...relatively little systematic research has been conducted on the effects of professional development on improvements in teaching or on student outcomes” (p. 917). Seven years later, Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen, and Garet (2008) concurred, stating, “although a consensus has emerged in the literature about the features of effective PD, the evidence on the specific features that make a difference for achievement is weak” (p. 469).

A limited body of research has brought greater focus to the issue of PD effectiveness in K-12 public schools. Garet et al. (2001) made the first large-scale empirical exploration of the impact of PD effectiveness on teacher learning. Using a national probability sample of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers, the authors identified both structural and core features that characterize high-quality PD. Structural features included: the form of the activity, i.e., *traditional* PD versus a *reform* type; the duration of the activity, i.e., the number of hours participants spend in the activity and the overall length of the activity itself; and the degree to which the activity emphasized the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, department, or grade level.

Garet and colleagues (2001) also identified core features that must be assessed in order to determine the effectiveness of PD measures. These include: the degree to which the activity has a content focus, including the degree to which the activity concerns itself with deepening and improving teacher content knowledge; the degree to which the activity offers opportunities for active learning (e.g., reviewing student work or observation and feedback on instruction); and the degree to which the activity promotes

coherence in PD (e.g., teacher communication, relevancy to the teacher, and alignment with state standards and assessments).

The relative lack of empirical evidence notwithstanding, the general consensus within the education community has been and is that PD is an important component of curricular and instructional improvement. This consensus applies to continuation high schools, at least amongst the program’s faculty and administrators. Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) observed that California’s continuation school leaders perceive a lack of understanding by both state school governance policymakers and district administrators that “working with abused or otherwise vulnerable youth may require special training special staff training or skills” (p. 9). Continuation high school leaders also find that appropriate staff development programs that address the needs of vulnerable youth are hard to find. Lacking PD options, continuation high schools often resort to school level experimentation and a “trial-and-error approach to instructional change” (p. 9).

Summary

In one of the few recent articles on California’s urban continuation high schools, Ruiz de Velasco (2008) argues that continuation schools operate in a “mid-range of quality, attention, and opportunity—a condition of benign neglect and low priority” (p. 9). He notes, however, that in the absence of direction from state education policymakers, continuation school leaders look for direction and support from local school districts. Again, without clearly articulated programmatic goals (Williamson, 2008), urban continuation school outcomes are Balkanized, with individual programs determining instruction, support, and general services (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008). A more systematic, overarching approach to state guidelines for continuation schools—including specific

teacher competencies—can better support consistent application of equitable educational programming.

Student needs may vary from school to school, but are generally centered on academic and social stressors related to put at-risk and dropout issues. Teacher support of key student behaviors—including an internalized locus of control, personal motivation, resiliency, and validation—encourages positive and healthy social and academic outcomes. However, urban continuation high school teachers are not formally trained through pre-service training programs or PD to address either academic and social stressor behaviors or the development of healthy, positive behaviors.

Currently, institutional support for developing and enhancing “special fitness” teacher training is non-existent; there is not a single alternative education teaching curriculum, certificate, or licensure training program in California public or private higher education. Further, research on the competencies needed to teach in alternative school settings is scarce (Guerin & Denti, 1999). The lack of pre-service training and PD programs designed to address “special fitness” proficiencies—and the dearth of research that could inform these programs—impairs the ability of teachers to meet the needs of California’s most vulnerable put at-risk students. Lacking organized training, support, or information, teachers are left with school-level experimentation and invention as their only viable training and development option (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008).

The lack of specific state guidelines for urban continuation high school teacher “fitness” hinders consistency in practice. “In the absence of clear signals about expectations...[and] systematic support...the quality of instruction in continuation schools will continue to depend largely on the beliefs, effort and motivation of individual

teachers and local administrators” (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008, p. 12). Without a clear definition of a teacher’s “special fitness to perform,” the quality of instruction in continuation high schools will not allow students to realize their potential. Clearly further study is needed on what constitutes California urban continuation high school teachers’ special fitness to perform.

Chapter 3

Description of the Research Design

Given society's concerns about creating successful dropout prevention programs (Carver & Lewis, 2011; Timar et al., 2007), the skillsets of continuation high school teachers—referred to in California Education Code Section 44865 as their “special fitness to perform”—play a critical role for students in terms of retention and successful completion of a public secondary education (Guerin & Denti, 1999). To understand educators' and administrators' beliefs about these skillsets, my study employed a qualitative multiple case study design. Data were primarily drawn from interviews with continuation high school principals and teachers as well as from concurrent document collection and analysis. Qualitative data collection methods were the most suitable approach for this study because interviews could generate the descriptions needed to answer the research questions. I focused on ascertaining the meanings that the study's participants held about what constitutes the “special fitness” factors that qualify teachers to teach in continuation high schools, with a special focus on teaching put at-risk students. The findings can help define specific areas of need for training and licensure requirements and, in turn, improve the outcomes of continuation high schools. To this end, the study focused on four research questions:

1. How do urban continuation high school principals and teachers define what constitutes a continuation teacher's “special fitness to perform?”
2. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, what types of training for working with put at-risk populations would improve a teacher's “special fitness to perform” in a continuation high school?

3. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how do specific kinds of academic, professional, and personal backgrounds qualify a teacher to be successful in a continuation school?
4. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how does a continuation teacher's ability to teach and support social and academic behaviors in the classroom constitute part of his or her "special fitness to perform?"

Research Design

The research questions were explored via qualitative methods consisting of interviews with continuation high school principals and teachers, and document collection and analysis. A qualitative research design was advantageous for the study, as its intent is to understand a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction (L. Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987). Yin (2009) contends that case studies are the preferred social science research method when (a) *how* or *why* questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Marshall and Rossman (2006) add that a case study requires immersion in the chosen setting; the researcher enters the participant's world and, through ongoing interaction, seeks the informants' perspectives and meanings.

As an educator with two California single-subject teaching credentials currently teaching in a continuation high school, I comfortably immersed myself within the continuation school environment. Moreover, I was interested in understanding the perceptions and beliefs of continuation principals and teachers regarding "special fitness to perform" factors. Finally, I was able to establish an immediate level of credibility

within the continuation school community. Conducting a qualitative study offered the best option for immersion and understanding the urban continuation school, with a richness of contextual detail from participants that would not be available using quantitative measures.

Interviewing teachers and principals for this study within the continuation school setting provided a credible contextual understanding of how they interpret continuation teachers' "fitness to perform." According to Seidman (2006), the primary way a researcher can investigate an educational "organization, institution, or process" is through the experiences of the people who "make up the organization or carry out the process" (p. 10). At the heart of interviewing is an interest in understanding the "lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 9). Seidman argues that if a researcher is interested in how participants make meaning of their experiences—their *subjective understanding*—then interviewing may be the best avenue of inquiry.

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Target population and sampling frame. The study was conducted within continuation high schools operated by the Celaya Unified School District (CUSD, a pseudonym), a large K-12 urban school district located in California. CUSD was selected because it is representative of other urban school districts in size, racial/ethnic/economic diversity, and established methods for teacher recruitment, hiring, and in-service training programs. Moreover, it is a school district with a large alternative education program, including multiple continuation program sites, and it has a large enough faculty pool to ensure a range of professional experience and training. The size of CUSD's continuation program, scope, faculty experience, and training variations made the site desirable for

this study, as the research questions relate to urban continuation high school principals and teachers. Together, these site characteristics increased the potential instructiveness of the study to others outside of the district, including education leaders and policymakers, as well as other continuation administrators and faculty who share similar program/site demographics.

Beyond size and scope, CUSD's continuation school program was typical in that district continuation teachers face common student put at-risk dropout indicators, including school-related factors such as disengagement (Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012); poor attendance, low academic achievement, and a lack of intellectual self reliance; social factors, including impact of peer groups (Ryan, 2000); family and socioeconomic background; and health issues, including substance abuse, high-risk sexual activity, and lack of access to quality health care (Oakland, 1992). Unlike in comprehensive schools, these risk factors are pervasive throughout the CUSD continuation school environment, as they are within alternative education programs in other large school districts nationwide (Lange & Sletten, 2002).

The participants in this study were CUSD continuation high school teachers and principals. Teachers have the closest and most frequent interactions with students. Based on their daily experiences, they may have the greatest understanding of put at-risk student needs, and the specific types of teacher training and characteristics needed to support student success. Principals have a different type of expertise, as they are the continuation high school site administrators responsible for hiring and evaluating certificated staff. As such, they determine teachers' "special fitness to perform," and its degree of relevance in the hiring and evaluation processes.

To support this study's development of information richness through interviewing, the method of principal/teacher selection was based on purposeful sampling. As Patton (2002) explains, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry" (p. 230, emphasis in original). Patton contends that information-rich cases provide insights and in-depth understandings that require fewer actual participants: "one may learn a great deal more by studying in-depth a small number of carefully selected (participants) than by gathering standardized information from a large, statistically representative sample" (p. 230). The specific type of purposeful sampling strategy used for teacher selection was "extreme case sampling," which involves selecting information-rich cases with participants who exemplify excellence or "outstanding successes" (Patton, 2002, p. 231). By selecting fewer illuminative cases of continuation high school teacher excellence, the study benefitted from selecting participants from whom I could learn the most while maximizing limited resources and time.

Stages of the data collection process. Data collection took place in sequential stages, allowing each stage to inform the subsequent stages. It included document collection and analysis, interview protocol development through a focus group and pilot testing, and one-on-one interviews with teachers and principals.

Pre-stage: Document collection. Yin (2009) states that documentation is one of six major sources of evidence used in case study. He contends that the primary use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources. Such documents can support the verification of collected information; the development of inferences that

may shape the scope of interview questions; and the corroboration of names, dates, places, and programs associated with the study. In this study, document collection began at the outset of the study in order to provide data for questions in the subsequent focus group. Documents were also collected on an ongoing basis in order to inform data analysis and to contribute to the study findings.

Public documents were used to identify possible factors related to how urban continuation high school principals and teachers define what constitutes a continuation teacher's "special fitness to perform," what types of training for working with put at-risk populations would improve a teacher's "fitness to perform" in a continuation high school, how specific kinds of academic, professional, and personal backgrounds uniquely qualify a teacher to be successful at teaching in a continuation school, and how a teacher's ability to transmit positive behavioral support is linked to his/her "fitness to perform" in a continuation high school.

Documents intended to inform research question one included teacher- and principal-generated Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation reports, including elements related to teacher training (including PD); documents containing teacher hiring interview questions; teacher performance evaluation templates; school PD committee meeting agendas, notes, packets, and memoranda; and school mission statements.

Documents that addressed research question two included teacher- and principal-generated WASC accreditation reports (including elements related to teacher training); school hiring committee meeting agendas and notes; school PD committee meeting

agendas, notes, packets, and memoranda; lists of teacher trainings and workshops attended; and individual school websites.

Documents targeted to research question three included teacher hiring interview questions and job descriptions generated by the school's hiring committee for open teaching positions. Question four documents included school PD committee meeting agendas, notes, packets, and memoranda; teacher-generated unit and lesson plans; school-wide behavior and classroom management plans; agendas and minutes from school positive student behavior committees; service agency resource brochures; handouts and flyers available to students in school classrooms; and school mission statements.

Stage One: Focus group. A focus group with six continuation schoolteachers who did not teach at potential study sites was conducted in order to identify “best practices” and the qualities of the factors that constitute a continuation teacher’s “fitness to perform.” The focus group format allowed a variety of perspectives to emerge. Specific criteria for selection of teachers for subsequent interviews were derived from this focus group discussion.

Focus group participants were recruited at multiple sites. These included Berdj Karapetian High School, Leticia Moreno High School, David Lynch High School, and Yvonne Terrell High School (pseudonyms). To allow for greater awareness of faculty academic and non-academic practices, teachers were invited to participate in the focus group based on the length of time they have worked at a continuation high school (a minimum of 4 years), types of general credentials and licenses held, specialized credentials and licenses held (e.g., special education), certificates held (e.g., National Board Certification), and involvement in PD committees and initiatives. Each focus

group member had one or more of these attributes, allowing the group to offer a diverse range of skills and a cumulative awareness of continuation teacher excellence.

Focus group recruiting began during mid-January 2013. The focus group was conducted for approximately 60-90 minutes at David Lynch High School. At the conclusion of the focus group, participants were given a nominal token of thanks, in the form of a \$10 gift card, for focus group participation.

Stage Two: Pilot interview protocols. For the second stage of the study, I designed an interview protocol based on the findings from the focus group. The protocol contained scenario-based interview questions consistent with the scope of all four research questions. These were modified after the focus group. The teacher protocol was piloted with three continuation schoolteachers from Sharon Delugash High School, Joseph Bernardo High School, and Edgar Martinez High School (pseudonyms). The principal interview protocol was piloted with three continuation school principals from Judith Light High School, David Sell High School, and Betty Frankel High School (pseudonyms). They were not part of the later stages of study. This allowed me to determine if the questions worked as written, were understandable to participants, and supported the gathering of rich, in-depth responses; it also helped me to identify what revisions needed to be made (Maxwell, 2005).

I recruited interview pilot participants by distributing flyers in teacher and principal mailboxes. Participants were selected according to the length of time they have taught in continuation schools (a minimum of 4 years), general credentials and licenses held, specialized credentials and licenses held, certificates held, and involvement in school committees and initiatives. I anticipated that each pilot protocol participant would

have one or more of these attributes, allowing for greater awareness of faculty academic and non-academic practices.

To support the efficient and productive use of participants' time, pilot testing of the teacher and principal protocols was conducted online using voice-over-Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, including Skype and Face Time. Recruitment and protocol pilots began in late January 2013. One evaluation per participant was conducted outside of work hours. The pilot interviews took approximately 30-45 minutes for review and comment. Participants who completed the evaluation were given a nominal token of thanks, in the form of a \$10 gift card. Data collection from the protocol evaluations was completed within 2 weeks of recruitment.

Stage Three: Individual teacher and principal interviews. The third stage of the study consisted of individual teacher and principal interviews. The teacher interviews were conducted with 15 continuation schoolteachers who were not part of the earlier stages of the study; the principal interviews were conducted with six continuation principals who were not part of the earlier stages of the study and who work at the same schools as the teachers.

The first interviews were conducted at three continuation school sites: John Eichinger High School, Daniel Crecelius High School, and Mary Ann Sesma High School (pseudonyms). These schools are the three largest multi-teacher continuation school sites within CUSD. I asked permission from the principals at these sites to make a presentation about the study during a scheduled faculty meeting and I put flyers about the meeting in teachers' mailboxes. At the meeting, I explained the study's purpose and goals, and asked teachers to participate. At the same meeting, interested teachers were asked to

complete a written questionnaire based on the focus group's identified "excellence," "best practices," and "fitness to perform" characteristics. This questionnaire (see Appendix B) helped to identify potential teacher interviewees for the study.

Implementation of the questionnaire occurred in early to mid-February 2013. The final question on the questionnaire asked if the teacher was willing to participate in an interview and if he/she was willing to provide contact information. In order to give potential participants the opportunity to complete the questionnaire, one meeting was conducted. The meeting for questionnaire implementation lasted approximately 45 minutes. Participants were given a nominal token of thanks in the form of meeting snacks and beverages.

After the responses to the questionnaires were read and analyzed, I identified 15 potential interviewees. I selected participants from teachers who completed the questionnaire based on the following criteria: thoroughness of critical thinking responses to potential "fitness to perform" topics as identified by the focus group, such as "excellence," and "best practices;" credentials and licenses held; specialized credentials and licenses held (e.g., special education); certificates held (e.g., National Board Certification); length of time teaching in continuation schools (a minimum of 4 years); and involvement in school committees and initiatives.

The interview protocols—one for principals and one for teachers—were standardized for all participants after being piloted. Based on the review of the literature and data from the focus group with teachers, the interview consisted of semi-structured, scenario-based questions pertaining to: teachers' and principals' perceptions of what constitutes a teacher's "special fitness to perform" in a continuation high school; what

types of training would improve a teacher’s “special fitness” for working with put at-risk populations; how their academic, professional, and personal experiences relate to their “special fitness;” and how teachers’ ability to transmit positive behavioral support to students is linked to their “special fitness.”

Interview participant recruitment began in mid-February 2013. Interviews were conducted at each participant’s work site. A single interview was conducted with each teacher and principal. Each individual interview lasted between 1-1.5 hours. Participants were given a nominal token of thanks, in the form of a \$10 gift card, for interview participation. Data collection was completed in mid-March 2013.

Recent administrator displacements caused by CUSD budget cutbacks limited years of continuation school experience as a selection criterion for principal interview participation. Principal participants were selected from four of the six same sites chosen for the study’s teacher participants; this allowed for comparison between teacher and principal interview comments during data analysis. Two of the six site principals chose not to participate in the study. The sites, principals, and teachers were all given codes and pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

To ensure accuracy in data collection, interviewees were provided the opportunity to review transcripts—a process referred to as *respondent validation* or *member checks* (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009)—in order to make suggestions for changes or corrections, or to amplify particular ideas or statements. Table 1 provides an overview of the stages of data collection and analysis.

Table 1

Data Collection and Analysis Timeline

Stages	Activities	When (CUSD calendar)	Number of Participants
Pre-Stage: Document Collection	Locate documents, analyze and summarize contents	Beginning early fall semester, 2012	n/a
Stage One: Focus Group	Recruit participants, hold meeting, transcribe and analyze data; revise the two interview protocols based on findings	Mid to late January, 2013	Six teachers
Stage Two: Pilot Interview Protocols	Pilot and modify protocols as needed	Late January, 2013	Three teachers; Three principals
Stage Three: Interview Recruitment	Attend school meetings and administer questionnaire	Early to mid-February, 2013	
Stage Three: Individual Interviews	Conduct one-on-one interviews with teachers and principals; transcribe data	Mid February, 2013 through Mid March, 2013	15 teachers; six principals
Data Analysis	Analyze findings from one-on-one interviews	Analysis was ongoing as I conducted the interviews and collected the documents	n/a

Data analysis methods. Interview data were analyzed based on transcribed digital audio recordings of principal and teacher transcripts, and a review of documents related to continuation school policies and procedures. Documents and transcripts were coded for patterns, themes, and topics related to the elements of what constitutes a teacher’s “special fitness to perform” in a public continuation high school. Categories established from this study’s literature review were also used as part of the coding process.

To support participant confidentiality, codes for all names and schools were established. The master list of all codes was placed in a fireproof combination safe. Recordings of the focus group and interviews were made using Livescribe digital

smartpen technology, with redundant backup of the recordings supported through flash drive, external hard drive, and Dropbox; Evernote; and Google Drive cloud computing storage. Document security/control, along with participant anonymity, were of paramount importance. Dropbox, Evernote, and Google Drive cloud computing storage were accessed only through personally owned and linked Apple computers requiring security passwords. Documents on these Apple computers used FireVault data encryption, accessible to the user exclusively by password or recovery key. The LaCie flash drive and external hard drive also required passwords, while all paper copies of transcripts and notes were placed in a fireproof combination safe when not in use.

Ethical Issues

This study was planned and conducted in a manner consistent with federal and state laws and regulations, as well as professional standards governing the conduct of research, particularly standards governing research with human participants. In compliance with CUSD Research Unit requirements, the study adhered to federal guidelines regarding the protection of human subjects, as outlined in Protection of Human Subjects, Subpart A - Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 34 C.F.R. pt. 97 (2006). I ensured that adequate provisions, as outlined in this section, were established to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data. It should be noted that study participants were limited to CUSD continuation school principals and teachers; no students or student data were part of the research study.

Informed consent was sought from each prospective subject in accordance with, and to the extent required by, 34 CFR Part 97, § 97.116, and was appropriately documented in accordance with, and to the extent required by, § 97.117. To support

clarity of understanding for potential study participants, I used language that was reasonably understandable when obtaining their appropriate informed consent.

In conducting this research, I also abided by the policies set forth by the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP). The UCLA OHRPP, in partnership with the research community, is responsible for ensuring the safety and welfare of human research participants involved in studies being conducted by UCLA faculty, staff, or students. The UCLA Consent Form was given to all participants in the study, and the voluntary nature of participation was stressed. Participants were informed that they could end the interview at any time.

Prior to beginning the research study, I submitted to the CUSD Committee for External Research Review (CERR) a copy of the UCLA OHRPP submission along with the CUSD proposal, and provided CERR with a copy of OHRPP's IRB approval letter.

In order to minimize privacy intrusions, in any written or oral report I included only information germane to the purpose for which the communication was made. I discussed confidential information obtained in schools, or evaluative data concerning students, teachers, and other research participants, only for appropriate research purposes and only with persons who were clearly concerned with such matters and had pledged to uphold confidentiality. The identities of the participants were confidential and each participant had a unique identifying code.

I work for the Celaya Unified School District as a long-term substitute teacher. My current assignment is Holly Martins High School/Harry Lime branch (a pseudonym). My contact with members of the CUSD continuation high school programs is limited to Martins High School faculty, who are dispersed at 28 branch locations throughout the

district. They meet as a group only for monthly staff meetings and PD training, which I am obligated to attend. As a substitute teacher, I am not a member of any Martins High School committee for the 2012-2013 school year. Daily contact with Martins High School teachers and administrators is limited to the team teacher at Martins High/Lime branch, who did not take part in the study.

Given my current employment status within CUSD, I was not in a position to evaluate teachers or to provide information about teachers' classroom performance. As participation in the study was voluntary and I was not in a leadership role, it was unlikely that continuation school principals or teachers felt coerced to take part in the study based on my limited role as a long-term substitute within the continuation high school staff.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study was supported through transparency in participant selection and reporting processes, as well as by triangulation of the data and moderation in remuneration. First, I provided the criteria for study participants using handouts that I provided at the initial meeting with each group at each site. The meeting included a short presentation of the study's basic outline and its general goals. Several days prior to the meeting, I posted copies of the handout at each site's main office and distributed it to each teacher through the CUSD faculty mailboxes located there as well. The school's main office serves as a hub around which numerous administrative and faculty activities revolve, and is an organizing area for teachers and principals where potential participants would likely see such notices. The criteria for participation were clearly stated on the handout. Having the handout in advance of the initial meeting allowed faculty time to understand the purpose of the study and to think of potential questions, and encouraged

interest in and support for participation. Greater overall support by potential participants increased the likelihood of generating a representative sample for the study.

The protocol also played an important role in supporting reliable research outcomes. Yin (2009) states, “the protocol is a major way of increasing the *reliability* of case study research and is intended to guide the investigator in carrying out the data collection from a single case” (p. 79, emphasis in original). I used the study’s research questions as the foundation for creating the interview protocol in order to remind myself and anyone else reading or attempting to replicate the study what information I was trying to learn. I piloted and revised scenario-based interview protocol questions before using them in the final study. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed immediately after recording. I provided member checks for interview participants so they could review their transcripts to check for accuracy and offer corrections, clarifications, and insights. Field-testing the questions, digitally recording and transcribing the interviews, and allowing the participants to check their transcripts for accuracy helped to ensure that I captured participants’ true experiences and perceptions, thus enhancing the study’s credibility.

I also increased trustworthiness through data triangulation, wherein information is collected from multiple sources “but aimed at corroborating the same fact or phenomenon” (Yin, 2009, p. 116). Data triangulation included member checks of the in-depth interviews, teacher participant selection questionnaire data, and document collection (Merriam, 2009).

Since the study included only 35 participants, it does not claim to be definitive or generalizable to all urban continuation high school principals and teachers. However, the

experiences of these 35 individuals should be instructive and informative to education leaders and policymakers, as well as to other continuation administrators and faculty who share similar program/site demographics.

Summary

This project consisted of interviews with continuation high school principals and teachers, along with concurrent document collection and analysis, focused on understanding how the study's participants perceive what constitutes the "special fitness" factors qualifying teachers to teach in continuation high schools. By generating these descriptions using structured data collection and analysis methods and addressing both ethical issues and trustworthiness of the research, the study can help define specific areas of need for continuation school teacher training and licensure requirements.

Chapter 4

Findings

Between January and March 2013, I interviewed 15 teachers and six principals from Celaya Unified School District (CUSD, a pseudonym) to collect their descriptions of the urban continuation high school teacher's "special fitness to perform." In doing so, I sought their responses to the following four research questions:

1. How do urban continuation high school principals and teachers define what constitutes a continuation teacher's "special fitness to perform?"
2. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, what types of training for working with put at-risk populations would improve a teacher's "special fitness to perform" in a continuation high school?
3. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how do specific kinds of academic, professional, and personal backgrounds qualify a teacher to be successful in a continuation school?
4. According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how does a continuation teacher's ability to teach and support social and academic behaviors in the classroom constitute part of his or her "special fitness to perform?"

In this chapter, the study's findings are described by research question, reviewing principal and teacher responses related to Research Questions One through Four.

Principals are referred to as PRIN 1 through 6, while teachers are referred to as TEACH 1 through 15 (see Appendix E). The remainder of this chapter is divided into three sections:

Principal and Teacher interview findings related to Research Questions One through Four, Continuation Teacher Narratives, and interview and Narrative Analysis.

Principal and Teacher Interview Findings

The following section begins a discussion on principal and teacher findings related to Research Question One.

Research Question One. This research question asked, How do urban continuation high school principals and teachers define what constitutes a continuation teacher’s “special fitness to perform?” According to the principals and teachers interviewed for this study, continuation teacher special fitness to perform are defined by several factors. These include the following:

Content mastery. There was general agreement between principals and teachers that a continuation teacher must have content mastery of both their credentialed area of expertise and content areas they have to teach outside of their credential. Four of the six principals interviewed for this study identified strong content knowledge as a characteristic that suggests someone can successfully teach continuation high school students. Eight of 15 teachers agreed. TEACH 5 believed in a “wide range of content knowledge,” while TEACH 3 urged “a mastery of the content area and ideally several content areas.” This content mastery and the ability to teach outside of a teacher’s credential is important to the success of the continuation program; often in continuation schools where there are one or two teachers per site, such as Category 2, Category 3, and Category 4 schools (see Appendix E), teachers must teach all academic core and elective subject areas required for a high school diploma. TEACH 1, referring to the transition

from teaching in a comprehensive program to a continuation school, said, “before, you might only be teaching one subject, now you’re having to teach everything.”

Not all principals or teachers agreed on what might be considered “mastery” of non-credentialed content areas; for two of six principals and seven of 15 teachers, the ability to teach or understand basic concepts within the subject area was considered adequate.

Reengagement and sensitivity. Continuation teachers face a variety of classroom challenges, notably student disengagement. Continuation students enter the alternative education program with histories of academic learning challenges and failure. Because many of these issues have been prevalent throughout their academic careers, many have opted to give up, disengaging themselves from recurrent failure. To address this challenge, continuation teacher skillsets also require an ability to promote student engagement effectively. Three of six principals interviewed agreed that student engagement affects student learning. PRIN 1 stated, “it’s important to be able to adjust and relate to students who’ve had difficulties in their background. In continuation, it’s not a once-in-a-while thing, that’s an everyday thing.”

Principals and teachers agreed that engagement requires instruction that students find relevant and is rooted in their lives. Because their classroom and out of school experiences are often negative, teachers must employ sensitivity in the continuation classroom environment. PRIN 6 said,

even though a child has taken a step back, because of that traumatic experience or that bad day, the fact that a teacher is willing to listen, stand with a child, or believe in a child can go a long way.

This level of comfort and trust was characteristic of the general PRIN belief in how a classroom culture looks.

According to principals interviewed for this study, an effective continuation teacher must have the ability to develop a positive classroom culture with a large put at-risk population. According to PRIN 1, PRIN 4, and PRIN 5, the continuation classroom culture is built upon teacher-student respect, trust, caring, risk-taking, confidence, tolerance, acceptance, and sensitivity. According to these three principals, teacher caring and sensitivity positively affects student learning.

Fourteen of the 15 teachers interviewed agreed on the critical need for a positive classroom culture when engaging their high put at-risk population. Reflecting on the variety of non-academic challenges facing put at-risk continuation students, TEACH 10 remarked on the unique setting of a continuation classroom:

So a teacher that comes in here has to understand that they are working with so much more than just school. It is not a teacher just of facts, but we are teachers of life. What makes a human successful and happy, that we are trying to get across to our students. But to be able to do that, we need to understand that we are playing in a whole different ballgame here in continuation.

TEACH 3 supported the idea of a classroom culture that is aware of and sensitive to the local community, stating, “if a teacher has a familiarity with the community, that is a plus, otherwise they are going to have to learn the culture of the classroom, the culture of the community.” While TEACH 3 viewed classroom culture from a reactive frame, other participants believed that a teacher can take proactive measures to build a positive, student-centered environment. TEACH 4 suggested that “being able to deal with situations that you wouldn’t normally have to deal with at a comprehensive school” requires flexible classroom management. TEACH 8 urged teachers to be flexible and

“make students comfortable.” TEACH 9 believed that teachers must provide “direction and guidance,” along with “patience” in a successful continuation classroom. This may require developing an ability to provide academic and behavioral support while minimizing the traditional authoritarian role of the comprehensive schoolteacher.

TEACH 15 emphasized the importance of “Learning how to be less of a ‘teacher’ teacher, and more of like a one-on-one kind of teacher. That’s something of a big change, coming from comprehensive to here.”

While teachers can support engagement and academic success best through effective delivery of instruction, continuation classroom behavior issues require a culture rooted in structure. Eight of 15 teachers interviewed believed that classroom management is a key component of a positive classroom culture. TEACH 3 said, “typically, the teachers are the sole person responsible and available in the classroom, that is if they don’t have a team teacher or teacher’s assistant, so classroom management has to be pretty well set.”

Instruction and differentiation. The qualities and characteristics that give a continuation teacher a “special fitness to perform” center around the teacher’s ability to personalize instruction, according to four of five principals interviewed for this study. PRIN 4 said, “you do whatever it takes. That’s our job as educators... Whatever the situation, whatever the kids come to you with, you have to do whatever it takes to bring them to the next level.” PRIN 6 added, “for me, the number one is: how do you personalize instruction? How do you create engagement?”

Individualization of instruction was also a major concern for nine of 15 teachers interviewed, who urged thoughtful planning for teaching to multiple skill levels. This

requires sensitivity to student skill levels, as explained by TEACH 8: “You have students whose skill levels are so fragile, where their feelings of self-esteem are so fragile.”

Individualization can support skill building and provide needed academic tools. As TEACH 2 remarked, “Giving them the tools that they need that maybe they haven’t had so far: study skills, helping them be structured students, organizing their materials.”

According to 10 of 15 teacher responses, a key characteristic teachers will need to develop in order to succeed at a continuation high school is an effective instructional strategy. This includes being flexible in curriculum instruction and pacing, as well as in grouping students for small group instruction and within a single classroom. According to TEACH 12, this is important “when you have a classroom with ninth through 12th graders in one room, all different subjects and all different learning abilities, you have to learn to differentiate.” TEACH 12 listed several areas for teacher instructional strategies: “set up their curriculum,” “engage the students beyond just the textbooks,” “coordinate an “intervention program” for both academics and behavior, and “understand the progression of curriculum” to best serve a student population with multiple academic gaps and learning needs. According to TEACH 12, these strategies support student reengagement in the learning process: “with the students that have already faced failure, what other strategies can they use to get them to bite back into the school program?”

Three of five principals agreed that differentiation of instruction was also an important teacher characteristic. PRIN 5 comment, “you need to have a strong academic background” was echoed by PRIN 2 and PRIN 3.

Addressing instructional differentiation, PRIN 1 remarked that a teacher must have “an understanding for the differentiation of instruction with the kinds of students

that we have,” while PRIN 2 said, “the continuation classroom will require a broader ability to differentiate.” PRIN 3 concurred, saying,

You’ve got to be able to be varied in your teaching methods, you can’t attack the students with one and only one method. You have to be able to recognize what type of learner the students are and to plan your lessons accordingly and to make sure that you’re going to be hitting every student on there.

Student assessment and remediation. Both teachers and principals agreed that the skill of assessing student competencies and providing remediation on a personal level, while doing so in small and whole group direct instruction, is a key continuation teacher skill. According to eight of 15 teachers, these characteristics include a teacher’s effort to develop a student’s skillset. TEACH 5 linked instructional strategies to “developing a student’s skillset through constant assessment, to make modifications to instruction.” Assessment can then be used to plan for differentiation for instruction. As TEACH 11 stated, “I can’t imagine how a teacher can be successful without assessing student knowledge...from there, the individualization would be based on that.” PRIN 2 commented, “teachers need to be able to perform a diagnostic of students coming into their classroom and treating each student individually, according to his or her needs, and then be able to group those students into manageable, teachable groups.”

Support for a positive continuation school classroom culture requires instructional modifications to meet the widely varying needs of put at-risk students. Nine of 15 teachers stressed that continuation teachers need to possess the ability to modify instruction. According to TEACH 11 and TEACH 13, this requires the ability to embed remediation opportunities into individualized instruction. TEACH 5 extended this idea to include both individualization and remediation through differentiated small group instruction.

Research Question Two. The following sections describe principal and teacher findings related to Research Question Two of this research study. This research question asked, According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, what types of training for working with put at-risk populations would improve a teacher’s “special fitness to perform” in a continuation high school?

Developing teacher skills. Students come to continuation high school with a variety of academic and non-academic issues that impact their prior knowledge and ability to acquire new information. Both principals and teachers mentioned learning gaps as a key area of concern for continuation school educators. TEACH 3 said,

the biggest issue is having an educational experience that has...had a lot of gaps, sometimes extended gaps or sometimes short gaps, but regularly or regular intervals so ultimately they have some knowledge in many content areas but they have gaps.

TEACH 7 also linked academic gaps to attendance gaps, stating, “students’ skills are very low,” because “they have either missed a lot of school or they have learning disabilities.” TEACH 2 described learning disabilities as a significant academic issue, noting, “[a] lot of them have academic issues in the sense that they may have a learning disability, and that usually tends to show in language or math or a combination.” TEACH 14 expressed concern about the large number of continuation students she worked with who have unidentified learning disabilities: “they are not identified, they are undiagnosed with IEPs [Individualized Education Plans]. I would say in my school 65% have learning disabilities and are undiagnosed.” Without a referral by the continuation teacher to a Special Education advisor, the student would remain undiagnosed, and no formal instructional or behavioral support modifications would be made.

Principals in the study concurred that student academic issues include their academic skillset (four of six principals) and literacy (five of six). PRIN 4 recognized that the high school curriculum is founded on learning that took place in elementary or middle schools: “we build so much on prior knowledge.” Yet, not all students have acquired an academic skillset that allows them to draw upon prior learning or access new knowledge. PRIN 1 outlined several student academic skillset issues:

They have not learned how to learn, they have not learned how to come to school on time, they have not learned how to work the entire day... They have “gappy” knowledge, which means they may know how to do long division, but they can’t do subtraction, or fractions, or things.

Key to addressing student academic gaps is supporting reading comprehension, an area of concern for four of six principals. PRIN 1 noted that students “could be two or three grades or more behind in reading.” PRIN 3 stated, “the biggest challenge that I’ve had since I’ve been working is reading comprehension. The reading comprehension is low because most of the kids have been turned off.”

As discussed in the findings related to Research Question One, 12 of 15 teachers interviewed believed that a continuation teacher’s skillset must include effective differentiation techniques. Content knowledge was also a priority, since continuation teachers must provide grade-level instruction and effective academic remediation, often in the same lesson, to students of four different grade levels. Eight of 15 teachers interviewed for this study believed that continuation teachers must have a mastery of content knowledge.

Although the purpose of Research Question Two was to identify descriptions of faculty training appropriate to the student population, a majority of those interviewed did not believe that specific training was supportive of a continuation teacher’s “special

fitness to perform.” According to nine of 15 teachers and four of six principals, the aforementioned continuation teacher skills and characteristics are developed through experience. When reflecting on continuation teacher skills, TEACH 1 simply said, “Some of this can’t necessarily be taught,” a sentiment with which TEACH 3 agreed: “quite often they are developed by being tossed into the fire and just put into a situation.” TEACH 6 said continuation teaching skills are “developed through trial and error,” as did TEACH 8, who added, “once you get into the classroom...it is on-the-job training” because “teacher prep classes can only do so much.”

Research Question Three. This section describes principal and teacher findings related to Research Question Three of this research study, which asked, According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how do specific kinds of academic, professional, and personal backgrounds qualify a teacher to be successful in a continuation school?

Training and coursework. In discussing pre-service training with principal participants, four of six agreed that pre-service training generally does not support a teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk populations, whereas five of six agreed that on-the-job training supports teacher competency. This aligned with principals’ and teachers’ perceptions of experience previously discussed in Research Question Two. In considering pre-service training with teacher participants, nine of 15 teachers believed that such training does not prepare teachers for continuation school. TEACH 3 asserted, “It would have been impossible for me to be successful if I went from a teacher preparation into a continuation school.” Any advanced academic coursework taken by continuation teachers should enhance both content and general knowledge. Twelve of 15 teachers interviewed

said that advanced coursework should support enhancing content knowledge and pedagogic mastery.

Reflecting on their own experience with pre-service training, PRINs 1, 2, 3, and 5 believed they were not prepared adequately for work with put at-risk students. When asked whether pre-service programs support the ability to work with put at-risk students, PRIN 1 replied, “Not much. In fact, I think that most of what I learned was actually working with the students.” PRIN 2 agreed:

You’ve got to read so much about where they are mentally...It’s the ability to actually feel that from a student and to find teachable moments. Some days are going to be better than others. That’s not a credential you go and study for. That’s something you learn from working with students and hearing their stories, and knowing what they go through. You’re able to sense.

Both principals and teachers were asked about advanced teacher coursework beyond pre-service training. Three of six principals believed such courses should support enhancing teacher content knowledge, while supporting a broader scope of content knowledge. Twelve of 15 teachers made similar observations, asserting that advanced coursework should support enhancing content knowledge and pedagogic mastery. This finding aligned with prior teacher and principal comments linking content knowledge beyond the credential with effective support for student course requirements.

When asked what additional licenses or credentials could best support a continuation teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk students, four of six principals said that an additional counseling credential would be helpful. A majority of the teachers interviewed did not list a specific additional license or credential, although six of 15 teachers supported training in special education.

For teachers who no longer take postsecondary coursework, school-based PD is often their only opportunity for continued growth. When reflecting on their school's PD program, three of six principals said their school's focus was on language acquisition and development. This aligned with CUSD's mandated focus on Common Core integration, with particular emphasis on developing language arts instruction across the curriculum. Four of six principals said their PD activities currently support collaboration between teachers. Category 1 and Category 2 continuation sites also use PD collaboration opportunities to discuss individual student needs and issues, often using data to drive the discussion.

When asked about the focus of their school's PD program, eight of 15 teachers believed that current PD places a focus on standards-based instruction. A majority of these teachers felt that PD must have some utility; 11 of 15 teacher interviewees sought usable outcomes from PD. These outcomes should be student-centered, as 13 of 15 teachers suggested that current PD program promote student achievement.

When asked whether specific kinds of academic backgrounds may qualify people to be successful at teaching continuation school, three of six principals listed prior teaching experience, four of six mentioned caring, and three of six supported their teachers' ability to connect with students. PRIN 6 described one teacher who was particularly adept at connecting with her students: "I hired a woman with a heavy Russian accent to teach ELD [English language Development] to Spanish-speaking kids, and the district told me, 'What are you, nuts?' I said, 'No. She speaks like they do.' It lowered their anxiety." Discussing what academic backgrounds supported continuation teacher

success, 11 of 15 teachers interviewed believed that expertise across the curriculum is a key to success.

When considering the prior teaching backgrounds of potentially successful continuation teachers, four of six principals believed that prior experience is important.

PRIN 5 listed several types of professional backgrounds that would support success:

Yes, the elementary teacher that has to do a variety of subjects within a school day, that's very much helpful. A teacher who has very good classroom management skills. That's absolutely, absolutely one where you will be successful....In their backgrounds, their professional backgrounds, did they learn how to go into a classroom prepared? Do they have the knowledge of the subject matter?

Fourteen of 15 teachers contended that particular types of educational backgrounds were more applicable to working in a high school continuation environment. These included: elementary school teaching, upper elementary and middle school teaching, experiences outside of teaching, working with people who have challenges, tutoring and remediation, working in challenging schools, high school teaching, and working in large classrooms.

When considering non-education work experiences that could support a teacher's performance, three of six principals supported having teachers with a business background. Eleven of 15 teachers felt that general, non-education work experiences provide a broad experiential background.

When asked what specific types of personal backgrounds qualify people to be successful at teaching continuation school, three principals of six included the willingness to work with put at-risk youth and experience in such work. PRIN 2 believed that continuation teachers' willingness inspired those around them:

Most of the continuation teachers are very inspirational: they're patient, they're kind, they care about people, and they show that they care about people. Because you can't stay in this environment if you don't care about your fellow human being.

Nine of 15 teachers interviewed believed that the specific personal backgrounds supporting success at teaching continuation school included people skills, while 12 of 15 believed teacher "authenticity" was important. Authenticity relates to teacher life experiences, and the similarities they may share with their students. Teachers' behaving in an authentic manner can have consequences in the continuation classroom. The majority of teachers interviewed for this study believed that a teacher's personal background can both support (14 of 15) and hinder (eight of 15) his/her success as a continuation high school teacher. TEACH 12 said, "being an immigrant, a language learner, and seriously having money issues growing up...builds an empathy for the student population I serve." TEACH 8 stated, "someone who's had an experience where he/she knows what it feels like to be put down, put upon or oppressed...and to understand that sensibility. It helps me to understand my students and help my students deal with these challenges." However, TEACH 4 cautioned that having a similarity of culture, ethnicity, or race is no assurance of success: "where they come from the same background, same experiences as the kids, yet they can't relate to the kids. And they have this sense of superiority, and I definitely think it hinders them as a continuation teacher." When a teacher's personal background has supported the success of continuation students in his/her classes, it was often seen in both academic skills (11 of 15 teachers) and non-academic skills (13 of 15). The majority of principals believed that a teacher's personal background can both support (four principals of six) and hinder (three of six) his/her success as a continuation high school teacher. PRIN 6 stated, "our background does have

an effect...If I went to an alternative school, that will change the perspective of the adult.”

PRIN 1 believed a teacher’s personal background may hint at professional success, noting that it could be advantageous if a teacher has “worked at a group home or a non-public school...something that shows they’ve got a desire to work with at-risk youth.”

Alternately, teacher backgrounds can hinder success when they create a narrow perspective on life. PRIN 2 stated, if “your perspective in life is, ‘there’s only black and white, wrong and right, and that’s it,’ and that’s the way you see the world, you’ll die in this environment.”

Reflecting on perspectives of culture and society, four of six principals believed teachers understand the social dynamics of today’s urban society, and this understanding influences their work with continuation students. PRIN 4 stated,

You do have to understand the multilayers of what goes on in a society or a big urban area where everything isn’t so homogenized...If we do not understand or are willing to learn about where our kids come from, what they’re exposed to, what they do, then how can we help them succeed?

In discussing continuation teacher perspectives of culture and society, 13 of 15 teachers interviewed believed teachers understand the social dynamics of today’s urban society, and this understanding influences their work with continuation students. They recognize that continuation students face multiple pressures in today’s urban society. According to 12 of 15 teachers, continuation students develop a commitment to accomplishing their academic goals. This commitment is characterized through building trust, building acceptance, and developing a classroom “family.”

Research Question Four. This section describes principal and teacher findings related to Research Question Four of this research study, which asked, According to urban continuation high school principals and teachers, how does a continuation teacher’s

ability to teach and support social and academic behaviors in the classroom constitute part of his or her “special fitness to perform?”

Appropriate social and academic behaviors. The purpose of Research Question Four was to examine continuation faculty support of appropriate social and academic behaviors within a high put at-risk student population. In this portion of the interview, the discussion initially focused on the continuation student’s sense of personal control. Four of six continuation principals perceived their students as lacking personal control. PRIN 5 commented, “most of them think that everything is done to them and they have absolutely no control. It’s almost like a victim personality that they have...everything bad is going to happen to them.” According to 13 of 15 teachers, their students perceive themselves as lacking personal control. TEACH 4 stated, “they attribute it to luck, or to their neighborhood, or to their family, fate, whatever it may be, it’s not them, they are not responsible for what happens to them.” TEACH 2 added,

So you need to help them and give them the options of being able to really take control of their lives as opposed to having other influences, whether it is friends, whether it is drugs, or gangs, take away their own personal freedom or personal control that they think they have over themselves.

Fourteen of 15 teachers contended that continuation teachers can influence how students perceive their personal control by making students aware that they have choices. All 15 teachers interviewed for this study claimed that continuation teachers influence their students’ belief in personal control by supporting good decision-making; they also believed their students’ personal motivation increased with success.

Five of six principals believed that using their academic leadership role, continuation teachers could place emphasis on the importance of education and influence how students perceived their personal control. PRIN 4 explained, “The more education

you get, the more control you will have over your personal life.” She added, “Teachers have a tremendous influence on this, and this is where you don’t see this as much in a comprehensive high school, but in the small, personal environment we have in continuation.”

Promoting opportunities for personal growth and developing student efficacy can support their efforts to achieve personal success. In turn, personal and academic motivation can increase. All six continuation principals observed that their students’ personal motivation increased with success. Whereas, as PRIN 1 stated, “basically, all of them want to succeed,” PRIN 5 added, “most of our students come in, their motivation level is very, very low. How low would your motivation level be if you were always failing?” PRIN 4 stated, “We have the ability to help kids change behaviors, and again, it’s by building their motivation to be better, to have more, to be hopeful, to be resilient.” PRIN 6 urged teacher-student collaboration to build personal motivation: “You’re actually saying to the kid, ‘I want you to succeed. Let me help you in this process.’” Four of six principals believed continuation teachers helped support the academic motivation of students through individualized support, and three of six identified consistent motivational support as important.

All 15 teachers said that continuation teachers support individual students’ academic motivation, noting that students’ motivation is affected by both the academic and non-academic issues that continuation students face. Non-instructional, out-of-classroom issues that continuation students often face include: sex, parental issues, substance abuse, violence, and poverty. These findings aligned with principal descriptions of out of classroom issues, including poverty, drugs, violence, and sex.

According to 14 of 15 teachers, these issues manifest themselves in the continuation classroom through disengagement, which can occur in a variety of ways. TEACH 14 explained:

They are unable to focus, tired depressed, anxious, or can't learn, or are high...I don't know how you can pay attention when you had to fight a freakin' homeless crack head on your way to school. These are things that have happened...Kids have been robbed on their way to school, or there is so much chaos in the home that I am the safest person, and so where does the fight go? Me.

Five of six principals contended that these issues manifest themselves in the continuation classroom as the underlying factors affecting learning. PRIN 1 noted "behavioral problems," and "lack of motivation" as persistent issues. PRIN 2 stated, "we have the kids with the huge rebellious attitudes." PRIN 3 described "fear" and "frustration." PRIN 5 stated, "The personal issues...they don't want to come to us. So, we see that decline in performance, and we have to try and figure out what it is." Of all these factors, PRIN 6 stated, "All of them affect learning."

With a history of disengagement and academic underperformance or failure, continuation students often have low levels of resiliency. Thirteen of 15 teachers interviewed agreed that some students are more resilient than others when it comes to academics, which manifests in academic confidence. Twelve of 15 teachers observed that continuation teachers support student resiliency by constantly supporting their students. Three out of six principals said that some students are more academically resilient than others because of strong academic fundamentals. Continuation teachers reported that they support student resiliency by using an individualized approach to students (three of six principals).

Five of six principals believed students are demonstrative when acknowledging their personal accomplishments. PRIN 1 observed, “they’ll go around and show everybody what they did, and say, “Hey, look what I did!” PRIN 1 also stated, “they’ll bring it to the teacher...they’ll say, “Can you call my mother and tell her that I did good today?” This sense of pride can serve as the motivation for continued success. PRIN 4 stated, “when they move on to the next task or the next thing you ask of them, they’re more motivated, more ready to take on something after they’ve been personally successful. Success breeds success.”

Validation of student success supports students’ motivation to continue that success. Five of six principals said the continuation teacher’s role in validating student success was fulfilled by consistent validation. Four of six principals agreed that continuation teacher validation of student effort influenced students by serving as a motivator.

Eight of 15 teachers observed that students are demonstrative when acknowledging their personal accomplishments. The continuation teacher’s role in validating student success is met by acknowledging student effort (nine of 15 teachers agree) and providing support (nine of 15). Ten of 15 teachers believed continuation teacher validation of student effort influenced students by motivating them, and ensuring that students know that they matter to someone (eight of 15).

Continuation teacher narratives. While a description of principal and teacher responses to Research Questions One through Four help support a better understanding of the continuation teacher’s special fitness to perform, a contextual description of continuation teachers provides an opportunity to see greater depth in their responses.

What follows are short narratives based on notes and digital recordings taken before, during, and after each interview. The themes selected for the narratives are representative of issues that teachers said impacted the lives of put at-risk students and include: the transmission of social capital from teacher to student was important for successful navigation of dominant cultural norms; dropping out of school reflects a significant concern for both put at-risk students and society; teacher expectations influence instructional delivery and student self-efficacy; effective mentoring can guide at-risk students toward social and academic success, and; a teacher's personal experiences can affect his/her ability to understand put at-risk student challenges while also providing appropriate levels of academic rigor. The teacher comments in this narrative were chosen because of the educational and personal challenges these teachers faced while in school, and the similarity of their issues to those confronting the students they now teach. Each of these teachers overcame at least one of these issues, and now works to transmit this success to his/her students. Each narrative theme represents issues faced by the 15 teachers interviewed for this study: social capital (TEACH 1, 2, 9), teacher expectations (TEACH 3, 11, 15), put at-risk of dropping out (TEACH 4, 5, 12), non-traditional mentoring (TEACH 6, 8, 13), and homelessness and empathy (TEACH 7, 10, 14).

Social capital. TEACH 2 works in a Category 4 continuation school (see Appendix E), located at a community center in a working class neighborhood of the CUSD. The community is a mixture of recent émigrés and first generation residents from Mexico, Central America, and Asia. Driving through the neighborhood to our interview appointment, I saw youngsters riding fixed gear bicycles, a teenage girl pushing a baby stroller, a woman struggling with a shopping cart, another selling tamales to residents and

local workers. The tamale vendor honked a bicycle horn that was attached to her shopping cart as I passed her. There were also a number of small industrial businesses in the area as well; I saw large trucks either delivering or loading goods, and could smell both diesel fumes and sewage. There were signs of gang and tagging crew involvement in the local area. Located only a few miles from the urban core, I noticed the early signs of gentrification: a few older houses appeared to have been recently renovated, with new horizontal slatted wood fencing and drought-resistant landscaping. A notice for an art walk was posted on a telephone pole. A young, tattooed urbanite rode past me on a rebuilt Triumph motorcycle. He headed into the parking lot of an art studio that advertised haircuts by “Barber-ella.”

The community center itself was a large, single story building. The interior was open and clean. It was well lit, and had a series of long folding tables placed together to form three groups. On the walls, I saw evidence of student work: a number of essays labeled, “This is Me,” and papier-mâché globes strung from the ceiling, painted to represent Earth. TEACH 2 laughed as we shook hands, stating, “Next year, we’ll do the globes differently. Some of the kids had the continents looking like Pangaea just blew up.”

TEACH 2 is a Latina in her early 40s. Although diminutive, she radiated the authority of someone used to being in positions of leadership. TEACH 2 has been certified as a generalist teacher by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (an “NBC” teacher) for over a decade. She had been a mentor teacher and a BTSA (Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment) trainer, and was recently supervising a student teacher. She spoke with an accent, softening the harder edges of

American English words and phrases. When talking, she punctuated her words with sweeping gestures. As we sat down to chat, I learned more about her story.

She was born in Mexico, and was raised by grandparents after her parents came to California for work. At age 10, her parents brought her to the United States on a short-term visitor's visa; she stayed beyond the visa's expiration date, and did not return to Mexico for many years.

Very soon after I arrived, my family moved to a part of town where we were the only Mexican family around. This was in the early '80s. My first day of school, I was put into a classroom where everyone else was African-American. I remember being put into the corner of the classroom, where I sat. My teacher didn't know what to do with me.

The teacher gave her picture books and coloring activities. After several months, her parents moved again, this time to the community where TEACH 2 now works. "My first teacher at my new school was just like the last one, she didn't know what to do. I felt very alone, although at my new school, there were more Latinos." It wasn't until she met a teacher with an unusual method to teach English Language Learners that she began the process of decoding English: "he taught us English by playing The Beatles. We would learn words and sing along. The more he played, the more I listened and learned."

The first teacher to support TEACH 2's growth outside of ELL was Ms. A, who discovered TEACH 2's growing math talent; Ms. A planted the seed of TEACH 2 going to college and becoming a doctor. "She saw something in me, and helped me to see it, too." Ms. A told her about college, and how it could lead to many life opportunities. Given hope and encouragement, TEACH 2 began to dream of a future college career.

Her hopes faced significant challenges in middle school. The school's counselor would not allow her to take an Algebra class; she felt that because TEACH 2 was an ESL

student, she would not comprehend the academic language. As a result, TEACH 2 ended up taking basic math for 3 years.

I felt like it was a waste of time. Math was my favorite subject and I wasn't learning anything new. Then, in the ninth grade my science teacher suggested I tried MESA [Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement], a math program for kids who were interested in STEM, to support student growth and interest.

In the summer of her ninth grade year, TEACH 2 attended MESA at a California State University:

The teachers knew I could handle the work, even without having taken any Algebra. They said, "You should not stay quiet in High School. Speak up, build up your self esteem." That's what helped me to take AP Biology in high school, when I was the only kid there who wasn't from the gifted magnet.

Language issues continued to pose barriers for TEACH 2.

I had been placed in a 10th grade Honors English course. I passed the English placement test. The English department chair, she moved 10 of us to something called "Advanced English." I was told, "This is kind of like Honors."

It was explained to TEACH 2 that she could not handle the rigor of the work because she was only 1 year removed from taking advanced ESL coursework. She was furious about the missed opportunity. Overcoming hurdles like these made TEACH 2 determined to create her own support network of advocates.

Knowing that my parents, who only speak Spanish, couldn't stand up for me to help me take the classes I needed, I built up a group of teachers who knew what I could do, and helped show me how to navigate the unknown. Even today, my mom sometimes cries about how I had to face the unknown, all alone.

Even today, after 20 years of teaching, TEACH 2 faces the skepticism of some colleagues who doubt her abilities because of her accent. She said,

My first day at work at my first assignment, a veteran teacher came up to me and said, "Why are you here, taking a job away from a good American?" Later, at my first faculty meeting for my continuation school, a teacher said, "You don't have

to be here, this meeting is only for faculty, not aides.” I have had to learn to understand the system, navigate it, and overcome it.

TEACH 2 used her life story and the challenges faced by a cultural and language “outsider” to support development of student cultural and social capital.

That’s why I transmit that to my students, and let them know if they ever have questions after they leave here, they can always come back and talk with me. Because when it’s their turn to face the unknown, they won’t be all alone.

Put at risk of dropping out. TEACH 4 works at a Category 3 continuation school; it is located in two bungalows on one corner of a middle school campus. The area was fenced and gated, with students from the continuation site separated from the middle school population. The campus is located in a working class neighborhood of the CUSD. The neighborhood is well known as a center of the Latino community, as it has been since World War II. Today, there are multiple generations of Mexican Americans living here, with a sprinkling of recently arrived Salvadorian émigrés. Driving through the neighborhood to the interview appointment, I saw numerous local retail stores along busy thoroughfares, with fast food franchises, gasoline stations, and used car dealerships. As the school is located off a main street, I had an opportunity to drive around the neighborhood. I saw that almost every home was fenced, with heavy wrought-iron gates and cinderblock walls. Many front doors had heavy fire doors, each with a deadbolt security lock. Almost every home had wrought-iron bars over the windows. Most of the houses surrounding the school were well kept.

Parking across the street from the continuation school entrance, I saw little foot traffic around the campus, with the exception of three teenagers who were slowly walking by the chain link fence dividing the school’s physical education track from the sidewalk. As the school children ran laps around the track, the three teens were talking

and laughing, pointing at students while sharing chips from a large bag of Doritos. They called out to a girl who was running on the track; she walked to the fence, where the teens offered her chips. She squeezed her hand through a chain link, managed to grab a handful of chips, and pushed them into her mouth. She waved at the teenagers, chewed, and began running again.

The continuation classroom bungalows were old, likely having been installed in the 1950s or early 1960s. They had stuccoed exterior walls with large windows and blinds, laminate flooring, and acoustic panel ceilings. The rooms were bright and organized, with old tables, chairs, and equipment. The tables appeared to have been divided for small group work. I noticed some student work posted on walls, along with information and instructional posters. TEACH 4 and I went to the second bungalow for our interview. I was told that TEACH 3, TEACH 4's team teacher and husband, installed extensive audio-visual equipment in this bungalow, including a wall-mounted projector. "We didn't want to have to wait a year or two for our tech guy to install it. TEACH 3's pretty handy with tools."

TEACH 4 is a Latina in her mid-30s. She spoke slowly, as though she was measuring her words carefully. TEACH 4 began to tell me her story:

I went to a really good elementary school. I had great teachers, I want to say, "everything I learned, I learned in elementary school!" <laughs> We had all the arts programs, my teachers were very good about taking us on field trips, I had a lot of background knowledge, very good early education. Then I went to middle school, and everything just fell apart.

TEACH 4 became a student put at-risk of dropping out: "I was put in the dropout prevention program, I failed everything in seventh grade. I was bad, I ditched, but I stayed on campus, but I talked a lot in class." In later years, TEACH 4 was diagnosed

with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). In the eighth grade, she was placed in a dropout prevention program; counselors monitored her academic and behavioral progress closely throughout the remainder of middle school. TEACH 4 continued in Honors and gifted classes, while centering much of her energy into the school's music program, where she played violin.

I wasn't doing well, but after seventh grade, I started doing better, and the dropout prevention program would pull me out of classes, we'd have counselors come over, we'd have special field trips, it was just a lot of incentives, it was incentive-driven.

TEACH 4 received free school supplies, free sweaters, and tickets to school events.

When TEACH 4 arrived at high school, she "couldn't get out of this program <laughs>, and...stayed in the dropout prevention program throughout high school." A consistent aspect of her dropout program was the counseling service, which was performed by the same people who worked with her in middle school. "They made sure I did well, and I was still involved in the music program." Upon graduation, TEACH 4 was accepted to a major private university in California, where she was given a full 4-year scholarship.

TEACH 4's experiences as a potential dropout had heavily influenced her choice to work with continuation students:

I see myself in these kids and say, "that could have been me." I think I had the support that I needed, like my music teacher, and the counselor, they were there for me. I want to give back, that's what I want to do, make sure that a lot of these kids that think, "ugh, I'm done," like I thought I was done, "no, you're not done." So, I think that really influenced me to work in continuation school.

TEACH 4 grew up in the community where she now teaches; in fact, she teaches on the same campus where she was once in danger of dropping out. She recognizes the symbolic significance of this, and uses it to empathize better with her student population.

Being considered at-risk, I think that's helped me a lot by realizing they're not bad kids, something's going on, but I grew up in the neighborhood, I went to the same schools, I still live in the neighborhood. Same background, I can relate to a lot of what's going on in their homes, just because I know what their family structures are like. I've seen it, I've grown up with it, I've seen it around me, so I think that's really helped me understand them a lot more, and see where they're coming from.

TEACH 4's personal experience as a put at-risk youth informed her professional attitude. Recalling the support she received through counselors in middle school and high school, she projected an attitude of caring and commitment to her students:

You know, we have a lot of students who tell us, "you guys actually care?" They're surprised, to find out that we do care, "I do care that you are here, and that you're learning, that you're doing well, not just in school, but that you're doing well outside of school. For these kids it's the first time someone from the school system cares about them, and is actually looking out for them. It's kind of my biggest thing, you know these kids have failed class after class, and no one ever catches them.

Teacher expectations. My interview with TEACH 3 took place after I spoke with TEACH 4. The two are team teachers and are married; as far as I know, they are the only other husband-wife continuation team teachers in CUSD beside my wife and I, who teach in a Category 4 continuation school across town. TEACH 3 is a slim, diminutive Latino in his late 30s. He was quick-witted, humorous, and outspoken; he was a key member of his school's PD committee and has served on the school leadership council. His principal considered him a valuable asset, as he was the school's science expert.

When I first arrived at their site, TEACH 3 met me at the gate and guided me to a ramshackle building adjacent to their bungalow classrooms. The building was located in what once was a garden. "This is a greenhouse," TEACH 3 explained.

Our TA [Teaching Assistant], some of the kids, and I are rebuilding it. I've fiddled with the old heater and got it to work again, I've been installing new glass window panes, and we've taken out a mountain of junk from inside.

He explained that the middle school had been using the greenhouse as a storage shed for decades. Now, he intended to convert it back to its original purpose, so his continuation students could grow plants throughout the seasons. “Somebody built it right: it has electricity, water, and a gas line. This place was meant to last. But they forgot its original purpose and dropped the ball. That doesn’t mean we can’t get it to work again.” I asked TEACH 3 who was paying for the repairs. He said, “When I can afford to, I just pay for it out of my pocket. Don’t tell my wife.” He paused, while smiling mischievously. “Just kidding.”

As we sat together in his bungalow classroom, we talked about the importance of teacher expectations and TEACH 3’s personal experiences as a student. He spoke with noticeable bitterness about his K-12 education: “I’m always shocked when I speak to other people, who tell me about their educational experiences. I think they had really great educational experiences; I didn’t do very well in school for a long, long time.” TEACH 3’s perception of his own abilities were affected by the comments of key teachers and counselors:

I had someone say, someone else at the school say to me, “You are pretty smart,” this was when I was in grade school, “Why don’t you go apply for the gifted program?” So I went to the person in charge. She said, “Well, you have to be very smart for that. I don’t think that’s a good idea.” I’ve had a lot of experiences like that.

Despite such comments, TEACH 3 explained that there were still several elementary teachers who played a positive role in his early academic career: “I can recall specific teachers who said, “Oh, he is the scientist in our classroom.” This is in grade school, so there were a few teachers who did say a couple of positive things.” Aside from these few positive remarks, elementary school was a difficult period for him. TEACH 3

felt that his teachers did not care enough to develop his budding interest in math and science, nor support development of his self-esteem.

By high school, TEACH 3 was used to his teachers' low expectations. Their indifference denied him access to the social capital needed for a first-generation student wishing to enter college:

Applying to universities, I limited myself to two universities and they were not prestigious, they were the only two universities I knew by name. I did not know of schools like Berkeley at the time, I don't think I even knew about UCLA. I was like out of the loop.

I went to college thinking that I wasn't going to be successful, because leaving high school I was essentially told that, "Okay, you got into college, but good luck. It is going to be very difficult."

TEACH 3 was filled with uncertainty, fueled by his teachers' doubts: "the expectation was that, 'Okay, you got in, but you can't be successful.'" I should not have told myself how I feel early on, going into the university thinking that way." Once in college,

TEACH 3 faced a defining moment:

After arriving at the university I believe my first course was a Chemistry class for engineers and scientists, and the professor asked a question that no one could answer, but I knew the answer and I answered it. She was pleasantly surprised, and that was the first hint that I would be successful. As time went on, I found out that I was very well prepared for college and post-graduate school.

Despite his initial misgivings, borne from years of low academic expectations, TEACH 3 found success in college. Now an experienced continuation schoolteacher, he often shares his early struggles with students who have also faced low expectations:

you know, I would say that I share with my students a lot of my personal experiences again in K-12 education and beyond that...but I tell my students, "You know what? I failed Algebra the first time I took it or I got a D the second time I took it and I got an A the third time I took it and I never got anything less than an A for many, many years after that." At times, I'll actually bring in report cards; a favorite one is a report card from the ninth grade where my GPA was 0.66. And then I brought one in from grad school and I had "A" in my science

courses from grad school, so they are surprised to hear that yes, you can still fail a class and become a teacher.

TEACH 3 now shared his personal struggles and the low academic expectations of his K-12 teachers with his continuation students, and used these stories to support student resiliency and self-esteem:

just showing them that and having them believe that it is okay to fail, but do not quit even if you fail. Who would have believed that the person that had to take Algebra 1 three times would end up taking relatively advanced math, science and engineering classes later on down the road?

Nontraditional mentoring. TEACH 6 works at a Category 2 continuation school: three bungalows for instruction, with a central bungalow for a principal (PRIN 2) and a secretary. TEACH 6 was recommended for participation in this study by PRIN 2 because, “he has an unusual take, because he has an unusual background. Sometimes, I shake my head when he says something wild. But he gets the kids to engage.”

To interview TEACH 6, I traveled through what many people consider a “tough” neighborhood in CUSD; it has a reputation for crime, gangs, drug use, and poverty. The area is largely African-American, with an increasing number of Latino immigrants and their families. TEACH 6 told me later that the shift in community demographics has led to some tension at the adjoining comprehensive school; he did not mention if this is also true at the continuation school.

Driving to the school, I saw a main street filled with small retail stores, an occasional restaurant, and auto repair shops. I passed several churches. In the residential section, the homes are a mixture of 1950s ranch style and 1920s mission revival. Large yards were common as I drove closer to campus, with many houses set back from the curb. Speed bumps surrounded the streets near the school. The area around the school is

quiet, with the exception of small groups of teens standing or walking on the sidewalk of the comprehensive school. They stared as I drove past. Eventually, I arrived at the interview site, parking across the street.

The continuation school had a high chain link fence with an electronically controlled locking entrance gate. After being admitted, I sat in the main office, observing the cramped room at the end of a school day. It was a bustling place, with an ongoing stream of students and adults wanting a minute of the principal's time. The secretary was working with a CUSD technician to schedule an equipment repair date, a police officer walked in to confer with the principal about a student, a young man walked in with a toddler, asking for the principal. "I want her to see my little girl," he said. After a 15-minute wait, TEACH 6 came to collect me.

TEACH 6 is a tall, slim White man in his late 30's with an engaging personality, a quick smile, and a booming voice. I soon learned that he had a gift for the dramatic, quotable statement. Entering a classroom, we approached his desk. "You can sit there," he pointed to a small student desk facing his. My back was to the door, and although I could hear students walking into and out of his room, I could not see them. TEACH 6 could see everything, in total command and control of his space.

What caught my immediate attention was the wall behind TEACH 6's desk. It is covered with hundreds of photographs: images of current and former students, some formal, others candid. It was a wall filled with smiles. The sheer number of images was overwhelming, as I viewed a mosaic of happy young people at their best. "Some of them are already dead," TEACH 6 explained. Hanging from the wall is a surfboard, painted with colorful designs. "The surfboard was a gift from one of my students. He wanted to

paint something cool for me.” Still, I was drawn to the photo wall. “Let me tell you about it, and how it came about,” he said.

TEACH 6 began his story by describing his early years. As a youth, TEACH 6 lived on the fringes of a glamorous beachfront community.

I was a waste of space. To put it lightly...I grew drugs in high school and I sold them to Madonna’s managers. I stole cars. I almost died of a liver infection when I was seventeen from alcohol consumption. I was drinking on campus. To say that high school was a joke to me was an understatement.

In his teens, TEACH 6 had a difficult home life: “I don’t remember what was going on in my household then. It was non-existent. You know, two single parents.” During this time TEACH 6 met the first of his life mentors, a 10th grade teacher:

RD [a teacher] in my 10th grade year used to stand outside. I used to walk into his classroom late every day. And he would say, “Why are you late to my class?” and I said, “Well, school sucks and there’s no punishment for being late.” He says, “Where do you come from?” “Two doors down the same hallway.” And then one day he had a wide body guitar, like a hollow body guitar and he was banging away on it. I thought it was the coolest thing. And I said, “Who’s that, man?” He goes, “That’s the class dude, get to class.” And I went home, pre-internet, and searched through the cassettes of my house and found combat rock, and sat down and thought, “G-----n, this guy is really f-----g cool.” And that was the start of the understanding that he was human.

Other teachers began taking an interest in TEACH 6. They spoke to him about his interests, tapping into his culture, using informal conversations to build unorthodox mentoring opportunities: “Math teacher pulled me aside and told me he quit smoking cigarettes because he couldn’t hold his breath when he was out body surfing or surfing. And I realized there were these human connections with these people.” As he continued through high school, TEACH 6’s teachers supported him, trying to help him find a purpose in life. In the 12th grade he met another teacher, PS, a former seminarian who had been part of the ‘60s hippie culture: “PS had told me that I needed to do something with

my life before it passed me by. And hopefully that we would be able to live within a time that there was a reason behind our lives.”

Perhaps because of the nontraditional mentoring he received, TEACH 6’s perspective began to change. He decided to pursue academics beyond high school: “I went to school after high school. I avoided going to jail. I went to my old job, waiting tables. I started making money and stopped selling drugs and realized there was an option outside of crime for me.” He enrolled in a junior college, but after a few years, found himself without direction or purpose:

I decided that I was going to go to college. I had gone to junior college long enough to be a doctor.... I had to figure something else to do, and I was moving forward. And a giant black man named Ralph, wore Birkenstocks and shorts, and said, “You think you’re going to kick the f----g door down and change the world.” And I looked at him and said, “That’s right,” and he goes, “ I hope you stay like that in ten years.” And I’m going on eight, and I want to find him so bad and tell him that my footprint is still on the door, and I’m going to kick it every chance I get.

So after high school I think I enrolled in junior college, and just kind of went to junior college and had a job. Until I was pointed in the right direction. And that was through working in schools or different things. People would say, “You have a way with kids, have you thought about doing this?” And I always had a thing for my teachers, male or female. They were always good to me. So that’s how I became a teacher.

Throughout the interview, I tried to keep my attention focused on TEACH 6, but his massive photo wall was difficult to ignore. So many kids; I was intrigued by what became of them, how their lives have unfolded. TEACH 6 noticed my repeated glances at his photo wall, and said

The Wall, this is their doing, they ask 90% of the time, “Hey, I have a photo for you.” I accept or deny based on whatever it is. If you make your way on the Wall, you did something to be remembered. RD had me on his Wall 10 years after the fact, if not more. I’m still on his wall, 15 years old. I am now thirty. She was here <points>. I talked to her brother the other day. Samuel is her first child. I only have a picture of K <points>. She named her son after me. She called me when

her father was in the hospital. She came back to say, “Hi” and I talked to her, she turned out to be a model in the end. She called me for an abortion, help to get an abortion. This guy, R, came here because his girlfriend came here.

In a weird way I don’t feel like I fit in. I don’t feel like I am accepted, but I feel loved.

TEACH 6 mirrored the emotions of his continuation students; they may not feel as though they fit in, they may not have felt accepted elsewhere, but with the right teacher, however nontraditional, they will feel loved.

Homelessness and empathy. TEACH 14 was recommended for this study by PRIN 5, her supervisor. She works at CUSD’s lone Category 1 continuation school: a converted, older small urban elementary school, with a main building, an adjacent building with additional classrooms, several bungalows, an eating area, student garden, parking lot, and basketball court. It has a high chain link fence surrounding the campus. The main building has an administrative office where several counselors and a dean work. The principal’s (PRIN 5) office is across the hall.

The campus was tucked inside a corner of an old industrial section of the city; to get there, I had to navigate through a stream of large commercial trucks heading to and from warehouses and plants. Less than a mile away is a corridor of homeless shelters. Closer to the school campus, a commercial bus depot reminded me of the transiency in the local community.

Unlike other continuation sites, this campus closely resembles a comprehensive school in feel and function; I saw students moving from one class to another, others sat in the main office awaiting detention for some infraction, and clusters of students sat at their eating area. When I met TEACH 14 for the first time, students greeted her as she passed by; a young girl stopped her to ask a question about a class.

TEACH 14 showed me to her classroom, old with worn tables and chairs. The room was colorful, filled with drawings, paintings, writing assignments, including a curious set of hand-made “Puritan Valentine’s Day” cards. One card read: “Life with you is worth the eternal hellfire that awaits our wicked souls.” I laughed, and TEACH 14 explained, “They’re reading *The Scarlet Letter*, and loved doing this art assignment.” The room was warm and inviting; I could imagine how students would feel safe and willing to engage in this environment.

TEACH 14 is a White female in her mid 30s. She has an air of incisiveness, and by habit quickly assesses people upon meeting them:

I was a bartender, cocktail server, and a waitress for many years. And you better learn to read people quick. It helped me be very intuitive and I am very observant and that has helped me a lot. I’m “quick with it” as the students say.

TEACH 14 was certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (an “NBC” teacher); her principal considered TEACH 14 to be the key teacher leader at their school. While talking about her students, she told me part of her own story.

TEACH 14 was raised in Hawaii amidst an unconventional family lifestyle. “I come from a chaotic household full of drugs and alcohol abuse, and things of that nature, and multiple divorces.” Her parents enrolled her in a private school, which she attended until there was no money available:

I went to private school; I grew up in Hawaii. I was a minority, and I was in private school there until the eighth grade. Then I was thrown into a 2,000 person, probably more, high school. I was a good student, I had one AP class, I didn’t know that much about Honors and AP as I should have, but I guess I should had been in all Honors, but when you transition from private to public, people don’t know, and I also have weird parents and they were like “Oh, don’t take that, it’s too hard.”

Throughout TEACH 14's high school years, her home life was in turmoil; she faced many of the same issues her own students face today:

I know what it's like to live in a house where people are screaming, I know what it's like to live in a house where drugs are normal, I know what it's like to live in chaos and come to school and be expected to do school, and it's like, "F... this, why should I care about this, when I have to pay all the bills?"

When TEACH 14 entered college, she had high expectations of academic success, and, at first did well. "I did really well at the beginning and my parents were like, "Good luck with school, but remember you have to pay for it." Family and financial issues began to undermine her earlier college success; as money was once again unavailable, TEACH 14 had to shift priorities from academics to survival.

My parents both tried to commit suicide...I have quite an exciting background. So, I was living in my car. You can watch my grades in my transcripts go from As to Ds. At that point I was like, "I just need to graduate." I worked, I worked salaries and worked 40 to 60 hours and went to school full-time and I was like, "I just want it to get it done."

Sill, she received support from her college professors: "so when I went to college...I loved my teachers, they saved me." Despite their support, the strain was unbearable. When not living in her car, she might sleep on a friend's couch, a practice known as "couch surfing:" "I am very familiar with couch surfing. That is how I got through college." During our conversation, she noted that couch surfing and other alternative sleeping arrangements are a familiar subject to her students today. "I think a lot of my kids sleep in the living room in couches or whatever so they don't get a lot of sleep. It's huge, because you have eight people in a house with a baby."

Despite the challenges of homelessness, TEACH 14 completed her college coursework, also earning a teaching credential. "I was just barely able to graduate from college before I got here." The strain of balancing academic survival with personal

financial hardship has exacted a heavy toll on her self-worth, something she feels she shares with her students:

Since then, I did get Nationally Board Certified, I think that instilled a bit of confidence in me. I did feel like my students, I felt stupid. I don't know this stuff, and I've had to make up for it, it's been a consequence for me, there have been big consequences in teaching for me. It is like, "When did I learn this? Let me go back." It has been humbling. I've also gotten my Master's, which I got straight As. So that was a big thing for me personally, because I felt like my kids in continuation, dumb. Emotionally it has been a big thing for me.

In her first years as a teacher, TEACH 14 had difficulty developing structure and academic rigor for her class. Because the issues that her students faced were similar to her own, she had difficulty separating sympathy from empathy, and developing basic skills with providing academic rigor. Her views have changed over the years:

I know it is cruel, but at the end of the day no one cares, so what are you going to do to teach them perseverance? Stop feeling bad for them. There is a difference between empathy and creating a crutch, and I had teachers who did that to me and their kindness hurt me in the long run. To be very honest, I had to learn how to hustle. So I think that feeling sorry for them is more insulting, in a sense. Like they can't do it.

TEACH 14's life experiences provided her with empathy for the academic, financial, and social challenges her students face each day. Her empathy is tempered with the understanding that students must develop academic proficiency in core academic subjects, allowing them the same opportunities for future success that have shaped her life.

My education has changed my life, it has changed my class, my whole values it changed...statistically I shouldn't be here. I should be pregnant, statistically. It gives me real passion that these kids can do whatever they want, and not that there is anything wrong with a profession, my fiancée is a plumber, that they should just go and do a trade. But what if they don't want to do a trade and what if they are really smart and want something else, what are you saying? It is really frustrating for me. I want my kids to have just as good as the White kids in Malibu, and that is why we are reading the freakin' *Scarlet Letter*. I want to

change their lives. I want education to give them that and I think it will provide them with so much more.

Interview and Narrative Analysis

This section addresses the connections and associations between what I found in the participant interviews and what was presented in the teacher narratives. Responses from principals and teachers who participated in this study provided insight into their perceptions of the continuation teacher's "special fitness to perform;" this includes findings expressed in interviews and narratives. The narratives described in this chapter and their general responses provided the context for what I found in principal and teacher interviews. Teachers whose comments are in the narrative were chosen because of the educational and personal problems they experienced in and out of school, and the similarity of their issues to those confronting the students they now teach.

Principals and teachers stated that a variety of social, cultural, and behavioral issues affect academic growth in a continuation school. Students face multiple stressors in their non-academic lives that affect learning. When TEACH 6 spoke of his students and their issues, he described them in relationship to his own teen issues of drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activity, divorced parents, and his disengagement from school. Similarly, TEACH 14 related stories of her own youth; problems stemming from drug use at home, multiple divorces, financial issues, a chaotic family life, and her parents lack of support of her academic career. These issues combined to make her college career a precarious blend of academics and homelessness that affected her learning. To support student academic success, teachers must be able to identify stressors and address underlying issues before academic engagement can occur.

According to teacher and principal interviews, continuation teacher “special fitness” is a flexible blending of academic and social, emotional, and behavioral management skills. As TEACH 14 noted, a continuation teacher must be “quick with it.” This blending reflects a teacher’s academic and personal experiences, and their own learnings from these experiences, transmitted through instruction and authentic, personal interaction. Because of her life experiences, TEACH 14 understands the issues her put at-risk students face. She strives to balance sympathy with empathy, and provide both rigor and structure for her students. This does not mean that her students are allowed to exploit her sympathy; at one point in our interview, she described herself as “La Jefa [The Boss]” in her classroom, emphasizing that she has little tolerance for rule breaking.

Interviewees also stressed the importance of differentiation. It is critical for continuation teachers to differentiate instruction to engage students successfully, using appropriate techniques to meet learning modalities. Instruction must also provide a balance of remediation and grade-level content. While teachers must be sensitive to out-of-classroom issues affecting student performance, they must also individualize instruction to address a number of academic learning needs. TEACH 2, who lost opportunities for academic growth because of teacher assumptions based on her accent, emphasized during her interview the necessity of instructional differentiation and developing lesson plans across the curriculum that support all learners at all stages. This finding supports principal and teacher interview comments that instructional flexibility involves strong instructional skills, proficiency in unit and lesson planning, along with broad content knowledge. TEACH 2’s efforts to incorporate social and cultural capital elements to her teaching add a layer of purpose and depth to her instruction.

Continuation teachers should be able to evaluate and utilize the outcomes of competency-level assessments during students' initial intakes; these assessments are meant to ascertain both academic and behavioral needs in order to plan individualized academic programs, while also supporting identification of undiagnosed special needs. This academic planning may include remediation. If TEACH 3's teachers had noted his assessment data in elementary school, they could have provided early support for math and science, and raised their expectations for his academic potential; conversely, consistent assessment may have been the key factor that kept TEACH 4 in an Honors program throughout middle school, placed her in a program for at-risk youth, and helped keep her from becoming a dropout.

During interviews, principals and teachers said that instruction at a continuation site relies less on pacing plans than a comprehensive school. Teachers must pace content delivery according to student mastery and remediation opportunities. In TEACH 6's interview, he emphasized the advantage of pacing flexibility, as did TEACH 3. TEACH 14 used *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Custom House* as examples of adjusting pacing to meet a variety of language learning needs.

Continuation teachers must promote a positive classroom culture that helps students develop a sense of belonging, which supports student motivation to attend class consistently and provides opportunities for student engagement. Consistent attendance supports academic development. TEACH 6, with his unorthodox manner and methods, has his wall of photographs, students whose families ask him to Sunday dinner, and a willingness to make pancakes on Fridays for his class. He spoke of the outrage his students feign when he is 15 minutes early to class; they are used to him being 30

minutes early. TEACH 6 has developed a classroom environment that has bridged cultures and successfully reengaged some of the toughest students in CUSD.

According to this study's findings, continuation teacher "special fitness" is similar in some ways to the demands placed on teachers in elementary schools: the ability to teach a variety of subject areas. This means that continuation teachers need to teach multiple subjects outside their credential. As an NBC generalist teacher and a former elementary teacher, TEACH 2 mentioned in her interview the advantage that she has in knowing how to use primary grade techniques such as rotating "centers" to facilitate instruction for different ability levels. As principal and teacher responses reflect a belief that content mastery is an assumed skill for continuation teachers, with non-content mastery a major benefit, TEACH 2's NBC generalist status is a testament to the importance of being able to teach content across the curriculum.

This comparison of continuation schoolteacher competencies and comprehensive elementary teacher skills highlights an important point; similarities and differences do exist between mainstream and continuation high schools, and their teachers. Although many of the identified teacher competencies outlined through these interviews and narratives are necessary for a successful mainstream classroom, there are differences in practice within the continuation school program. Unlike elementary school teachers, who are accustomed to teaching multiple subjects to a single grade-level class, and secondary comprehensive teachers, who teach a single subject to multiple classes each day, continuation teachers must teach multiple subjects with as many as four different grade levels blended into a single classroom of students. This requires a continuation teacher to consider a variety of factors when delivering instruction: range of age within the

classroom (from ages 15-21) and level of student subject knowledge or mastery. The teacher must embed remediation into lessons or processes, and provide ongoing formative assessment to check student comprehension. Pacing plans must be modified to ensure content knowledge.

Another consideration is the high number of put at-risk students in the continuation classroom; while an urban high school teacher may face a high number of put at-risk students each day, every pupil in a continuation classroom is put at-risk of dropping out of school. As TEACH 6 argued in his interview, the addition of a student in a continuation program represents a failure by the comprehensive school to successfully remediate a student's academic and behavioral skills. TEACH 6 believed that the continuation teacher's role was to find a successful way to remediate put at-risk students where others had failed. This suggests performance ability beyond what a comprehensive schoolteacher can do.

A third area involves the necessity of continuation teachers to individualize instruction; often, comprehensive teachers teach as many as 40-45 students in 50-minute single subject blocks, or "periods." The number of students each period limits a teacher's ability to provide individualized, differentiated instruction. This was emphasized in TEACH 10's interview, where she compared her current instructional flexibility as a continuation teacher to her years in a comprehensive classroom. The difference TEACH 10 observed was threefold; she was able to know her continuation students and their needs on an individual basis, she could adapt her instruction to meet their individual challenges, and she could alter the pacing of lessons to ensure student content understanding. TEACH 2 referred to this difference between comprehensive and

continuation school as “rigidity versus flexibility,” or having the ability to address academic and non-academic issues that interfere with student engagement. She used the example that unlike a comprehensive school instructor, the majority of continuation teachers cannot send a student to the counselor’s office down the hall to deal with issues; rather, the teacher must address student issues in a timely fashion. In this role, the continuation teacher becomes the site counselor, surrogate parent, motivator, dean, and life coach. Comprehensive schoolteachers cannot easily assume these roles due to their pacing plan responsibilities, time constraints of 50 minute periods, and inability to create trusting, long-term teacher-student relationships with an average of 160 students taught each day. Unlike the comprehensive school, the continuation school’s strength lies in its ability to provide these services to an average group of approximately 29 students in an environment where the teacher gets to know each person and his/her academic and socio-emotional needs, and can work with the same students for the majority of their high school careers.

In addition to multiple academic, administrative, and clerical duties, the continuation teacher is often the primary on-site source for counseling and discipline. Time and distance often negate the possibility school administrators dealing with behavioral issues. This was evidenced by a situation where several students in TEACH 4’s class drank vodka in plastic water bottles during class and suffered acute alcohol poisoning. As each student began convulsing, TEACH 4 contacted emergency response paramedics, provided first aid, contacted parents, and notified her supervisor. When the students were taken to the hospital, she provided group counseling support by discussing with the class what happened, why it happened, and the effects of alcohol poisoning on

the body. As both teacher and on-site supervisor, TEACH 4 dealt with behavioral issues that could not wait for administrative support to arrive from a main office miles away.

Interview participants also believed that continuation teachers may benefit from training and mastery of special education academic and behavioral strategies. TEACH 2 mentioned after the interview her recent completion of a university extension certificate in “educating and supporting students with emotional disturbances;” her intention was to eventually earn a Master’s Degree in Special Education. This willingness to employ special education techniques in a continuation environment ensures support for all levels of learners and a broad variety of behavioral needs.

Many of the aforementioned findings relate to teacher skills that support student success; however, “special fitness to perform” goes beyond a continuation teacher’s ability to use specific skillsets. Principals and teachers both spoke of a dedication needed to teach and support classrooms of disengaged, unmotivated, put at-risk students; throughout the study’s interviews, both principal and teacher participants referred to this quality as “heart.” This can be seen in the interviews of TEACH 1-15 and vignettes of TEACH 2, 3, 4, 6, and 14, often in a casual, off-hand remark: a teacher will rebuild a school greenhouse using his own money (TEACH 3); a teacher will take an entire class to a restaurant to celebrate academic achievement (TEACH 9); a teacher will set up a makeshift kitchen and cook for a classroom of students each Friday (TEACH 6); another will buy cases of water and frozen ice pops throughout summer sessions because her site lacks air conditioning (TEACH 2); the teacher whose only desire was to teach in a continuation school, a environment unique from what is found in the comprehensive school (TEACH 14).

The unique quality of “heart” is also noticeable in the desire and motivation to teach continuation school, based on personal characteristics or background: the teacher who worked with special needs students, because her brother has special needs (TEACH 1); the immigrant who found her voice and wants to ensure that her students do as well (TEACH 2); the teacher who validates and supports his students because his teachers had low expectations for him (TEACH 3); the teacher who was a victim of physical abuse and is committed to supporting student victims (TEACH 12); the teacher who faced a home life of drugs and lived in a car, who struggles to balance sympathy, empathy, and rigor (TEACH 14). While “heart” may not be a “special fitness” characteristic that can be easily taught or quantified, it is part of the common language of continuation principals and teachers who participated in this study.

Given the findings from principals and teachers in section one of this chapter, and the teacher narratives in section two, specific skills can be identified that are needed by the successful continuation schoolteacher and that differentiate them from the comprehensive teacher:

- Academic flexibility: unlike comprehensive high school teachers, continuation teachers do not have the luxury of curricular and pacing decisions being made by a committee or departmental chair. Instead, according to teachers and principals interviewed for this study, teachers at each site must determine curricular areas of emphasis, align them with California state standards, and pace instruction to meet student needs. This is due in part to the practice of “continuous student enrollment” at continuation schools; unlike comprehensive schools, continuation sites receive new students, along with

their varying academic skillsets and gaps, on a weekly basis. In order to ensure low functioning students' content mastery, the continuation teacher must adjust instruction to address development of fundamental skills. In her interview, TEACH 4 mentioned that because a majority of her students had elementary school level reading skills, she must modify her instruction to support basic literacy.

- Independence: the majority of continuation teachers must provide instruction and behavioral support on a daily basis without administrative or departmental involvement. Unlike comprehensive schools, the geographic distance between the continuation classroom and main office isolates many teachers from support, requiring them to play multiple academic and administrative roles. The effective continuation teacher must be comfortable with decision-making responsibilities, and ensure that these decisions are in compliance with state and school district requirements.
- Self-Reliance: continuation teachers must be highly self-reliant, beyond the norm for a comprehensive schoolteacher. They must address the academic and socio-emotional needs of their students, and their classrooms are often located miles from their administrators or school police. They are responsible for resolving parent, student, and school district issues that may impact instruction for the day, ensuring the physical and emotional safety of their students, the community, and themselves. This requires a teacher to lead the classroom confidently, making decisions during routine and emergency activities that are appropriate to a given situation and are followed by students.

This was exemplified by TEACH 14 referring to herself as “La Jefa [The Boss].” As stated by PRIN 1, when a teacher cannot lead, a student will often attempt to take control to ensure student safety. An exemplary continuation teacher is the self-reliant *Jefa* of her classroom.

- Classroom Management: Unlike a comprehensive teacher, a continuation teacher deals only with students who are put at-risk of dropping out. This put at-risk status may be the result of academic issues (e.g., credit deficiencies) or socio-emotional issues (e.g. anger, behavioral management, or the unpredictable actions of substance abusers). Negative student behavior, including the threat of classroom violence, is a continuing concern for the continuation schoolteacher. As noted by TEACH 3, a continuation teacher must transcend the fear of potential physical violence, which is omnipresent, and perform in a fair and professional manner. This requires an understanding of how to redirect such impulses, and support positive individual and group behaviors without administrative or counseling support.
- Teaching outside of the credential: Unlike comprehensive teachers, all continuation teachers are expected to teach outside of their credentialed areas of expertise. This is necessary due to the limited number of teachers available to students at a continuation site. Successful continuation teachers must develop competence, if not mastery, of subject matter outside of their credential in order to support student diploma requirements. As stated by TEACH 5, the greater the degree of teacher content knowledge, the higher the potential for richer, deeper explorations of academic content.

- Teaching multiple grade levels simultaneously: while comprehensive schools often have classes divided by subject and grade or credit level, continuation classrooms include students from as many as four grade levels, i.e., 9-12. This requires continuation teachers to decide appropriate group-based courses and instructional methods. For example, TEACH 2 mentioned her use of whole and small group lessons; whole group activities may focus on a single “language arts” class covering Common Core standards for grades 9-12, rather than four separate classes. While teaching whole-group multiple grade courses is often necessary in single or team-teacher classrooms, it requires the continuation teacher to modify instruction to meet various academic standards while addressing academic gaps and providing appropriate remediation.
- Greater stakeholder interaction: unlike comprehensive high school teachers, continuation teachers must deal directly with parents, social workers, and probation officers on a daily basis. The lack of on-site administrators or classified staff removes the common filters between teacher and stakeholders. This requires continuation teachers to have ready access or knowledge of student and instructional information, often playing the roles of instructional leader, counselor, administrator, and office staff. It also increases communication between the continuation school main office and the Category 3 and 4 (community-based) school sites; TEACH 3 and TEACH 4 repeatedly spoke about office staff telephone requests for information taking place during instructional time. Along with parental requests and student enrollment inquiries that often take place during class time, the continuation teacher must

balance administrative and classified duties with instruction. Unlike comprehensive teachers, the continuation teacher works with same students throughout the day.

- Remediation: a unique aspect of the continuation school classroom is the high concentration of students requiring some form of academic remediation.

TEACH 9 and PRIN 1 spoke of students entering continuation schools with significant gaps in core academic subjects. According to both interviewees, these gaps are often aligned with significant attendance issues, particularly during the elementary school years. For the incoming continuation student, comprehensive school efforts to remediate academic gaps have failed; it becomes the responsibility of the continuation teacher to address these issues.

This requires extensive knowledge and use of individual and group instructional differentiation techniques. The increased need for remediation and intervention on the secondary level garnered notice by CUSD. In 2010, CUSD began 2 years of PD workshops for applying “Response To Intervention” (RTI) techniques in the secondary school classroom. This was indicative of CUSD’s recognition that remediation was needed at the high school level, including their continuation high school program. Although an overview of elementary school RTI techniques was provided, the PD training was limited to encouraging use of student test data to support differentiation of instruction; no specific strategies were provided. Until evidence of greater success for remediation in the comprehensive classroom exists, continuation teachers will be key to effective student remediation.

- Reengagement: according to principal and teacher interviews for this study, incoming continuation student disengagement is a major concern. This may stem from a variety of academic or non-academic issues originating during their comprehensive school years, and often manifests itself in poor attendance, incomplete or missing assignments, inattentiveness, inappropriate classroom behavior, and physical or verbal abuse by the disengaged student. As credit recovery programs, continuation schools must provide opportunities to reengage these students who are at greatest risk of dropping out of school. Continuation teachers are expected to reengage students by individualizing instruction, implementing lessons that connect to personal and group interests, and aligning coursework to personal and group cultural connections. PRIN 6 and TEACH 14 repeatedly mentioned the need to make instruction relevant to students, while TEACH 3 and TEACH 4 stressed how their longstanding ties to the local community created connections to the students and their issues; these connections support a level of trust and respect between student and teacher that give students the confidence to engage and lessen their fear of academic failure.

Chapter 5 will provide a discussion of the study's conclusions, recommendations, limitations, and a personal reflection.

Chapter 5

Discussion/Conclusion

If research on alternative education is limited, studies on continuation schools are a rarity. Ashcroft's (1999) research on alternative school training is 14 years old, and Kelly's (1993) major work on continuation schools is 20 years old. Even the most recent writing in the area predates the economic and political upheavals of the current era. For example, Ruiz de Velasco (2008) published his article on continuation schools prior to the severe budget cuts and teacher layoffs of the Great Recession. However, these research studies did address issues that concern continuation schools today: teacher skills, socio-economic issues, and dropout prevention. The present study built on these fundamentally relevant works to shed a unique light on continuation teacher competencies and their "special fitness to perform" in an era of high expectations and limited means.

In this chapter, I summarize my findings and how they are linked to previous research; list recommendations for teacher hiring, training, and practice based on the findings; describe the study's limitations; consider the study's implications for future research; and conclude with a personal reflection.

Conclusions

The conclusions in this section were based on principal and teacher participant responses to the four research questions, teacher narrative descriptions, and analysis of the two data sources. With the lack of available research data on teacher proficiencies in alternative school settings, the purpose of this study was to identify principal and teacher descriptions of the continuation teacher's "special fitness to perform" in relation to at-risk

students' particular needs within the context of a continuation school. The definition goes beyond a set of skills but reflects the teachers' own experiences, knowledge, skills and interpersonal capacities and is critical to supporting the academic engagement, retention, and eventual success of put at-risk continuation school students. Through 21 interviews conducted over a 3-month period in the winter of 2013, I learned from practitioners their beliefs about what continuation teachers must do to be successful in ways that promote success for their concentration of high put at-risk students. What follows are key findings from the viewpoints of the study's principal and teacher participants.

Academic growth in the continuation school environment is affected by a variety of social, cultural, and behavioral issues. Students face multiple stressors in their non-academic lives that affect learning. Teachers must be able to identify these stressors and address these underlying issues with students before academic engagement can occur.

Continuation teacher "special fitness" is a flexible blending of academic and social, emotional, and behavioral management skills. As TEACH 14 noted, a continuation teacher must be "quick with it." This blending reflects a teacher's academic and personal experiences, and their own learnings from these experiences, transmitted through instruction and targeted personal interaction.

It is critical for continuation teachers to differentiate instruction to engage students successfully, using appropriate techniques to meet learning modalities. Instruction must also provide a balance of remediation and grade-level content. While teachers must be sensitive to out-of-classroom issues affecting student performance, they must also individualize instruction to address a number of academic learning needs. Balancing individualization, remediation, and grade-level content across as many as four

grade levels in a single classroom is a daily necessity and involves strong instructional skills, proficiency in unit and lesson planning, and broad content knowledge.

Continuation teachers should be able to assess and understand the outcomes of comprehensive assessments during students' initial intakes; these assessments are meant to ascertain both academic and behavioral needs in order to plan individualized academic programs, while also supporting identification of undiagnosed special needs. This academic planning may include remediation.

Instruction at a continuation site relies less on pacing plans than a comprehensive school. Teachers must pace content delivery according to student mastery and remediation opportunities.

Continuation teachers must promote a positive classroom culture that helps students develop a sense of belonging, which supports student motivation to attend class consistently and provides opportunities for student engagement. Consistent attendance supports academic development.

Continuation teacher "special fitness" is similar in some ways to the demands placed on teachers in elementary schools to be able to teach a variety of subject areas; continuation teachers need to be able to teach multiple subjects outside their credential. Principal and teacher responses reflect a belief that content mastery is an assumed skill for continuation teachers, with non-content mastery being a major benefit.

In addition to multiple academic, administrative, and clerical duties, the continuation teacher is often the primary on-site source for counseling and discipline. Time and distance often negate the possibility of behavioral issues being addressed by a

school administrator. Continuation teachers can benefit from training and mastery of special education academic and behavioral strategies.

“Special fitness to perform” goes beyond the ability to use specific skillsets. It requires dedication to teach and support an entire classroom of disengaged, unmotivated put at-risk students; throughout the study’s interviews, both principal and teacher participants referred to this quality as “heart.”

Recommendations

Although principal and teacher descriptions of the teacher’s “special fitness to perform” were obtained through interviews of individuals who were perceived to offer good examples of engaging in “best practices,” the broader purpose of the study was to identify these factors and apply them to a larger continuation school teacher population. As such, the following recommendations are made, along with their connections to the literature discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

The unique academic and behavioral demands of continuation students require unique teacher skills; to accommodate these specific student needs, PD must be adapted specifically for the continuation school environment. Continuation schools must align PD programs to meet students’ academic and underlying social, cultural, and behavioral issues and needs. For example, continuation teachers need additional training in dealing with emotional disturbance, drug and substance abuse awareness, and counseling related to these and other issues. Teenagers’ behavior is affected by a number of social factors and has a significant influence on the likelihood that put at-risk youth will become high school dropouts (Lange & Sletten, 2002). These social factors include the influence of peer groups, family background, and socioeconomic background (Oakland, 1992;

Rumberger, 1987; Ryan, 2000). It is incumbent upon continuation teachers to become aware and knowledgeable about these factors, and allow for them in instructional decision-making. Support for this can come from correctly aligned PD.

Continuation schools need to incorporate PD that increases teacher skills and awareness of student socio-emotional needs, including differentiation and delivery of instruction, classroom management, special education strategies, unit and lesson planning for multiple grade-level instruction, direct instruction methods, support for teacher competency/mastery of out-of content subjects, project based-learning, and critical thinking skills. This recommendation is supported by teacher participant recommendations for PD activities that promote student achievement.

Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) observed that California's continuation school leaders perceived a lack of understanding by both state school governance policy makers and district administrators that "working with abused or otherwise vulnerable youth may require special staff training or skills" (p. 9). Continuation high school leaders also find that appropriate staff development programs that can help address the needs of vulnerable youth are rare.

Continuation schools must create PD opportunities to support teacher understanding of social capital concepts, with training on how to connect instruction with teacher social capital. While some students of color can successfully manage to "decode the system" (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, p. 33) and learn how to engage institutional agents in mainstream cultures, the majority cannot. This is especially true for the urban continuation high school student, whose very inclusion in the "last chance" alternative education program infers an inability to negotiate dominant cultural and social norms

effectively. Access to the continuation teacher's social capital may also serve as a last chance for students to decode the system, support self-efficacy, and increase internal motivation (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

To provide social capital that supports individual growth and success, urban continuation high school teachers must manage to respect the policies and practices of the institution while transmitting information of cultural and social value to students. In doing so, urban continuation teachers will support their students' ability to successfully develop what Stanton-Salazar (2001) describes as a "bicultural network orientation" (p. 34), allowing for the successful navigation of multiple cultures. Successful transmission of social capital requires both pre-service and PD training for the urban continuation high school teacher. Interviews for this study suggest that while the majority of teachers are unaware of "social capital" as a concept, they understand that students generally lack the knowledge to navigate the dominant culture's various norms successfully. PD can help teachers better understand social capital and address the ways teachers can support their students' bicultural network orientation.

Continuation schools should extend specialized PD to a yearlong, new teacher orientation to support developing continuation teacher competencies for newly hired continuation teachers. This can be accomplished through the use of mentor teachers, monthly training prior to whole group PD, portfolios, or additional classwork aligned to working with put at-risk students. Training such as this can be aligned with possible higher education licensure options for continuation teachers. Principal and teacher comments in this study support Ashcroft's (1999) contention that while alternative education teachers may consider themselves adequately prepared to teach subject matter,

they have not had adequate training to deal with their students' legal, social, and psychological issues. Principal and teacher responses mirrored the sentiments of Ashcroft's participants who said, "I have basically educated myself in this area" (p. 82). With the exception of special education courses, continuation principals and teachers in this study dismissed formal pre-service and advanced training, relying instead on continuation classroom experience. An investigative starting point to improve teacher training could be Wisconsin's Department of Instruction Education Certification #952 add-on license, Wisconsin Statutes ch. 115, subch. 2 § 115.28 (7)(e)(2) (2012). Coursework could provide licensure and salary point credit for teachers, along with proof of professional growth for programs such as National Board certification.

Hiring practices will require changes to selection procedures to reflect needed teacher knowledge and competencies. The principal and teacher participants' list of teacher competencies aligned with those noted by Aron (2006), whose recommendations included: choosing to be part of the alternative education program; routinely using positive discipline techniques; establishing rapport with students and peers; having high expectations for students; being certified in their content areas; being creative in their classrooms; having a role in school leadership and in designing the program and the curriculum; and having access to ongoing PD that supports an academic focus, enhances teaching strategies, and develops alternative instructional methods. Principals and school hiring committees should consider the "special fitness" factors identified in this study when interviewing teacher applicants: content mastery in both their credentialed area and areas required for student completion of courses; ability to reengage highly disengaged, put at-risk youth with lessons and projects that relate to the students' academic, personal,

and community cultures; the ability to differentiate instruction, addressing multiple learning modalities while concurrently teaching students from as many as four high school grade levels; the skill of assessing student competencies and providing remediation on a personal level, while doing so in small and whole group direct instruction; providing immediate behavioral and academic counseling services in lieu of periodic site visits by certificated supervisors or counselors; evidence of teacher sensitivity to student cultures; teacher capacity to transmit information about social and cultural capital; and ensuring grade-level academic rigor while providing opportunities for success across a variety of academic competency levels.

Greater acknowledgement of specificity in teacher qualifications and more selectivity in hiring will support the alignment between student need and continuation teachers' ability to meet that need. To improve continuation teacher recruitment efforts, school districts must change the general perception that continuation school placement is a professional dead-end, limited to individuals who are too indifferent or burned-out to truly teach. Continuation teachers must be reimagined as professional elites who possess academic and behavioral skills and enthusiasm to work with the most challenging students in public education. Motivation for working within continuation programs could include both professional recognition (e.g., certification and licensure programs), and monetary compensation (e.g., differential pay).

Recognition of teacher excellence requires a standard or benchmark that supports a fair and balanced approach to evaluation of students and teachers; scores on such standardized assessments as the California Standards Test (CST) are inadequate indicators of student learning because of continuous enrollment patterns throughout the

school year, the high concentration of students with significant academic gaps and attendant below grade-level understanding of content, and the low-stakes nature of testing for disengaged continuation students. An evaluation of continuation teachers can include a portfolio-based examination of student progress, indicators of student academic growth (e.g., responses to formative and summative essential questions), and yearly teacher portfolios, showing growth in mutually agreed-upon areas of professional interest or need.

Continuation teacher competencies are only one factor in supporting student academic and behavioral growth; state and school district policy must value alternative education for its role as an effective dropout deterrent, and honor that value by providing adequate resources to students and teachers. Instead, continuation teachers cited numerous instances of having to fill major support and resource gaps: TEACH 15 spoke of having her husband repair flooring in her classroom; TEACH 4 acknowledged her husband's installation of a classroom projection system; TEACH 2 has paid over \$400 monthly in utilities for her Category 4 site (community-located); TEACH 5 mops and cleans the bathrooms of her site, since her Category 4 school has no janitor; TEACH 13 must monitor student medication schedules, since her students cannot access school nurses; TEACH 1 purchases emergency supplies of first aid bandages, ointment, and feminine hygiene products for her class; the photocopier at TEACH 7's site was inoperative for 18 months before it was repaired; and regularly purchasing school supplies such as boxes of photocopy paper, pens, lined paper, and art materials is common, as is turning a blind eye to students taking extra lunch food home to feed family members. The "benign neglect" of school districts and policymakers mentioned by Williamson (2008) directly affects the ability of continuation schools to recruit and retain

excellent teachers, and contributes to the feelings of isolation and low morale of current continuation educators.

Limitations

Several limitations to the study emerged during the data collection process. For instance, the pool of principal and teacher candidates in CUSD was smaller than expected; a combination of retirements and teachers with less than 4 years' experience limited the number of eligible candidates. This increased my reliance on Category 4 schools (community-based, single school branch sites) to provide candidates for the study, since the majority of CUSD continuation schools are Category 4.

Although all continuation schools provide PD sessions on pedagogy and curriculum, each school Category has differing PD needs; Category 1 and Category 2 (multi-teacher, on-site administrative campuses) collaboration included individualized student evaluations of performance and behavior. This is not needed in the Category 3 and Category 4 schools, as they are isolated sites, with an individual or teacher teams.

Data collection was severely limited by lack of access to recorded district and site memoranda and committee files; this was due largely to informal recording and archiving of school site memoranda, including committee meeting agendas and minutes. Actual data collection was limited to information on PD and PD committees from Category 3 and Category 4 schools. While document collection for this study did not match the scope initially intended in the research design, the lack of recorded material supported greater emphasis on principal and teacher protocol development, which resulted in enhanced depth of responses during the subsequent interview phase.

Since the study included only 35 participants, the findings are not generalizable to all urban continuation high school principals and teachers; however, the experiences of these 35 individuals can be instructive and informative to leaders and policymakers concerned with continuation schools, as well as to other continuation administrators and faculty who share some similar program/site demographics.

Implications for Future Research

Continuation high schools serve as a rich, untapped area for educational researchers; as outlined in Chapter Two of this dissertation, very few studies have been conducted that focus on issues related to continuation schools. Beyond determining principal and teacher descriptions of the continuation teachers' "special fitness to perform," further investigations into the area can generate greater awareness of alternative education issues. These include, but are not limited to:

- Constructivist instructional practices that focus on the needs of continuation school students.
- PD programs developed to address continuation school needs.
- Review of pre-service training addressing alternative school population - is it needed as an adjunct to coursework related to put at-risk populations?
- Personnel selection and staffing methods for continuation schools.
- How teaching occurs in single-site single teacher classroom with multiple grade levels.
- Discipline practices in the continuation classroom.
- Counseling services provided to continuation students.
- Late identification of continuation students with special needs.

- Parental involvement in students' continuation school program.
- Social capital and the continuation teacher.
- Gifted and talented students in the continuation school environment.
- Use of remediation and intervention strategies in the continuation classroom.
- Adaptation of RTI strategies to the continuation classroom.
- Use of special education strategies in the continuation classroom.
- Continuation teacher content competencies, and how they are used when teaching outside of their teacher's credential subject.
- Continuation teacher-student interaction and relationships.
- Continuation teacher-parent interaction and relationships.
- Perceptions of continuation school programs by school district leadership.
- The role of continuation schools in dropout prevention.

Personal Reflection

From the outset of this study, I have been interested in exploring and learning more about the nature of the continuation schoolteacher. This interest emerged from genuine desire to improve the ability of continuation teachers to support the academic success of students most at risk of dropping out of school.

Over the years, as a continuation schoolteacher, I have heard much said about the quality of continuation school educators, mostly unkind. Often, continuation schools have been considered the dumping grounds for "bad" students and equally "bad" teachers. Stories abound, and were supported by statements of participants like TEACH 3, TEACH 6, and PRIN 6, who spoke of the teacher who reads the newspaper during class; another teacher who gives students fill-in-the blank worksheets as a substitute for direct

instruction; or the veteran teacher, looking for an easy pre-retirement job baby-sitting disinterested students. Robust discussions of continuation teacher excellence are rare.

Yet, examples of excellence do exist; I met many in the course of the 15 teacher interviews conducted for this study. They honor their craft, and support the growth and refinement of the skills needed to do their job properly. “Molding young minds” may read like a tired cliché, but that is exactly what these teachers do, one student at a time.

For the continuation teachers and principals I interviewed, the term “special fitness to perform” implies a unique combination of skills, distinct from those attributable to their comprehensive school colleagues. I have also learned that “special fitness to perform” denotes more than a specific skill set, it also includes the personal desire to teach in an environment unique from the comprehensive school. While continuation schools may reflect the same academic and behavioral issues faced by teachers at urban public high schools, the striking difference is in the high concentration of these issues and sheer number of put at-risk students attending continuation schools. The students in the continuation classrooms are truly the *others*, and each has a story: the credit deficient, the substance abuser, the pregnant teen, the kid working two part-time jobs, the student with anger management issues, the graffiti tagger, the drug dealer, the kid who stares off into space, the gang member, or the one that doesn’t fit in. They are both the abused and the abusers of teen society. These young people do not comprise a small fraction of the continuation school population; each and every student is put at-risk of dropping out of school or dropping out of life.

So, is there a magic bullet that can create an excellent continuation teacher from thin air? Unfortunately, no. I was surprised to learn though interviews that, with the

exception of special education courses, continuation principals and teachers are generally dismissive of formal pre-service and advanced training; collectively, they are far more supportive of skill development through “experience,” and “on the job training.” I believe these assertions say a great deal about their prior training, and the lack of exposure to coursework they found relevant to working in an urban secondary school, much less a continuation program. Again, coursework similar to Wisconsin’s Department of Instruction Education Certificate #952 add-on license may help address this relevancy gap.

While some continuation skills are attainable through pre-service coursework, PD, advanced degrees, additional certification, or experience, an underlying theme ran throughout principal and teacher interviews; continuation teachers must have “heart,” a willingness to find deep wells of patience, an ability to desensitize themselves from insult and rebuke, the drive to commit professional purpose to the least engaged students in public education, to provide the safe, family environment that may be lacking elsewhere, to model selflessly what it is to be good, decent, and kind to youngsters who may never have been exposed to such qualities. It is “heart” that compels some teachers to care beyond reason, and to stay in a thankless role that has far more bad days than good. As said by PRIN 4:

some people have a career, and that’s how they pay their bills, but you have to genuinely love kids, and I mean that, love kids, because some of these kids are not very lovable. But they need you to love them.

While “heart” may not be a “special fitness” attribute that can be easily taught, trained, or quantified, it is a common identifier of the committed

continuation schoolteacher, and a foundational beginning to improve the quality of programs in urban continuation schools.

Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

The researcher will briefly discuss the need to define the concept of “special fitness to perform” and will begin by asking:

Warm Up

Question:

What defines success in a high school classroom?

Question:

Describe a successful continuation schoolteacher.

Question:

As a continuation teacher, how do you know when you’ve been successful?

Domain One: Student Learning

Question 1

Describe any differences in working at comprehensive schools and continuation schools.

Question 2

What are the differences, if any, between comprehensive school students and continuation school students?

Question 3

What are some of the educational terms that come to mind when describing continuation school students?

Follow up

What other words do you hear that are used to describe continuation school students?

Question 4

How does a teacher’s choice of terms and language influence their perceptions of, and expectations for students?

Question 5

How does a teacher’s choice of words reflect the teacher’s assumptions about how the students will behave?

Question 6

Please define the term “at-risk Students”

Follow Up

How does that differ from being “put” at-risk?

Question 7

How do successful continuation teachers best assess a student's preferred optimal learning modality?

Follow up

What are the signs that a teacher is doing this?

Question 8

What do you believe is the best way for continuation teachers to assist students with special learning needs?

Follow up

What would I observe when this is happening?

Question 9

Explain how continuation teachers can best provide resources to students outside of their area of expertise.

Follow up

If I am observing a teacher providing these resources, what am I looking for?

Domain Two: Instruction**Question 1**

What differences in instructional approaches, if any, do you see between comprehensive schools and continuation high schools?

Follow up

What, if any, instructional approaches used in a comprehensive school also apply to a continuation school?

Question 2

What types of learning modalities do successful continuation teachers incorporate into their instruction?

Follow up

How would these teachers incorporate these learning modalities into their instruction?

Question 3

How do successful continuation teachers best individualize instruction for their students?

Follow up

What evidence would I look for that shows effective individualized instruction?

Question 4

What are the best ways for continuation teachers to incorporate skill remediation within their lessons/instruction?

Follow up

What would I see when someone is doing this?

Question 5

How do continuation teachers assess the effectiveness of their lessons?

Domain Three: Non-Academic Issues**Question 1**

Describe, if any, differences in the non-academic needs of comprehensive school students and continuation school students.

Question 2

How can teachers in continuation schools best assist students with non-academic issues?

Follow up

If I am observing a teacher providing assistance in non-academic issues, what actions or communication should I look for?

Question 3

What types of opportunities can continuation teachers provide for students to address non-academic issues?

Follow up

What would be the characteristics of these opportunities?

Question 4

In a best-case scenario, what would continuation teachers do to engage parent involvement in their child's school activities?

Follow up

What teacher behaviors would I be looking for?

Domain Four: Experiences of Teachers**Question 1**

What personal experiences best support teacher success in the continuation school classroom?

Follow up A

What professional experiences best support teacher success in the continuation school classroom?

Follow up B

What academic experiences best support teacher success in the continuation school classroom?

Question 2

Explain how these personal, academic, and professional experiences may be similar or different for comprehensive schoolteachers and continuation schoolteachers.

Question 3

How do you define a continuation teacher's "special fitness to perform"?

Appendix B

Continuation School Teacher Questionnaire

Teacher Background

Question 1:

How many years have you taught?

Question 2:

How many years have you taught in a continuation school?

Question 3:

List all current teaching credentials, certificates, or licenses recognized or authorized by the State of California.

Question 4:

If you previously taught in a comprehensive school, what subjects did you teach?

Question 5:

What subjects do you currently teach?

Domain One: Student Learning

Question 6:

How do you best assess a student's optimal learning modality?

Question 7:

What is the best way for continuation teachers to assist students with special learning needs?

Question 8

Explain how continuation teachers can best provide resources to students outside of their area of expertise.

Domain Two: Instruction

Question 9

What types of learning modalities do successful continuation teachers incorporate into their instruction?

Question 10

How do successful continuation teachers best individualize instruction for their students?

Question 11

What are the best ways for continuation teachers to incorporate skill remediation within their lessons/instruction?

Question 12

In what ways would continuation teachers assess the effectiveness of their lessons?

Domain Three: Non-Academic Issues

Question 13

How can continuation teachers best assist students with non-academic issues?

Question 14

What types of opportunities can continuation teachers provide for students to address non-academic issues?

Question 15

In a best-case scenario, what would continuation teachers do to engage parent's involvement in their child's school activities?

Domain Four: Experiences of Teachers

Question 1

What experiences have most informed your teaching practice? Professionally? Academically? Personally?

Question 17

In January and February 2013, we will conduct interviews with continuation teachers to help generate descriptions of teacher excellence. Each interview will last for approximately ninety minutes. Would you be willing to participate in an interview? If so, please provide contact information below, including an email address. The data from this project will be used to inform continuation school principals and teachers about capacities that can assist teachers to succeed in continuation schools.

Name _____

School _____

Email address or telephone number _____

Appendix C

Principal Interview Protocol

Scenario-Based Question (Focus Group and Protocol Pilot Derived)
Please describe what defines “success” in a continuation high school classroom.
How do you know when a continuation school teacher has been successful?
You and your school’s staff selection committee are considering hiring a teacher applicant. What characteristics do you look for that suggest they can successfully teach continuation high school students?
A comprehensive school teacher is considering working at a continuation school. What characteristics will this teacher need to use from their prior teaching experience?
Follow up What characteristics will they need to develop in order to succeed at the continuation high school?
Reflecting on your own experiences and observations, tell me about times when teachers did something during classroom instruction that illustrates these characteristics.
How did the examples you have just mentioned affect student learning?
When I walk into a continuation classroom, I will see a variety of students. Describe their main academic issues.
As part of the hypothetical duties of your staff selection committee, list the specific skills teachers need to address the different academic issues of continuation students.
Reflecting back to your own teaching credential preparation courses, in what ways does pre-service training support a teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk populations?
A teacher candidate interviewing with your staff selection committee has completed advanced degree coursework. Committee members want to know if it is in a classroom content area or an unrelated non-classroom subject. Why would it matter, and in what ways do you think this might or might not support her/him in the classroom?
Based on your experience, what additional credentials, licenses or certificates could support a continuation teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk students?
Your school is due for a WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation review, and you are responsible for writing the report. WASC wants you to describe your school’s current professional development program, including its goals and learning outcomes. What would you write?
Continuing your WASC report, describe the ways your school’s professional development program currently supports your teachers’ ability to work with put at-risk students.
While writing the WASC report, you reflect on the composition of your continuation school staff. Some seem to be more successful than others. Describe the specific kinds of academic backgrounds that may qualify these people to be successful at teaching continuation school.
Tell me about your own academic background.
Continuation faculties come from a variety of prior teaching experiences. How do

specific kinds of professional backgrounds qualify people to be successful at teaching in a continuation school?
As a continuation principal, you get to know the professional and personal backgrounds of your faculty. Please describe any non-education work experiences that have influenced their performance in continuation schools.
What is your teaching and administrative background outside of continuation schools?
If you could review a broad selection of continuation teacher personnel files, what specific types of personal backgrounds would you find that qualify people to be successful at teaching continuation school?
Drawing from experience, please explain how a teachers' personal background helps support or hinder his or her success as a continuation high school teacher.
Give examples of how a continuation teachers' understanding of society influences their work with continuation students.
How do students react to this?
In the continuation classroom, you may hear a student talking about their "personal drama" or how things "just seem" to happen to them. Tell me about continuation students and their ideas about personal control. Do they see themselves as having or lacking personal control over their lives?
Are there ways that teachers influence how students perceive their personal control of their lives?
As a principal, you observe student behaviors on a regular basis. Please describe your perceptions of their personal motivation.
Describe specific instances where teachers helped support the academic motivation of an individual student.
As you're walking around a classroom during an instructional transition time, you overhear students describing a variety of problems they encounter outside of your school environment. Explain some of the non-instructional, out-of-classroom issues that continuation students deal with.
How do these issues manifest themselves in the continuation classroom?
Not every student that walks into a classroom is the same. Some will attempt to complete assigned tasks every class session, while others are inconsistent or simply give up. In what ways do you think some students are more resilient than others when it comes to academics?
What role do continuation teachers play in supporting student resiliency?
One of your teachers gave their students a major activity to complete. After successfully completing the project, in what ways do these students acknowledge their personal accomplishment?
What is your teacher's role in validating student success?
How do you think their validation influences students?
To help your staff selection committee prepare to interview continuation teacher candidates, you may have to describe the qualities and characteristics that give a teacher a "special fitness to perform." What are they? Please describe.
What makes these characteristics different from that of the comprehensive high school teacher?

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Protocol

Scenario-Based Question (Focus Group and Pilot Protocol Derived)
Please describe what defines “success” in a high school continuation classroom.
As a continuation teacher, how do you know when you’ve been successful?
You are a member of your school’s staff selection committee, and are considering hiring a teacher applicant. What characteristics do you look for that suggest they can successfully teach continuation high school students?
A comprehensive school teacher is considering working at a continuation school. What characteristics will they need to use from their prior teaching experience?
Follow up What characteristics will this teacher need to develop in order to succeed at the continuation high school?
Reflecting on your own experiences, tell me about times when you did something during classroom instruction that illustrates these characteristics.
How do the examples you have just mentioned affect student learning?
When I walk into a continuation classroom, I will see a variety of students. Describe their main academic issues .
As part of your hypothetical duties on the staff selection committee, list the specific skills teachers need to address the different academic issues of continuation students.
How are these skills and characteristics developed?
Reflecting back to your own credential preparation courses, in what ways does pre-service training support a teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk populations?
A teacher candidate interviewing with your staff selection committee has completed advanced degree coursework. Committee members want to know if it is in a classroom content area or an unrelated non-classroom subject. Why would it matter, and in what ways do you think this might or might not support her/him in the classroom?
Based on your continuation classroom experience, what additional credentials, licenses or certificates could support a continuation teacher’s ability to work with put at-risk students?
Your school is due for a WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) accreditation review, and you are responsible for writing the report. WASC wants you to describe your school’s current professional development program, including its goals and learning outcomes. What would you write?
Continuing your WASC report, describe the ways your school’s professional development program currently supports your teachers’ ability to work with put at-risk students.
While writing the WASC report, you reflect on the composition of your continuation school staff. Some seem to be more successful than others. Describe the specific kinds of academic backgrounds that may qualify these people to be successful at teaching continuation school.
Tell me about your own K-12 education.

Tell me about your post-secondary education.
How (if at all) did these experiences influence your work in continuation schools?
Continuation faculties come from a variety of prior teaching experiences. How do specific kinds of professional backgrounds qualify people to be successful at teaching in a continuation school?
During a casual conversation with a friend, you talk about your non-education related work experiences, and how they have influenced your performance as a continuation teacher. Please describe them.
What is your teaching background outside of continuation schools ?
If you could review a broad selection of continuation teacher personnel files, what specific types of personal backgrounds would you find that qualify people to be successful at teaching continuation school?
Drawing from experience, please explain how a teachers' personal background helps support or hinder his or her success as a continuation high school teacher.
Please give examples of how your own personal background has supported the success of continuation students in your classes.
Give examples of how your own understanding of the society we live in has influenced your work with continuation students.
How have students reacted to this?
In the continuation classroom, you may hear a student talking about their "personal drama" or how things "just seem" to happen to them. Tell me about continuation students and their ideas about personal control.
Do they see themselves as having or lacking personal control over their lives?
Are there ways that you influence how students perceive their personal control of their lives?
Describe specific instances where you helped support a student's belief in his or her personal control.
In dealing with your continuation students on a daily basis, describe your perceptions of their personal motivation .
Describe specific instances where you helped support the academic motivation of an individual student.
As you're walking around the classroom during a transition time, you overhear students describing a variety of problems they encounter outside of your school environment. Explain some of the non-instructional, out-of-classroom issues that continuation students deal with.
How do these issues manifest themselves in your continuation classroom?
Not every student that walks into your classroom is the same. Some will attempt to complete assigned tasks every class session, while others are inconsistent or simply give up. In what ways do you think some students are more resilient than others when it comes to academics?
As a continuation teacher, what role do you play in supporting student resiliency ?
Suppose you have given your students a major activity to complete. After successfully completing the project, in what ways do they acknowledge their personal

accomplishment?
What is your role in validating student success?
How do you think your validation of their effort influences students?
To help your fellow staff selection committee members prepare to interview continuation teacher candidates, you may have to describe the qualities and characteristics that give a continuation teacher a “special fitness to perform.” What are they? Please describe.
What makes these characteristics different from that of the comprehensive high school teacher?

Appendix E

Site Description

Interviews of continuation school principals and teachers were conducted at three different types of continuation school sites within the Celaya Unified School District:

Category 1 - small school site: Mary Ann Sesma High School (a pseudonym) is CUSD's lone Category 1 site. It is located at a former elementary school in an industrial urban area. The campus includes eight classrooms, with students rotating from class to class using a "period" system, similar to comprehensive secondary schools. The Sesma High administrative team includes a principal, assistant principal, counselor, and school dean. The campus itself allows students opportunities to participate in more traditional school activities, such as assemblies or physical education classes.

Category 2 - comprehensive campus bungalows, independent school:

Category 2 sites are located on the campuses of comprehensive high schools, but are independently run by CUSD as continuation high schools. Category 2 schools are usually located in a corner of the comprehensive school, away from the main campus. They commonly have four bungalows within the site: three classrooms and one bungalow, used as an administrative center by the school's principal and secretary.

Category 3 - Comprehensive campus bungalows, single school branch site:

Category 3 sites are one or two adjoining bungalows or rooms located on the campus of a comprehensive school (elementary or secondary), but are supervised by a single, centralized continuation school administration. Category 3 schools are usually located in a corner of the comprehensive school, away from the main campus. These sites are typically "team teacher" led, with two teachers providing instruction. Administrative and

support services are often located miles away from the campus, requiring teachers to serve as on-site administrators, counselors, and clerical staff.

Category 4 - Community-based, stand-alone, single school branch site:

Category 4 sites are one or two rooms located within a larger urban community facility, often in places such as storefronts, houses of worship, or community centers. They are supervised by a single, centralized off-site administration. Category 4 locations are either “team teacher” led with two teachers providing instruction, or are run by a single teacher. Administrative and support services are located miles away from the campus, requiring teachers to serve as on-site administrators, counselors, clerical staff, nurses, janitors, and security.

Interviews for this study took place at 16 CUSD continuation sites: one Category 1, five Category 2, three Category 3, and seven Category 4 schools.

Table E1

Interview School Locations, Identified by Category Type

Site	School Category	PRIN Interview	TEACH Interview
Elizabeth Bell High School	2		X
John Brosnan High School	4		X
Susan Campos High School	2		X
Daniel Crecelius High School	4	X	X
John Eichinger High School	3		XX
Leonard Fortunato High School	3	X	X
Puente Grande High School	4		X
Richard Haley High School	4		X
Barney Johnson High School	4		X
Dick Madden High School	4		X
Tyler Mitchell High School	2	X	
Rene Parola High School	4	X	
Michael Romo High School	2	X	X
Mary Ann Sesma High School	1	X	X
Patricia Toy High School	3		X
Laura Zenzola High School	2		X

Description of the Interview Participants

Based on the results of the study’s Stage Three focus group and returned questionnaires, six principals were selected for interviews. Three principals were selected because of the following qualifying factors: continuation school administrative experience, prior administrative experience, prior teaching experience in comprehensive schools, and prior teaching experience in continuation schools. Three additional principals were also selected, based on recommendations from the initially selected principals. The enthusiasm of their recommendations supported the intention to select individuals who represent “excellence” and “best practices” within a continuation school program.

The six principals participating in this study were interviewed from CUSD school sites representing the four continuation school categories: one Category 1, two Category 2, one Category 3, and two Category 4 schools.

For the purposes of the study, principals were given pseudonyms, identified as “PRIN 1” through “PRIN 6.” Each of 35 questions asked was given an identifying label, “Principal Scenario-based Question (P SBQ),” sequenced one through 35.

Table E2

Principal Interview Information

Participant	Gender	Site
PRIN 1	F	Daniel Crecelius HS
PRIN 2	F	Michael Romo HS
PRIN 3	M	Tyler Mitchell HS
PRIN 4	F	Leonard Fortunato HS
PRIN 5	M	Mary Ann Sesma HS
PRIN 6	M	Rene Parola HS

Based on the results of the study's Stage Three faculty presentations, focus group and returned questionnaires, 15 teachers were selected for interviews. Ten teachers were selected because of the following qualifying factors: thoroughness of critical thinking responses to potential "fitness to perform" topics as identified in the questionnaire, such as "excellence," and "best practices"; credentials and licenses held; specialized credentials and licenses held (e.g., special education); certificates held (e.g., National Board Certification); length of time teaching in continuation schools (a minimum of 4 years); and involvement in school committees and initiatives.

Five additional teachers were also selected, based on recommendations from the initially selected teachers and principals. Their recommendations supported the intention to select individuals who represent "excellence" and "best practices" within the continuation school environment.

The 15 interviewed teachers were from CUSD school sites representing the four continuation School Categories: one Category 1, four Category 2, four Category 3, and six Category 4 schools.

For the purposes of the study, teachers were given pseudonyms, identified as "TEACH 1" through "TEACH 15." Each of 41 questions asked was given an identifying label, "Teacher Scenario-based Question (T SBQ)," sequenced one through 41.

Table E3

Teacher Interview Information

Participant	Gender	Site
TEACH 1	F	Daniel Crecelius HS
TEACH 2	F	John Brosnan HS
TEACH 3	M	John Eichinger HS
TEACH 4	F	John Eichinger HS
TEACH 5	F	Puente Grande HS
TEACH 6	M	Michael Romo HS
TEACH 7	F	Leonard Fortunato HS
TEACH 8	M	Richard Haley HS
TEACH 9	M	Dick Madden HS
TEACH 10	F	Barney Johnson HS
TEACH 11	M	Laura Zenzola HS
TEACH 12	F	Elizabeth Bell HS
TEACH 13	F	Patricia Toy HS
TEACH 14	F	Mary Ann Sesma HS
TEACH 15	F	Susan Campos HS

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