UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Collateral Damage on the Home Front: The Impact of Alternative Education Models on the High School Graduation of At-Risk Military Dependent Students

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

in

Educational Leadership

by

Marsha A. Schjolberg

Committee in Charge:

University of California, San Diego

Professor Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Chair

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Erika Daniels

Professor Lorri Santamaria

2012

The Dissertation of Marsha A. Schjolberg is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

Chair

University of California, San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2012

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Steve, a former sailor, who has been my strongest advocate and my biggest cheerleader. I could not have taken this journey without your lifelong support. Thank you so much for always being in my corner.

To our children, Jamie, Jennifer and Steven, thank you for understanding that mothers (and grandmothers) have goals and dreams, too. I am incredibly proud that you have grown into caring adults who have empathy for others, and you have chosen to focus on making the world we all share a better place.

To my grandson, Jordan, I love you so much and I know that your life will be infinitely better as a result of having such fabulous parents. I see the sparkle in your eyes, and the warmth of your smile. You have the ability to grasp new ideas so quickly that I know you will make a profound difference in the world as you follow your family in the spirit of community service. I love watching your self-discovery and I am excited to watch you grow into a wonderful and caring man!

To my parents and my grandparents, whose mantra, "Good, better, best, never let it rest, until your good is better, and your better, best" has kept me focused all my life, I pray that you are looking down and smiling. I listened, I learned, and I paid it forward.

To all the women and men who serve and sacrifice every day, it was my privilege to serve with you. You exemplify honor, courage, and commitment under the most difficult of circumstances. Your sense of duty to the mission, and to our country, is unquestioned. Thank you for making the quality of my life and those of our countrymen possible by always answering the call, regardless of personal or family sacrifice.

To my students, every day is an adventure. I feel so humbled to have the opportunity to participate in your education and watch you grow into wonderfully productive adults. You make me smile every day.

Most of all, to the children of our service members in this study, I hope this is an accurate portrayal of your successes and challenges. It is my privilege to have met you and to tell your stories. I marvel at your pride in your family and your steadfast support of our country despite the challenges of military life; a life that you did not choose. Thank you for taking the time to educate me. I have learned so much from you. Continue to be strong, work hard in school, and always move forward. I am so proud of all of you and together we will work to —make it right."

EPIGRAPH

Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.

John Adams, 1808

And so my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

John F. Kennedy, Jan. 20, 1961

If the Army wanted you to have a family, they would have issued you one.

Unknown

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my professors at the University of California San Diego and California State University San Marcos, thank you for taking a chance on me. Thank you for believing that my background and interests, all-be-it non-traditional, will make a difference and improve the awareness of the issues facing military dependent students. It is my hope that this study brings to light the alternative opportunities to help *all* children learn.

I would particularly like to thank Dr. Juan Necochea who recognized my potential long before I did, and encouraged me to follow my passion.

My full gratitude is given to Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter, who supported me by editing and reading revision after revision, pushing me to the finish line. Thank you for being such a wonderful advocate and cheerleader.

A special thank you is directed to Dr. Lorri Santamaria, an Air Force ~~–b~~rat" who identified a dissertation in my work and advocated for my acceptance into the doctoral program. Thank you for your support and friendship.

I cannot over emphasize my sincere thanks and admiration for Dr. Erika Daniels who, in addition to being a faculty member at California State University San Marcos, remains so well respected in the K-12 community that she opened the doors to many of my research sites and provided endless hours of moral support. Thank you so much for helping me articulate my passion and for guiding me along the way.

To both my new and long-standing colleagues and friends who propped me up when I faltered and spent endless hours participating in my journey by suggesting adjustments, editing, and reading what seemed like the hundredth revision of my

dissertation, you have enriched my life. Thank you so much for your support. I am so lucky to have you all in my life.

And so, as this chapter ends, our journey is really just beginning.

Fair Winds and Following Seas.

VITA

2012 Ed. D., Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, University of California, San Diego/California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM)

2011 Administrative Credential (Certificate of Eligibility), CSUSM

2007 M. A., Master of Arts in Education, CSUSM

2007 Cleared California State Teaching Credentials (Social Sciences, Health Sciences)

2007 Certificate (BICM), Behavioral Intervention Crisis Management, CSUSM

2006 Cross-Cultural Language and Academic Development (CLAD), University of San Diego

2006 Certificate, Instructor California English-Language Development (CELDT)

1980 Executive Program Certificate, Finance, Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania

1977 M.P.H., Master of Public Health, Columbia University, NYC

1969 B.S., Bachelor of Science in Education, Boston University, Boston, MA

Other Education (U.S. Navy)

Troops to Teachers Program

Command Leadership School, U.S. Navy Reserve (senior leadership development)

ASMRO, Medical Regulation, Scott Air Force Base, IL

Credentialed Teaching Experience

Hands-on teaching experience with comprehensive public high school, public charter, alternative/independent study schools, university, and distance learning. Multicultural Studies, Social Sciences, Health Sciences, Public Health Policy, Military Liaison/Counselor, for Grades K-20 and adults.

2006–Present ALTUS INSTITUTE: THE CHARTER SCHOOL OF SAN DIEGO

- Exceptional Teacher Performance Award School Years 2007-2008, 2008-2009
- Military Liaison Officer/Career Counselor

Teach military dependents and civilian middle and high school students across all academic levels including students who have a history of high mobility and inability to thrive academically (credit deficient) and/or emotionally; as well as students who want an accelerated program, traditional grade level students, and students with special needs. Developed Project TEAM (tutoring English and Math). Along with Fleet and Family Support Services, supported/developed psychological and social/life skills counseling curriculum. Military school liaison/career counselor supporting parents and students interested in access to post high school military training, enlistment, or military (ROTC and Academy) college opportunities. Developed a UC a-g qualified course entitled Introduction to Military Careers, consistent with the 2008-2012 California State Plan for Career Technical Education using the Pathways model, creating viable options for vocational and work bound students. Advocate for parents and youth on matters related to education/school transition/deployment/family/life skills issues. Selected as WASC site pane list.

2006 ADJUNCT FACULTY, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
San Diego Campus (undergraduate courses in public health)

2004–2007 ADJUNCT FACULTY, WEBSTER UNIVERSITY
San Diego Campus (graduate courses in public health)

1978–2006 INSTRUCTOR, UNITED STATES NAVY
Active and Reserve Collateral Duty

1970 TEACHER, White Plains High School, New York

Military Leadership Assignments

- Special Assistant to COMMANDER THIRD FLEET, San Diego
- Operation Enduring Freedom (Joint Operations), 2005-2006
- Commanding Officer, NR NH Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton
- Officer in Charge, NR Naval Medical Center San Diego H
- Commanding Officer, NR NH San Diego 119
- Commanding Officer, NR Southwest Region National Defense Medical System
- Executive Officer, NR NDMS (Camp Pendleton)
- Executive Officer, NR NDMS (Naval Medical Center San Diego)
- Executive Officer, NR NDMS (Long Beach)
- Executive Officer, Medical CRU 119
- Bureau of Medicine and Surgery(BUMED),U.S. Navy, Office of Programs and Plans

- National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda: Tricare/Access and Clinic Productivity
- Director for Administration, Naval Hospital Bremerton WA
- Director for Administration and Professional Training, NR Surgical Team119

Military Career Highlights

- Directed the largest multidisciplinary health care reserve team in the United States (ambulatory and inpatient settings), for both physical and behavioral health
- COMMANDER THIRD FLEET (VBAG), Officer in
- Charge/Chair; Violence Behavior Advisory Group
- Operation Home front, Family Readiness Program Officer (FRO), Ombudsman Program, PTSD
- Former Chair, Marketing Committee, Inter-service Family Assistance Committee Southwest Region (Tri Service)
- Family Readiness—Educational challenges in multicultural environments
- Family Readiness-DOD/DON (Navy and Marine Corps) military lifestyle, diverse populations, and socio-economic/educational challenges
- Officer in Charge of Pre/Post Deployment Health Assessment program for Individual Augmentees (PDHA,IA)
- COMMANDER THIRD FLEET Force Protection: Officer in Charge of developing FLEET Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear (CBRN) OPTASK
- State and Federal Presentations to FEMA,DHS, DOD, EMS
- Executive management/operations/finance/re-engineering to meet contract requirements
- Strategic planning and policy, business planning, data collection and analysis, marketing and government advocacy

Civilian Leadership Positions

1998-2002 BLUE SHIELD OF CALIFORNIA
Regional Manager, Marketing Government Programs

1981-1998 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
Director, Business Development UCSD Health Care
Developed contractual relationships for UCSD Medical Group; $40M in revenue.

Business Officer, Department of Reproductive Medicine
Directed the business affairs of School of Medicine with a multimillion-dollar budget. Led a multidisciplinary team to develop multispecialty practice sites, contracting, program and facilities development, and government and community

collaborations. Designed and directed the prototype for military/civilian nurse midwifery now adopted as standard of care. Developed contract relationships for women's health initiatives with VAMC, Naval Medical Center San Diego, and Council of Community Clinics.

Research

Schjolberg, M. (2012). *Collateral damage on the home front: The impact of alternative education models on the high school graduation of at-risk military dependent students.* Doctoral Dissertation. University of California, San Diego, California State University, San Marcos.

Schjolberg, M. (2007). *The value of an independent study program on the academic performance of military dependent students at-risk for becoming high school dropouts.* Master's Thesis. California State University, San Marcos.

Professional Affiliations

- LEAD San Diego-Cross Border Initiative
- Chair, Flora Vista Site Council (7 years)
- American Public Health Association
- American Educational Research Association
- Military Child Education Coalition
- Military Officers Association of America
- Disabled Veterans' of America

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Collateral Damage on the Home Front: The Impact of Alternative Education Models on the High School Graduation of At-Risk Military Dependents

by

Marsha A. Schjolberg

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2012

California State University, San Marcos, 2012

Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Chair

This study looks at a culture within a culture focusing on military dependent high school students at risk of not completing high school, what occurs when the psychosocial stressors due to high mobility and other family dynamics impact adolescent children, and what role alternative education programs may play in mitigating educational challenges and family life stressors. A review of the literature speaks to the high mobility, academic challenges, and psychosocial stressors unique to military dependent populations, as well as the various alternative independent study models explored. Emphasizing student-centered appreciative inquiry, the study employs a qualitative embedded design within a single case study with a focus on the relationship between military dependent students at-risk for dropping out of high school and independent study alternative educational programs at multiple freestanding and traditional school campuses. Both students and teachers were interviewed. Additionally, students were asked to respond to three quick-

write questions. Data supporting the self-perception of academic and psychosocial success from a student/teacher perspective were analyzed to look at changes in course completion, appropriate age/grade level remediation, tracking for timely graduation, post high school plans, changes in family dynamics, and changes in attitudes about school and self- worth.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

High Mobility and Educational Challenges. Highly mobile students have a particularly difficult time academically and socially in traditional public school. They tend to fall one to two grade levels behind, lack friends, have difficult family lives, and are at-risk for dropping out of high school (Blum, 2005; Government Accounting Office, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). These students represent a disproportionate share of public school students who are African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian. Many are culturally and linguistically diverse from their White counterparts. Because these students move frequently and are linguistically diverse, it is more difficult for them to learn and retain new material, often relearning materials in their new location. Students who do attend school often drop out due to poor reading skills, poor language, skills and academic failure—thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty, transience, and at-risk behaviors (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). This data suggests that there is a direct relationship between high mobility and the achievement gap.

Of the more than 76 million school-aged children in the United States, approximately 25% move every year. High mobility is defined by a lack of permanence, such that students in grades K-12 change geographic location and/or schools as often as annually, either permanently or for partial periods of the school year (Department of Defense, 2006; Government Accounting Office, 2005; Military Child Education Coalition, 2004; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). High

mobility occurs within the context of the family dynamic, cultural and socioeconomic barriers, academic performance, peer/school relationships, and efficacy.

According to Sanderson (2003), high mobility is fast becoming the lifestyle of expectation in the United States. In 1994, the General Accounting Office (GAO) report on elementary school children indicated that approximately 17% of the nation‘s third-graders (more than 500,000 children) attended at least three different schools since starting third grade. Students find themselves moving across the state, country, or even internationally so their parents can earn a living (Kerbow, 1996). As families no longer cluster together for security, mobility tends to increase during harsh economic times, creating yet another set of social challenges relating to resilience skills and self-efficacy (Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, & Dornbusch, 1990; Simpson & Fowler, 1994). Family economic circumstances often force students to live with extended family members, blended families, or stepparents (Government Accounting Office, 2005).

In addition to day laborers, military dependents, and single-parent homes, a much smaller number of middle-class students relocate to follow their parents‘ career opportunities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Unlike other highly mobile students, children of corporate climbers are not as frequently behind in school. However, they are most often White, have well-educated stable parents, have access to financial resources, and are able to attend private schools and/or obtain private tutoring and counseling to improve their academic standing (Government Accounting Office, 2005; Long, 1975). Yet, despite the evidence of an increasingly mobile society, publicly funded traditional education models remain fundamentally unchanged. Because mobility is increasing especially in highly impacted areas, educational leaders cannot continue ~~–b~~usiness as

usual" and expect to successfully meet the needs of the mobile population (Kerbow, 1996; Zehr, 2005).

High Mobility Among Military Families. Although a wide variety of students are affected by mobility, this study will focus on military dependent high school students, who are among the most mobile and psychosocially challenged groups. A growing number of these students are at risk of becoming high school dropouts due to a unique combination of high mobility and psychosocial stressors (Department of Defense, 2001). This study will focus on those stressors and examine independent study programs as a possible mitigating force.

There are more than 1.9 million military dependent students in the United States (most are children of junior enlisted, who represent a significant portion of the military force). Of those, a growing number have significant challenges associated with timely high school graduation because of their high mobility and unique family stressors (Department of Defense, 2007a; Department of Defense 2007b; Hefling, 2009).

. This study focused on the subset of military dependent students who are at risk of not completing high school and have chosen to attend alternative education high school programs. Findings are applicable to other highly mobile populations.

The importance of this study cannot be overstated. It is a readiness issue for the service member in addition to an educational challenge for the dependent. Adverse psychosocial behaviors compromise military readiness and endanger the lives of service members. When service members are focused on family rather than the mission (particularly in a war zone), lives are jeopardized. Not since World War II has so much stress been placed on military families. Since September 11, 2001, American military

service personnel and their families have endured challenges that are unprecedented in recent history, including consistent operational demands and recurring deployments in combat zones (Hefling, 2009). Approximately 1.5 million American troops have been deployed in support of the war effort; one-third have serviced at least two tours in a combat zone, more than 70,000 have been deployed three times, and 20,000 have been deployed at least five times. To date, more than 4,000 deployed Americans have been killed and more than 23,000 have returned from a combat zone with physical wounds. An additional 25% are struggling with psychological issues. Many report exposure to multiple life-changing stressors, making it difficult to sustain family life (Department of Defense, 2007a; Department of Defense 2007b; Hefling, 2009).

Consistent with other highly mobile populations, military dependent students are often from blended families, are multiracial, multicultural, and have lower socio-economic status (Military Child Coalition, 2004). Hence, they also represent a significant component of the achievement gap. Moreover, military dependents have the added burden of having a family member in harm‘s way. Military dependent students, often from blended families, find that they live with friends, stepparents or other relatives who may live in locations other than that of the core family—exacerbating feelings of isolation and fear (Department of Defense, 2001).

Psychosocial Pathology. The Pentagon reports an alarming increase in mental health concerns as manifested in military dependent children (Astor, 2010). In 2007-2008, the demand for mental health services for military dependents doubled (2 million outpatient visits), and hospitalizations for military dependents increased by 50% since the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Hefling, 2009). One in 88 military dependent

students has been diagnosed with a form of autism spectrum disorder. Mental health challenges and use of mental health services are 3.5 times greater than the percentage of civilian children 4 to 17 years old and represent more than 35% of the dependent population (Department of Defense, 2007b). Dependents are seeking inpatient care for increasingly severe mental health issues including depression, anger management, post-traumatic stress, aggression, increased drug and alcohol use, and suicidal behavior (Hefling, 2009).

At present, 1 million American children have had at least one parent deployed. Having a primary caretaker deployed to a war zone for an indeterminate period is among the most stressful events a child can experience (Department of Defense, 2007a). The stress of deployment and fear for the parent‘s safety are difficult to navigate and permeate every facet of a student‘s life (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). As a result of repeated, sustained, and multiple war zone deployments, military dependents are emotionally fragile and, as a result, absences from work and school are common (Department of Defense, 2007b). Military dependent students are more likely than their civilian counterparts to exhibit at-risk behavior and have mental and/or physical ailments as a result of family lifestyles, which preclude regular school attendance (Department of Defense, 2001). These absences are contrary to the structured environments of traditional high schools, and further denigrate the students‘ abilities to stay on task and complete assignments on a timely basis consistent with non-military classmates. Hence, military dependent high school students drop out of school traditional high school. In a volunteer survey conducted by the Department of Defense, U.S. Army high school seniors were asked how often they moved and when the last move occurred. Of the respondents

(n=250), 30% indicated that they moved at least twice during high school. Thirteen percent indicated that they moved between 11th and 12th grades. The Army now believes that 100,000 high school students are listed as attending home school (Department of Defense, 2001).

As of 2008, of all active duty forces (2,509,653), more than 80% of the enlisted identify themselves as members of a minority group (Department of Defense, 2008). They move on average three times more often than their civilian peers. Unlike children of day laborers who move among communities in the same state or geographic region where credits may be transferable, military students regularly move across the country and internationally. Junior enlisted parents are often younger than their civilian counterparts, and frequently report having difficulty in high school themselves (Department of Defense, 2006; Department of Defense, 2008; Military Child Education Coalition, 2004). Exacerbating the problem of high mobility, one family member is often deployed while the other is left to raise the children, effectively forcing the children into a single-parent family with the added burden of low socioeconomic status and an overriding fear of injury or death of the deployed family member (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004). Military dependents often fall below the poverty level and are eligible for federal and state aid, including free and reduced school lunch (Department of Defense, 2006).

The increased incidence of adverse mental health behaviors is staggering (Department of Defense, 2007a; Department of Defense, 2007b; Hefling, 2009; Military Child Education Coalition, 2004; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). As such, the plight of military dependent students of junior enlisted is more severe than civilian

residential ―stayers" or ―movers" because military dependent students are adversely affected not only by high mobility, low socioeconomic status, less-educated or absentee parents, but by increased emotional stress that manifests in both physical and psychological adverse behaviors (Edwards & Young, 1992; Hefling, 2009; Mmari et al., 2009; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989; Straits, 1987).

Non-Intact Families. Since military families are usually one-parent homes (with a deployed parent), often the remaining parent is the stepparent with a limited relationship to the older student and other blended family members. Several studies cite that students from single-parent homes, addressed as non-intact families, account for part of the reason students drop out of high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Audette, Algozzine, & Warden, 1993). Children from blended families, stepfamilies, and single-parent families are more likely to move during the school year and represent as much as 30% of the difference in the risk of dropping out and graduating from high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Audette et al., 1993). Teens from blended families, single-parent families, or stepfamilies have lower grade point averages, poorer school attendance, and more problems with school authorities. They are more likely to move during the school year and their behavior represents as much as 30% of the difference in the risk of dropping out and graduating from high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1994). As mobility continues to increase due to economic and operational tempos, students move more frequently and are unable to accumulate credits or acquire the requisite skills necessary to advance to a new grade (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004; Pittman & Bowen, 1994).

The Department of Defense has recognized the psychosocial challenges of military life, particularly in a wartime environment. To help families deal with the outcomes of these stressors, all branches of the military offer life skills programs for service members and their families. However, these programs are not mandatory and are often looked upon as carrying a social stigma if families participate. Additionally, assistance is available to address the most pressing of psychosocial and financial issues.

The Marine Corps menu reflects the pressing issues of the day by providing resources that respond to the concerns of military family members and potential military family members who are looking for resources such as paternity testing, child support, service member location, and divorce counseling. These topics express the concerns relating to the psychosocial aspects of military family life, which ultimate affects every family member, including the service member and their dependents. Although the Marine Corps Community Services web page is displayed, every branch of the service faces similar issues. The Marine Corps page is an example of proactive community engagement attempting to address the psychosocial needs of their constituents (http://www.usmc-mccs.org/helpcontactus.cfm).

Figure 1.1 reflects the multifaceted approach the Marine Corps has taken to inform and assist both civilian and military members. Note that in addition to the contact page which is displayed, tabs for family life, military life, retiree life, community services, referral phone numbers and mailing addresses are all available. This level of transparency reflects the concern for the wellbeing of service members and their families and suggests that the Marine Corps, as well as the other branches of the military,

understand the importance that family plays in the lives of well adjusted, fit and ready marines. Family services are available on every military base anywhere in the world.

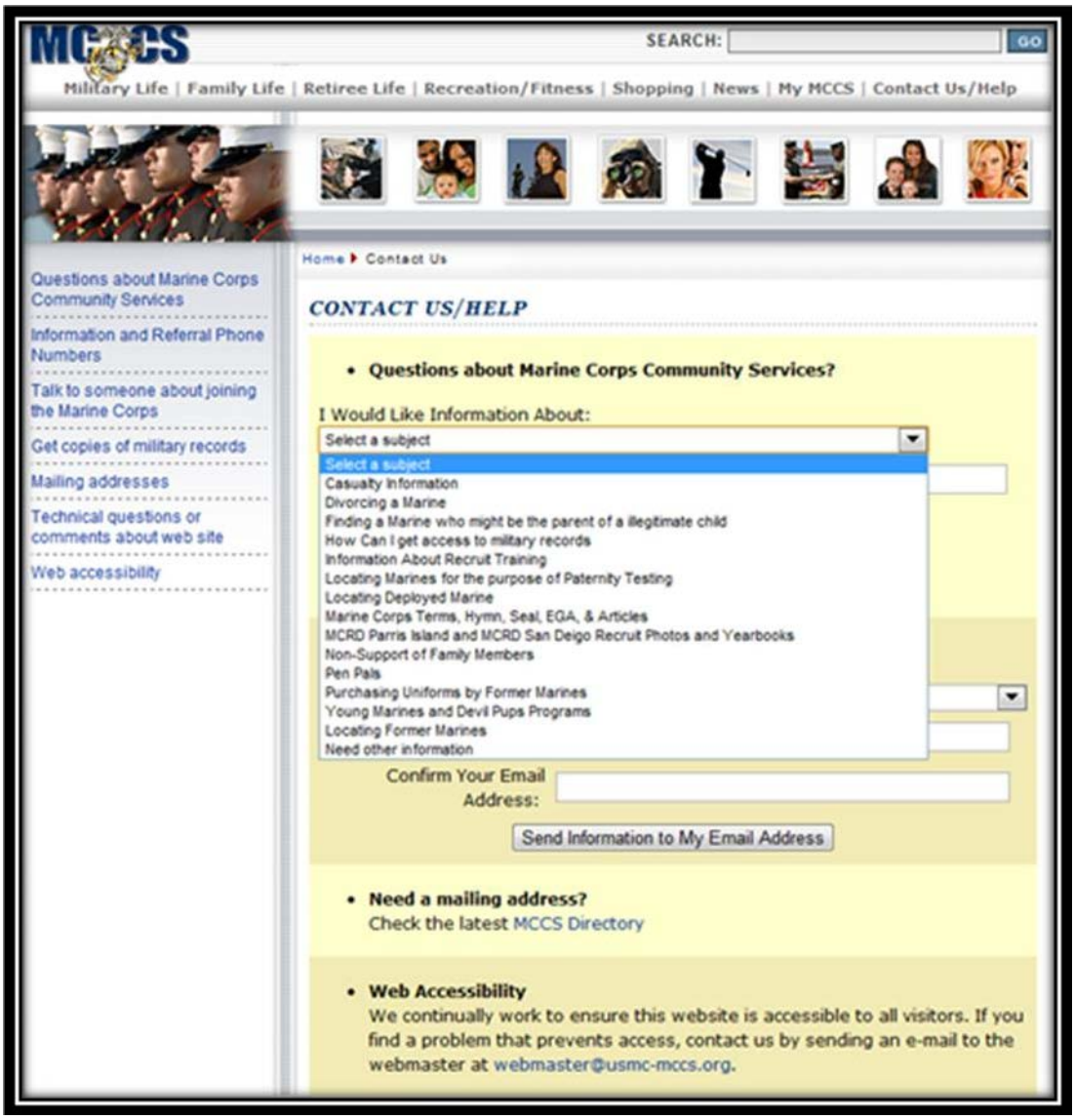

Figure 1.1 Marine Corps Community Services information page.

In addition to the Marine Corps, every branch of the military spends tens of millions of dollars to support military families (Department of Defense, 2007a, b). The U.S. Navy contracts with civilian groups to provide support to the fleet and their dependents. The organization, known as Fleet and Family Support Services, offers

courses and counseling for service and family members relating to life skills, parenting, reuniting, divorce, finance, anger management, and more. Currently, life educators meet Navy ships at their last port and cruise with them into their home duty station while providing counseling in support of the returning sailor. Discussions regarding reuniting with family, parenting, finances, and medical needs all occur before the sailor comes home and the ship arrives at its home port.

The Center

Your Metro San Diego Fleet & Family Support Center Locations:

Naval Base San Diego (NBSD)
Buildings 259, 261 & 263
3005 Cortina Alley, Suite 1
San Diego, CA 92136-6190
Mon, 7:30 am-7 pm
Tue-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
619-556-7404

Naval Base Coronado (NBC)
Building 318, Saufley Road
San Diego, CA 92135-7138
Mon-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
619-545-6071

Naval Base Point Loma (NBPL)
Buildings 211 & 212
140 Sylvester Road
San Diego, CA 92106-3521
Mon-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
619-553-6306

Murphy Canyon Branch (MCB)
4087 1 Santo Road
San Diego, CA 92124
Mon-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
858-277-4258

Bayview Hills Branch (BVH)
1967 Sky Harbor Road
San Diego, CA 92139
Mon-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
619-556-1275

The Village at Serra Mesa Branch (VSM)
3141 Afton Road
San Diego, CA 92123
Mon-Fri: 7:30 am-4:30 pm
619-556-1277

Gateway Village Branch

Fleet & Family Workshops
NOVEMBER 2011

SOAR (Spouse Orientation & Area Resources to San Diego): Exploring America's Finest City
Nov 18, Fri, 10 AM - 3 PM, FFSC BVH

Spouse Readiness Workshop: Resources for the Military Family
Nov 7, Mon, 5 PM - 7 PM, FFSC NBSD

FAMILY READINESS GROUP (FRG) SUPPORT
Call (619) 556-8311 to register

Family Readiness Group (FRG) Training
Nov 14, Mon, 9:30 AM - 11:30 AM, FFSC NBSD

INDIVIDUAL AUGMENTEE (IA) SUPPORT

Individual Augmentee (IA) Family Connection Meeting
Nov 8, Tue, 6 PM - 8 PM, Murphy Canyon Chapel, 3200 Santo Rd, SD CA 92124

Individual Augmentee (IA) Family Homecoming Workshop
Nov 16, Wed, 6 PM - 8 PM, FFSC NBSD

Individual Augmentee (IA) Sailor & Family Deployment Readiness Brief
Nov 15, Tue, 10 AM - 11:30 AM, NBSD NMPS Auditorium, Bldg. 3291, SD CA 92136

Returned Individual Augmentee (IA) Workshop

Responsible Anger Management
(2-day class occurring 11/3 & 11/7 only)
Nov 3, Thu, 9 AM - 4 PM, FFSC NBPL
Nov 7, Mon, 9 AM - 4 PM, FFSC NBPL

PERSONAL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Consumer Awareness
Nov 3, Thu, 2 PM - 3:30 PM, FFSC NBC

Credit Management: Using Credit Wisely
Nov 22, Tue, 2 PM - 3:30 PM, FFSC NBSD

Developing Your Spending Plan
Nov 3, Thu, 2 PM - 3:30 PM, FFSC NBPL
Nov 15, Tue, 5 PM - 6:30 PM, Murphy Canyon Chapel, 3200 Santo Rd, SD CA 92124

Financial Planning for Deployment
Nov 29, Tue, 5 PM - 6:30 PM, Murphy Canyon Chapel, 3200 Santo Rd, SD CA 92124

Home Buying
Nov 29, Tue, 1 PM - 4 PM, FFSC NBSD

How to Survive the Holidays Financially
Nov 10, Thu, 1 PM - 2 PM, FFSC NBC
Nov 17, Thu, 3 PM - 4 PM, FFSC VSM

Million Dollar Sailor/Spouse Workshop
Nov 8 - 9, Tue - Wed, 8 AM - 4 PM, FFSC NBSD

Money and the Move
Nov 3, Thu, 3 PM - 4:30 PM, FFSC VSM
Nov 10, Thu, 3 PM - 4:30 PM, FFSC BVH

Planning for Your Retirement
Nov 1, Tue, 2 PM - 3 PM, FFSC NBSD

Figure 1.2 Fleet & Family Workshops (U.S. Navy, 2011).

Student Learning in Traditional Settings. The effect that high mobility and emotional disconnect have on student learning in a traditional K-12 setting, and the issues relating to improving self-efficacy and academic performance, are daunting to educators, students, and parents (Military Child Coalition, 2004). Educators and parents report that the educational needs of all students (residential ―stayers" and ―movers") are frequently adversely impacted by the constant change in classroom dynamics and the disruption of classroom instruction as children come and go (Department of Defense, 2001).

According to Astor (2010), teachers and leaders in traditional school settings have never been trained to understand and appropriately respond to the stressors faced by military dependent students, and as such, the behaviors of these students are largely misunderstood. This lack of understanding and knowledge has created an environment that is generally unresponsive to the needs of military dependent students (Astor, 2010). Astor's contention is that leadership in schools with this student population must be aware of and act upon the social and psychological nuances of their students in order to maximize the learning experience.

Purpose of Study

Given the lack of success in traditional high school for a growing number of military dependent students, it is important to investigate alternative educational approaches that offer the opportunity of increased personal success and academic achievement for this highly mobile population. As such, a review of the literature reflects that various independent study models offer a more flexible learning environment, which

may be better suited to the psychosocial and academic needs of highly mobile, at-risk high school students (Fine, 1991; Foley & Pang, 2006).

Focused solely on military high school dependents, this study examined military students who are at risk of not completing high school, and who have opted to attend alternative programs. Independent study programs represent an alternative educational model that is more flexible than traditional school. This study sought to determine whether alternative study programs support, constrain, or have no effect on the academic and psychosocial development of highly mobile military dependent high school students who would otherwise be at higher risk for becoming high school dropouts. These students—by virtue of family challenges, school disenfranchisement, or some combination of circumstances—have not been successful in a traditional school setting (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004). Hence, these students represent the very group at-risk for becoming high school dropouts and/or exhibiting adverse behavior (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Audette et al., 1993).

Academic research has produced a number of studies surrounding issues of high mobility, resilience, and self-efficacy and their relationship to academic success (Croninger & Lee, 2008; Faunce, 1984; Felner, Primavera, & Cauce, 1981). However, there is limited research regarding independent study programs for at-risk military dependent students. Additional research is required to better understand how we, as a society, can improve the educational outcomes for a growing segment of our youth.

To that end, the Department of Defense (2001) recommended an additional study to look at military dependent students holistically (the whole child), and determine what special programs may be needed to address the challenges of mobile high school

students. As a result of the recommendations made by the Department of Defense (2001), a pilot study followed the activities of 12 military dependent high school students in one specific independent study program in southern California. Grades, transferability of coursework, test scores, high school graduation, recognition of positive school role models, community involvement, and improved connectivity between civilian and military installations and programs were addressed. Findings reflected a substantial increase in grade point average, timely course completion, and transferability. None of the students dropped out of school and all of the students have remained in high school at other locations, moved on to college, or into viable careers (Schjolberg, 2007).

By expanding the study to include a minimum of 22 military dependent students from four branches of the service and from four unique independent study programs, it was anticipated that additional information would support new opportunities to meet the needs of the "whole child" and create an environment in which military dependent high school students will thrive both emotionally and academically.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

The primary theoretical framework on which this study was based is social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). However, additional theoretical frameworks also offer secondary support. These frameworks are multifaceted and interrelated. They include social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) and social cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), all of which relate to the students' abilities to "make meaning," model behaviors, develop purposeful relationships, and reflect the importance of the "community" as having a central role in the students' ability to develop a positive self- image.

These theoretical frameworks speak to the role society (school, peers, family, community) plays in the development of self-efficacy, mental stability, individual achievement, and communal belonging (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Rumberger, 1998) and are appropriate to this study because they emphasize the important roles that culture and community play in the social development and ―belief system" of the members. As an example, social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behavior, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others. This theory connects human behavior to cognitive and environmental influences. Children ―copy" parents, siblings, and friends, and are rewarded based on the assimilation of behaviors and attitudes. External motivation and recognition reinforces the behaviors and choices made by children.

Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) believed that children use their basic mental functions in the context of their cultural surroundings. Therefore, the values, beliefs, and tools that children develop are socioculturally determined and vary from culture to culture (memory of events, mind mapping). According to Vygotsky (1978), interpretation is made more clear by the help of a ―more knowledgeable other" (MKO). Once the MKO explains why and how something works, the child is able to understand more clearly and mimic the activity. The latter reflects Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where, after being shown an activity and given guided practice, a child is more likely to replicate the activity independently.

In the same way, social capital theory (Coleman, 1988) explains the underpinning of emotional support, and social benefits of behaving or thinking like the community. Coleman (1998) believes that this is the basis of interaction among humans that display

reciprocation and trust. The willingness to take initiative or take risks in a social context is based on the belief that others will respond favorably, and that this interconnectivity forms the basis of self-efficacy and sense of community for mutual benefit.

Consistent with social capital theory (Coleman, 1988), the concept of community participation in the development of resilience in children is paramount (Nettles, Mucherah, & Jones, 2000). Benard (2004) suggests that if individuals (caregivers, more knowledgeable others, parents) focus on every student‘s innate resilience and help them develop, articulate, and live with wisdom, as a society we can determine what helps children thrive. Focusing on the ―thriving mechanism" allows for well-adjusted children who grow into adjusted adults (Benard, 2004; Pajares, 1996).

When role models are absent or parental deficits exist, the outcomes often yield aggressive, deviant, and antisocial attitudes that promote at-risk behaviors. Parents' inability to control coercive exchanges among family members constitutes ―training for fighting," which leads to aggressive behavior and poor peer relationships. This lack of social skills generalizes to antisocial behavior in the classroom, which makes it next to impossible for the student to obtain necessary academic skills, thus poorly preparing the student to cope with life outside school. This ultimately leads to high rates of delinquent behavior as reflected below (Patterson et al., 1989).

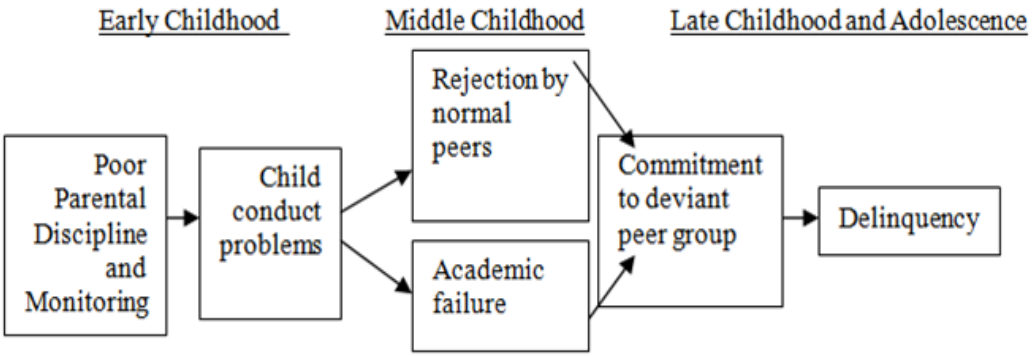

Figure 1.3 A developmental progression for antisocial behavior.

These theories are pertinent to military dependent students because the military has a unique culture and code of behavior, which functions as a subset of the greater society (Military Child Coalition, 2004; Department of Defense, 2001). Within the context of military life, the absence of a consistent caregiver and/or parent is a stumbling block to the development of resilience. Resilience—as defined by the ability to be flexible and pliable such that a student can ―roll with the punches"—is an important element of self-efficacy (Pajares, 1996). Additionally, the absence of a stable home environment, where all parties are in a consistent living arrangement and part of an emotionally stable family and common community, makes it difficult for students to be rooted in a school or neighborhood (Nettles et al., 2000). Frustration and aggression are often commonplace (Department of Defense, 2007b).

Moreover, military culture includes its own code of ethics, morals, values, dress code, and language. Service members do not have jobs; they have a sense of duty, commitment and 24/7 responsibilities. Service members are often deployed unexpectedly based on world events, and can be absent for months or years at a time. Enlisted service members live together in military communities, work together, and socialize with each other, but deploy at different times and to different locations.

Transient military housing is ―a temporary home.” There is a distinct code of behavior and expectations. Service to our country is always first, and commitment to the mission is often of greater immediate importance than commitment to family. Despite these pressures, approximately 60% of all service members are married, have children, or both (Department of Defense, 2008). Current literature does not address the academic and psychosocial needs of at-risk military dependent high school students in nontraditional academic settings. Hence, independent study as an alternative educational high school model is explored in support of this population.

Since the military has a defined culture, social cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) will help illuminate behaviors learned by military dependent students, particularly as they model what they see and live (Bandura, 1977). Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

1. What is the students‘ self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent high school student?
2. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military dependent high school students?
3. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent high school students?
4. In what ways are freestanding public independent study programs similar or different from traditional comprehensive high school independent study programs?
5. In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

Proposed Methodology

A phenomenological (Husserl, 1900) lens was applied to study the cultural nuances of this group of 22 students representing four branches of the military at four independent study programs. Phenomenology, although based in philosophy, is used to describe the experiences of one or more individuals within the context of the individual's personal experiences and from their perspective. This research method lends itself to military culture in that it determines meaning from lifestyles and experiences in a unique culture using in-depth interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Qualitative analysis was applied to a single-case, embedded-design study with multiple units of analysis to clarify the challenges facing military dependent students and to determine the value—if any—of the independent study approach. Teachers and students from four independent study programs were interviewed. Additionally, students were asked to complete three quick-writes and student transcripts were reviewed. Only military students in grades 9-12 were asked to participate in the study. Interviewees were chosen based on their interest to volunteer for the study and only those teachers directly responsible for participating students were interviewed.

Significance of the Study

Earlier research suggests that students who feel a sense of belonging to a program or school have positive peer, family, and mentor relationships; exhibit a greater sense of resilience; and are more likely to graduate from high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Military Child Education Coalition, 2004; Pittman & Bowen, 1994; Rumberger et al., 1990).

This study examined whether independent study enhances, impedes, or is neutral to the needs of military dependent students as they work toward high school graduation. The findings could assist educational leaders in identifying the importance and prudence of developing additional independent study venues as a substantive and credible alternative to traditional educational programs; thereby, meeting the needs of students who would otherwise be at risk for high school failure while mitigating future adverse behaviors. It may also help mitigate challenges to military readiness and the corresponding cost in health and human services for the service member and family.

Definition of Terms

AARC—Academic Acceleration and Recovery Center, which provides independent study alternatives to students for acceleration or credit recovery using the university one course/block scheduling model (both in and out of the classroom).

Alternative Education Model—An umbrella term describing nontraditional programs, such as independent study, online, AARCs, ASAM, homeschool, or any combination.

ASAM—Alternative School Accountability Model, which provides independent study alternatives to credit deficient students using the one course/block scheduling model.

At-risk behavior—Engaging in tobacco, drugs, sexual promiscuity, fighting/bullying, and/or other illegal activity.

At-risk student—A student who may not function at grade level and/or may not attain high school graduation.

Blended family—The presence of step or half siblings and stepparents either of one ethnicity or multiple ethnicities.

Deployment—A military term depicting the movement of service members outside the continental United States, usually for 13 months or more. Families are left behind.

Highly mobile student—A student who moves with regularity and frequency.

Junior enlisted service member—A member of the military who is considered part of the general work force; often affiliating directly out of high school.

Military dependent—A child or stepchild who is the financial responsibility of an active duty or reserve/National Guard military member.

Minority student/ethnically diverse—Students who are represented by specific ethnicity or a combination thereof (non-White).

Movers—Reflecting mobility or transience of students.

Psycho-socioeconomic pathology—Adverse mental or emotional behavior as a result of real or perceived danger or status/class/economic standing in society.

Residential stayer—A student who lives in and attends school in the same neighborhood.

Single-parent home—The absence of either a mother or father or second ~~"o~~n site" parent.

Resilience—The ability to recover from difficult/adverse situations.

Social cultural theory—The fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition. The community plays a central role in the process of ~~"m~~aking meaning" (Vygotsky 1978).

Social learning theory—The importance of observing or modeling the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others to develop personal behaviors and attitudes (Bandura 1977).

Virtual high school—Offering credit recovery or acceleration in which the teacher and student communicate electronically along with in-person visits and tutoring.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter reviewed scholarly literature relating to the behaviors and life circumstances of highly mobile students who are considered at risk of becoming high school dropouts because of an inability to thrive in a traditional educational setting. It also examined the role independent study programs play in mitigating academic and psychosocial challenges for this population. Although many of the studies are not unique to military students, they do reflect findings associated with highly mobile at-risk populations and are applicable to both civilian and military communities.

The studies cited applied academic theoretical frameworks reflecting the outcomes that support the importance of connectivity and personalized attention in the context of independent study programs. Social learning theory, social cultural theory, and social capital theory are the theoretical frameworks from which these studies are viewed. The studies addressed the roles that school, peers, family, and community play in the development of self-efficacy and resilience. The absence of those skills in caregivers, parents, and community has a varying deleterious effect on military dependent students growing up in that environment.

Challenges Facing Highly Mobile Students

A Sense of Community Beyond the Military. Whether defined by acceptance of one‘s peers culturally, ethnically, or geographically, educators agree with Newman (1988) that one of the basic needs of all humans is the need to belong. By definition, students who are highly mobile are frequently moving and often are unable to identify with a peer group (Finkel & Ashby, 2003). Unlike other highly mobile children who

move between communities in the same state (where credits may be transferable), military students move across the country and overseas with regularity. Approximately 24% of military students are between the ages of 13 and 18 years old and are always the new kids on the block struggling to fit in at a new school or community (Viadero, 2005).

For example, emphasizing the importance of peer and community relationships in Illinois, Ross, Reynolds, and Geis (2000) reviewed survey and census track data to learn about poverty, mobility, and stability in a socially isolated neighborhood. Mobility was associated with deleterious adolescent outcomes, including difficulty in school and antisocial and violent behavior. Conversely, in affluent neighborhoods stability was associated with low levels of distress and high levels of socialization. Ross et al. (2000) examined the effects of neighborhood stability and poverty on the psychological well-being of residents, as well as the effects of well-being across different types of neighborhoods, measuring different economic indicators. Resident turnover compared to stability was also measured based on the frequency of moves. Findings, which were consistent across research studies, reflected that the negative effects of the poor, stable neighborhoods on residents‘ psychological well-being did not stem from a lack of social ties among neighbors but rather a sense of despair about the future, concluding further that anger and school performance may have a direct relationship to poor neighborhoods and lack of hope. The similarity to military dependent environments is telling in that lack of socioeconomic standing and fear of the future is paramount (Department of Defense, 2001).

Sampson, Morenoff, Raudenbush, and Earls (1999) also identified the importance of maintaining a neighborhood identity for adolescent development. Their Chicago study

included a home-based community survey of 8,782 residents representing all 343 neighborhood clusters. Five items measured to ensure intergenerational closure involved questions about children‘s friends, knowledge of friends‘ parents, reciprocity of errands or favors, watching out for each other‘s children, and neighborhood stability. Interestingly, neighborhoods with high involvement were less likely to be transient and have less stress, greater school focus, and a greater sense of community, regardless of socioeconomic status. Military communities are the antithesis of this norm because families regularly relocate and parents are often deployed and non-participatory in their children‘s daily lives (Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998).

A consensus in the literature reflects a sense of belonging as pivotal to the lack of crime and improved educational status of the children in the neighborhood. According to South and Haynie (2004), residentially mobile adolescents differ significantly from their non-mobile counterparts on most friendship network characteristics. South and Haynie (2004) used data from 13,000 respondents to the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to examine the impact of residential and school mobility on the structure of adolescent friendships. Compared to residential stayers, movers have smaller networks, are less likely to report having a best friend in school (71% versus 79%), and are less likely to receive a best friend nomination in return. Mobile students were more likely to make difficult transitions from junior to senior high school, more likely to feel isolated, and less likely to live with two parents. Additionally, South and Haynie (2004) noted that characteristics of friendship networks also varied by race. Non-Whites had fewer and smaller networks and less prestigious positions within the network.

As research suggests, students who attend the same school for their entire career are most likely to graduate, whereas the most mobile of the school populations have the highest rates of failure and dropout. Children who change schools often may miss important educational concepts, thereby lowering their grades (Ross et al., 2000). Attending a new school may make the student feel socially isolated and marginalized. Often, marginalized students seek out others who are also feeling marginalized, such as those who are involved in antisocial behavior or who are disengaged from learning (Teachman, Paasch, & Carver, 1996). All of these factors suggest that residential mobility leads to a loss of relationships, commitment, and trust for children (Coleman 1988). Rumberger and Larson (1998) confirms that students who frequently change schools between 8th and 12th grades were twice as likely to drop out of high school as students who did not change schools. According to Rumberger (2003) and Rumberger and Larson (1998), after conducting a study that looked at the incidence of student mobility in middle and high school and its effect on high school completion using the National Educational Longitudinal Survey third follow-up data, the findings suggest that student mobility is both a symptom of disengagement and an important risk factor for high school dropouts. Review of the data reflected that 31% of 8th graders changed schools two or more times between the 1st and 8th grades and 10% changed schools two more times between 8th and 12th grades. Academically, the group who transferred with the greatest frequency represented the students who did not graduate from high school and felt no connection to their current school.

Family Characteristics, Demographics, and Stressors. Frequent interstate migration is found to be associated with an increased likelihood of enrollment below the

modal grade for age among children whose parents are not college graduates (Long, 1975). Among military dependents, the problem of high mobility, the relationship to at-risk behaviors, and high school dropout rates are exacerbated by the imposed military culture. The Department of Defense (2008) reported a total military force of 2.5 million members, of which the vast majority of enlisted forces describe themselves as minorities. More than 60% of all military members are married and have children. Enlisted personnel (including Reserves) comprise the youngest adults and more than 80% of the military forces. Approximately 46% of enlisted members are under 24 years of age; 58% are under 29 years old. Educationally, 90% of enlisted have a high school diploma and 6.9% have a GED, while only 4% have a college degree (Department of Defense, 2005). Active duty forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, have a dependent family population of more than 2 million (Army Profile, 2005).

The unique constellation of stressors on military children is manifested by multiple moves, isolation, frequent separations, hazards of family deployment, and adverse physical and psychosocial behaviors that compound the stressors of everyday life (Department of Defense, 2007). Responses by children to these stressors vary by age and developmental stage. Typically, adolescents withdraw and deny feelings about separation. In the deployment phase, adolescents may be angry, aloof, apathetic about school, and may misbehave more frequently (Huebner & Mancini 2005; Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989). According to Jensen, Martin, and Watanabe (1996), boys seem to suffer more effects than girls and try to assume the role of the missing parent. Girls often become the surrogate ―mother" to younger siblings as the homebound parent obtains a job or becomes overwhelmed by family circumstance. Adolescents may also

become defiant, depressed, and try to protect younger siblings from stress and negative images and emotions as expressed by the media, schoolmates, and teachers. Huebner and Mancini (2005) found that adolescents who are overtaxed beyond their coping ability often take on the role of parent or breadwinner for the remaining family members or, in the case of girls, become pregnant themselves as a way of developing a sense of closeness. The U.S. Army has been proactive in recognizing and developing programs in support of military families as evidenced by their willingness to potentially forgo cuts in spending for family programs in support of their soldiers.

Figure 2.1 Department of Defense budget cuts may spare family programs.

As reflected by the Wingspread Declaration, (Center for Adolescent Health and Development, University of Minnesota, 2003) students are more likely to succeed when they feel connected to their family, community and school (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). Parental involvement and accountability improves the likelihood that students exhibit

renewed interest in academics. The focus on academics diminishes incidents of fighting, bullying, and vandalism (Schapps, 2003). Additionally, students are likely to feel more "settled" and exhibit less disruptive behavior, substance and tobacco use, emotional distress, and early age sexual encounters. These factors are true across racial, ethnic, and income levels (Wilson & Elliott, 2003). Students who cannot connect to peers often harbor feelings of inadequacy that result in an inability to make friends in new environments (Spaulding, 1964). As a result, highly mobile students report that they were less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities at traditional school (Battistich & Horn, 1997). Both teachers and students reported that these students are more likely to act out and get into trouble as a way of deflecting anger or frustration or to receive attention (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999). Educators suggest that lack of participation in extracurricular sports and clubs at school (often because attendance is not met) is a key indicator. Prior research has found that both misbehavior and lack of involvement in extracurricular activities increase the risk of dropping out of school (Blum, 2005).

Consistent with social cultural theory as defined by Vygotsky (1978)—which reflects the importance of the community as having a role in the students' ability to make meaning—military culture affects and often defines the cognitive development of children since they learn what they "live." If the family is "broken" and the community "stressed," the exhibited adverse behaviors become the norm for the child. Frequent moves are often compounded by the anxiety of parental separation during deployments and challenge the system to ease the transition from school to school (Drummet et al. 2003). In an environment of elevated operational tempo, anxieties are elevated as both

financial and emotional anxiety increases. These challenges—added to the necessity of moving not just from school to school, but from system to system across states—heighten the likelihood of academic failure (Department of Defense, 2007).

Consistent with Bandura (1977), who reflects modeling of adult behaviors and coping skills, and Coleman (1988) and Cummings (2004), who speak to the importance of building trust and resilience with strong reciprocal relationships, students replicate behaviors and reactions to life stressors, including separation anxiety.

Thinking that they are proactively avoiding disruption in their children's education, some families opt to separate, leaving an older child behind with family friends while the family moves to another location (Department of Defense, 2001). Unfortunately, the cycle of emotional stress is repeated because the student feels alienated from family. Feelings of isolation and abandonment create a platform for at-risk behavior. In many families, older female children take on the role of caregiver for younger siblings as the resident caregiver works outside the home. Limited income precludes the ability to utilize day care services. Additionally, medical appointments are scheduled based on availability so children do not attend school on a regular basis, fall farther behind, and may be expelled for truancy. This behavior also limits social networks, opportunities to excel academically, and to explore talents (Ross et al., 2000). Rather than having a calming effect, these stressors increase adolescent disenfranchisement (Department of Defense, 2007; Ross et al., 2000).

High Mobility and Academic Challenges. A study by Rumberger et al. (1999) identified three basic components of student mobility: incidences, consequences, and causes. In that study, specifically focused on California high school students, surveys of

more than 1,100 students followed over 6 years yielded telling results. Almost 75% of California students made unscheduled school changes between grades 1 and 12; compared to 60% as the national average. Student mobility was prevalent among all ethnic and immigrant groups but appeared to be related to socioeconomic status (low income, single-parent homes had a higher incidence of transient behavior). In 1990, the average high school in California saw 22% of its 10th graders leave before completing 12th grade. One out of five high schools in California had student mobility rates (number of students leaving the school each year) in excess of 30% and one out of 10 had student mobility rates in excess of 40%, compared to 6% in other states (Rumberger et al., 1999; Rumberger, 2003).

California is unique in that it has both a large day labor population as well as a large number of stateside military dependent students due to the abundance of military installations (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004). Approximately 61,000 children of service members are attending schools in California. More than half attend schools in San Diego County, with about 12,000 annually relocating at different times during the year. These students impact the high-school dropout rate and highlight the need to develop strategies to keep students in school and improve their ability to thrive.

Students who attend the same high school for their whole career are most likely to graduate, whereas the most mobile of the school populations has the highest rates of school failure and dropout (ERIC/CUE Digest, 1991). Military students, especially those of junior enlisted, often do not complete grades 9 through 12 at the same location, fall below the poverty level, live in single-parent homes (due to deployments or blended families), suffer psychosocial deficits at an increased rate, and can be considered mobile

(Department of Defense, 2006; Department of Defense, 2007a; Swanson & Schneider, 1999). Moves require students to adjust to new teachers, curricula, and social situations. Because of different practices across states and school districts within states, credits may not be recognized and students who move prior to final exams may not receive credit for courses (Long, 1975). In fact, military students and parents report incompatible graduation requirements across states, redundant/missed entrance and exit testing, lost transfer of records, changes in course content and sequencing, and exclusion from extracurricular activities among the issues as major stumbling blocks to retaining age-appropriate grade placement and timely graduation (Department of Defense, 2006).

Hence, that the plight of military dependent students of junior enlisted is more severe in that they are adversely effected not only by high mobility, but by the presence of less-educated or absentee parents, lower socioeconomic status, and emotional trauma (Israel, Beaulieu, & Hartless, 2001; Rumberger et al., 1999; Straits, 1987). Educating this group of students is exacerbated by the growing numbers of military dependent students with psychosocial and emotional issues that are undiagnosed or undertreated, framing their challenges in the context of both education and public health (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007).

Similar findings by many researchers concur with research indicating that high mobility negatively affects student achievement, particularly when students are from low-income, less-educated families (Israel et al., 2001; Rumberger et al., 1999; Schuler, 1990). Since economic conditions continue to contribute to student mobility, high rent, poor housing, and economic hardship adversely affect urban schools. In many inner city

schools, student turnover that is as much as 100% a year are an increasing phenomenon (Schuler, 1990).

Correlations between mobility and poor achievement in language, reading, and mathematics have been found in several studies. Tucker et al. (1998), in using the data supplied by the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) of 1988, noted that students from cohesive family units had diminished adverse effects from moving. Students from blended families or from single-family homes had more adverse effects from moving, demonstrated by poor academic achievement, lack of friends, and difficulty adjusting to school life. In their study using NHIS data, Tucker et al. (1998) reviewed the responses from interview data from 47,000 households. In 1988, NHIS included a children's response portion in which 4,499 children from birth to age 17 were interviewed. Each were asked if they were repeating a grade for academic reasons, their academic standing in class, if they were "sometimes or often" disobedient in school, if they had difficulty getting along with other students and teachers, and if they were expelled from a previous school because of behavior. A child who failed within any of the above categories was considered to have less than a satisfactory school experience. Of the 4,499 student respondents, 21.5% were so defined (Tucker et al., 1998).

Teacher-Student Relationships. Of additional concern is the lack of student-teacher relationships as a result of absence and adverse behavior. Croninger & Lee (2008) looked at the relationship of teachers and students and studied whether teachers have a direct effect on how students perform socially and academically, which ultimately affects a student's choice to stay in school. Moreover, the study addressed how the involvement of teachers in the personal matters relating to students allows the latter an

outlet for discussion and fosters a relationship that encourages school retention. Croninger and Lee (2008) found a direct relationship between 10th grade students and the degree to which they felt that teachers were a significant source of social capital. Those students with strong teacher relationships stayed in school. Teacher involvement reduced the dropout rate by half. However, teachers are less likely to invest in a child they do not know well or when they perceive that a student is disinterested or disruptive (Foster, 2008; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2004). As early as the 1960s studies reflected that teachers tend to believe that highly mobile students perform at a lower level and compare unfavorably in attitude, attendance, and ability. This perception perpetuates the problem and contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Druian, 1986).

Traditional School Structures That May Exacerbate At-Risk Behavior. Blum (2005) reported that nationwide, 40% to 60% of secondary school students feel disconnected from the schools they attend. Part of the problem, particularly for military dependent children, is that traditional schools set up barriers, which include sequencing of courses, prerequisites, and attendance measures to play sports that exacerbate students' adjustment problems, prompting at-risk behaviors (Blum, 2005; Pittman & Bowen, 1994).

Research shows that students who enjoy a sense of "connectedness" with their schools get better grades and are less likely to smoke, use drugs or alcohol, attempt suicide, join gangs, or engage in sex during their teen years (Blum, 2005). Additionally, Gay (2000) contends that in today's times, mass media play a strong role in shaping adolescent understanding of the world and are powerful sources of diversity and curriculum content. Mass media has been known to share images and attitudes that are

controversial, which need to be countered in classroom discussion. This is particularly heartfelt with military students whose parents may be engaged in wartime activity. Students tend to drop out if they feel that they cannot fit in (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004).

In the absence of a national curriculum (Halpin, 1990), military parents report that differing requirements across states have caused students to lose honors credits for courses taken at previous high schools when moving. Military students have also been turned away from the National Honor Society chapter at a new school, despite having held membership previously (Pittman & Bowen, 1994). Students have shared stories of having to retake courses or attending schools that did not offer courses in subjects that passionately interested them. As reported by Viadero (2005), one Pentagon survey found that 91% of officers and 90% of enlisted personnel with children in school had problems transferring children to new schools. The problem is more significant among junior enlisted personnel because their numbers are greater and they are often less educated and unable to assist the student academically, deploy more frequently, and lack the financial resources to send students to private schools (which have greater academic flexibility).

Experts believe that the need to help children develop a relationship with their school applies well beyond the military. It was especially timely following hurricanes Katrina and Rita when thousands of additional children who exhibited emotional stresses were separated from family, school, and entered a new community. Schools can provide emotional anchors for children who are misplaced (Blum, 2005).

At-Risk Behavior. Individually, each of the challenges faced by highly mobile students (credit deficiency, poor achievement, economic hardship, family separation,

separation from peers, multiple siblings and blended families, violence, ethnic identification and acceptance, isolation, physical and emotional distress) is a significant stumbling block to high school graduation; but together, it is believed that these challenges create the backdrop for additional at-risk behavior, which further denigrates the students‘ chances for graduation (Wishart, Taylor, & Shultz, 2006). Challenges to learning often manifest at a young age and exacerbate over time. Based on family dynamics, babies having babies, multiple relationships, single-parent homes, and constant fear and instability, the behaviors relating to high school failure are predictable (Fine, 1991).

The importance of keeping busy and engaged as a means of avoiding at-risk behavior is reflected in the statistics relating to juvenile arrest and court involvement. A first-time court appearance during high school is more detrimental for educational outcomes than a first-time arrest without a court appearance (Sweeten, 2006). Police made approximately 2.3 million juvenile arrests in 2001, but simultaneously more than 4 million 15-to-24-year-olds (roughly 15%) were high school dropouts as of October 2001. Students who are generally performing below grade level have absentee problems and are not engaged at school, extracurricular clubs, or jobs are reflected as the majority of convicted juveniles. The stigma of being an offender and the realization of a court sentence is ~~―a~~ wake-up call” because it may reflect poorly on the student‘s ability to join the military at a later date (Sweeten, 2006). All these factors point to the growing challenges of educating highly mobile students of lower socioeconomic standing, whether military or civilian.

Alternative Education Models and High Mobility

In recent years, traditional classroom environments have come under fire by political and parent groups of all types. The dropout rate for high school students, particularly in large cities, is soaring to high double digits (CNN Dobbs Report, 2007). Military dependent students in California, who as previously noted, reflect a 33% higher mobility rate than their civilian counterparts, are considered at greater risk of dropping out of school than their civilian counterparts (Department of Defense, 2001). In the absence of a national curriculum that transcends local control and traditional school calendars, one approach to protecting academic credits, involving parents, and completing coursework may be in revisiting alternative educational models including independent study and homeschool programs (Cohen, 2000).

Since inception, alternative educational programs have meant different things to different people. Raywid (1994) notes the variety of definitions surrounding alternative schools. She provides the most recent summary of the three different categories: Type I, Type II, and Type III.

Type I alternatives are schools of choice that sometimes resemble magnet schools and are likely to reflect programmatic themes. Type II alternative schools focus on behavior modification and reflect programs to which students are sentenced—usually as one last chance before expulsion. Type III programs are designed for students who are presumed to need remediation or rehabilitation, whether the need is academic, social, or emotional. The assumption is that after successful treatment students can return to mainstream programs. Most recently, Raywid (1994) suggests that new Type III

alternative schools are ―mixed" and offer a combination of services for all students, including those who wish to advance.

Testing Raywid's theory, Lange (1998) studied Area Learning Centers in Minnesota. Program characteristics, educational issues, curriculum, and student progress were investigated. Lange surveyed the directors of the programs (n=134) as well as the teachers (n=195). The study reflected positive findings regarding educational advancement, emotional and social support, and individual flexibility. The characteristics described by the respondents suggest an environment conducive to meeting the needs of at-risk students. Raywid's (1994) theories and Lange's study (1998) expanded the dialogue around alternative programs on the national level.

An additional study in Texas conducted by Franklin, Streeter, Kim, and Tripodi (2007) reflected a comparison between solution-focused public alternative schools and traditional high schools. This study evaluated 85 students from two educational models by examining credits earned, attendance, and graduation rates. Follow-up data on postsecondary education decisions was also obtained. More than half of the students from the alternative program entered a postsecondary education program and completed credits. The comparison group had higher attendance rates. Franklin et al. (2007) concluded that the solution-focused alternative program appears to show promise as an intervention for reducing dropout rates for at-risk students, as well as creating an interest in pursuing postsecondary education.

Additionally, a pilot study by Schjolberg (2007) reflected the educational advancements made by 12 military dependent students in an independent study program in southern California. Students were surveyed and queried about their attitudes

regarding school and family stressors. Students reflected a high mobility rate (as much as 18 moves in 18 years), blended and stressful family dynamics, and low academic achievement. After six months, students‘ grade point averages, rate of course closure, grade advancement, and graduation all improved as a result of active intervention for both academic and psychosocial challenges. None of the students dropped out of high school.

Independent Study. Independent study programs have several forms: homeschool only, home study with classroom intermittent attendance, daily interactive ―classroom" activity via the Internet, or full-time/partial daily classroom instruction (Ray, 1997). Courses may be undertaken out of sequence, a limited number of courses may be taken at a single time, and the first day of school and/or semester is actually the first day that the student arrives. Academic pacing is at the student‘s request. Consequently, a student entering school in November, who would otherwise be two months behind in a traditional classroom setting, is actually starting as though the term has just begun (Lange, 1998; Ray, 1997; Zehr, 2005).

Combination homeschool/limited classroom study is the model most frequently employed in the independent programs (Zehr, 2005). According to Zehr (2005), in this model students can work at home at their own pace using the curriculum-based standards and textbooks of the traditional school. Students come to storefront classrooms on a scheduled basis, usually in two-hour blocks, and meet with teachers who review work, provide feedback, and offer additional assignments and personal one-on-one attention. The underpinning of emotional support, personal attention, and core curriculum instruction allows the student to thrive in a nonthreatening environment and at the

student‘s own instructional pace (Finnigan, 2004; Lange, 1998). Schools offer flexible schedules (including Saturdays), allowing students and parents to work and still participate in educational activities. Contrary to popular belief, rather than move more slowly, students actually complete coursework with greater speed, simultaneously taking one or two courses and using a block scheduling system similar to a university model (Zehr, 2005). Comprehension and test scores often compare favorably.

Complementary to Family Lifestyle and Community Schools. The independent school option seems to work well with employed parents who ask older children to babysit younger siblings. Moreover, the storefront independent study program often maintains a relationship with neighborhood traditional public schools (Zehr, 2005). Because of the personal attention and flexible schedules, guidance counselors in traditional schools recommend students attend independent study to help them either improve academically or focus on vocational programs, with the intent of getting the student back on track for traditional graduation. Many neighborhood schools have relationships with independent programs that allow students to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs to augment personal instruction with group activity (Foley & Pang, 2006). Rather than feeling alienated or misplaced in a traditional environment, students see their military neighbors and friends at the local storefront school and are able to participate in community and school activities (Military Child Education Coalition, 2004).

Consistent Academic and Credentialing Requirements. Publicly funded storefront independent schools in southern California are available without cost to the student. Requirements for high school graduation are state mandated. Honors courses, remedial

courses, and general education courses are often available, and all teachers are required to be credentialed to the same standards as traditional public school teachers. Exit examinations, course examinations, and special accommodations for students are also held to the same standard (Finnigan, 2006). Students who move from state to state are able to continue their education and reaffiliate with either a traditional high school or an independent school in their new environment because independent study programs are aware of the requirements to ensure that course sequence and curriculum transitions are easily met. The speed with which a student completes work is customized to meet individual needs (Finnigan, 2004).

All students, regardless of circumstances, seem to be attracted to the perception of relationship building, individual attention, and emotional support that small independent learning environments provide. A bond develops between the teacher and the student. Because teachers often make home visits and actively include parents in educational decisions, instruction is personalized, individualized, and self-directed (Zehr, 2005). Teachers take a holistic approach in recognition of the students‘ needs. Consequently, students often form a parental relationship with a single teacher who assists in developing the resiliency and life skills necessary to complete high school and navigate to a productive future (Pajares, 1996; Zehr, 2005).

Homeschool. In 1997, a study of 5,402 homeschool students from 1,657 families was released, which reflected that, on average, homeschoolers out-performed their counterparts in the public schools by 30 to 37 percentile points in all subjects. This was true regardless of age or race (Ray, 1997). In grades K-12, both White students and students of color scored, on average, in the 87th percentile. In math, Whites scored in the

82nd percentile and minorities scored in the 77th percentile. By contrast, in public school, Whites scored at the 58th percentile and minorities in the 29th percentile. The difference was cited as threefold: the lack of friction between students (drama) in the school environment, personalized attention, and strong parental involvement (Ray, 1997; Foster, 2008). The fear of undereducated parents unable to adequately support their children's education in a home environment does not appear to have merit based on the national testing statistics, particularly in the primary grades (Ray, 1997; Zehr, 2005). In recent years, home study has been expanded to include online computer-based high school courses (virtual learning). The student rarely attends a public forum and assignments are monitored via the Internet (Lange, 1998). This study is relevant to military students because independent study programs promote course continuation regardless of location. School is year-round and students are free to start and stop courses at any time as long as the course meets the requirements for high school graduation. Military dependents who follow parents to various states are able to complete coursework via the Internet to ensure credit capture. This phenomenon allows students to move with their families and transfer completed credits to a traditional school, should they decide to return to that environment (Walter, 2004).

In summary, scholarly researchers agree that geographic, psychosocial, and economic stability are the ideal underpinnings of a well-adjusted child who performs academically and fits in socially. In the absence of stability, alternative educational models will be researched to determine if they mitigate the challenges faced by at-risk high school students. The next chapter focuses on the methods that will be utilized to compare and contrast traditional high school independent study programs and

freestanding independent study programs as they relate to military dependents in southern California.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact independent study programs have on the success of at-risk military dependent students in terms of both academic and psychosocial phenomena from the students‘ perspective. Hence, this was a student voice study. To determine if independent study programs bring value to the at-risk population, the study compared the academic outcomes from Academic Acceleration and Recovery Center (AARC) programs at traditional high schools, a virtual high school, and an independent study program using a qualitative comparative case method within the single case embedded design (Yin, 2009).

Although military dependent students move more frequently than civilian students and have the additional burden of psychosocial trauma as a result of having parents in harm‘s way (Astor, 2010; Department of Defense, 2007; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Government Accounting Office, 2005; Military Child Coalition, 2004), outcomes of this study can also be applied to other at-risk high school populations, such that increased availability of independent study venues might provide greater flexibility and opportunities for success.

Research questions were explored from student self-perception:

1. What is the student self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent high school student?
2. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military dependent high school students?
3. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent high school students?

4. In what ways are the free standing public independent study programs similar or different from traditional comprehensive high school independent study programs?
5. In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

Research Design Overview

Yin (1984) defined the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. Case study research excels at bringing an understanding of complex issues by emphasizing detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships.

An important consideration to ensure literal replication is the development of a rich theoretical framework that states the conditions under which the particular phenomenon is expected to be found (Yin, 2009). The use of the literal replication design was reflected in the repetitive use of the interview questions, review of transcripts, and quick-writes across all four independent study sites and directed to military dependent students of the same grades and ages. Review of the military culture, family life, academic expectations, and related psychosocial stressors was discussed with each student at each of the sites. After review of the data, due to the commonality of the responses, it was clear that the most effective way of reporting the data was the comparative case method. In this model, multiple units of analysis (Schools A, B, C, D) were embedded within a single case (military students) expecting similar findings. In support of this methodology, common categories were created as a result of content

analysis, interviews and observations, and the conceptualization of the data as similar clusters across students and schools. Categories were meaningful both internally, in relation to the data understood within context, and externally, in relation to the data understood through comparison (Dey, 1993; Yin, 1984).

To further study alternative education models and their impact on the psychosocial and academic success of students, theoretical frameworks were selected to reflect the nuances of military life and their impact on student success. The theoretical frameworks relating to social capital theory, social cultural theory, and social learning theory provided the cultural lens by which to understand military lifestyles. Modeling and observing behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others (Bandura, 1977); developing purposeful relationships (Coleman, 1988); community participation in helping students ―make meaning" (Vygotsky, 1978); and the progression for antisocial behavior as discussed by Patterson et al. (1989) offered explanation as to why independent study programs may improve the academic success to at-risk military dependent high school students.

Within those theoretical frameworks, a phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1900) in the context of multiple case studies was undertaken. A phenomenological approach was appropriate because it is most often used to describe one or more individual's experiences around a particular issue or behavior. The key element in phenomenology is that the researcher attempts to understand how people experience a phenomenon from the person's own perspective. The goal was to enter the world of the students to better understand their perspectives and experiences so that we learn how to best affect positive change and improve high school graduation rates. Like

phenomenology, case study employs a rich description of the common characteristics of experiences. Qualitative methods were used, including interviews, document review, quick-writes, and observations. The primary data collection method focused on in-depth interviews in which significant statements and determining meaning from those statements were identified. Holistic descriptions across all sites, looking for commonality, and discussion of themes and implications were also present (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This approach remains consistent with the steps involved in empirical phenomenological studies as outlined by von Eckartsberg (1986), which focused on emphasizing the study of configuration of meaning, involving both the structure of meaning and its creation. Similarly, van Kaam (1966) operationalized empirical phenomenological research in psychology. He investigated the experience of really feeling understood by obtaining descriptions of the feelings of his research subjects. A similar undertaking is described herein.

Study Context. Four high schools in southern California with military dependent students were identified. Schools were selected based on their proximity to military housing, military installations, and available alternative educational models. The schools are located in multiethnic, multicultural, and socioeconomically diverse neighborhoods. This study occurred on the traditional high school campuses at the Academic Acceleration and Recovery Center (AARC), which offers an independent study program at each of the traditional high school sites (Schools A and B). The third site (School C) is a publicly funded charter school, which is a freestanding independent study program designated as an Alternative School Accountability Model (ASAM) located near military communities in southern California. School C‘s instructional design focuses on

motivating students who are academically at risk to reengage with school. The fourth site (School D) is a "virtual" online high school where students remediate or accelerate as needed. School D is part of a publicly funded unified school district. Two schools expressed uneasiness regarding actual military student enrollment, thinking that it is most likely higher than reported because students and parents may not self-identify.

School A, close to a military base, expects the military population in the southern California area to continue to experience growth due to force structure changes. School A is located in a multiethnic, multicultural community adjacent to a military base. Students in the AARC program typically enter in 11th grade after demonstrating their inability to thrive in a traditional setting. The AARC program is housed on a traditional high school campus in a separate building. In addition to classrooms, students have access to a lounge where they are able to meet with a career counselor dedicated solely to their needs, a community liaison, teachers, and a program director who is also a guidance counselor and a teacher by training. They also use the lounge as a place to gather and chat about issues of personal concern. The atmosphere is welcoming, familiar, professional, and open. Teachers and administrators know the students by name, ask about family as well as academics, and engage in open discussion about character, family life, academic success, future plans, and general well-being. There are numerous computers in the classrooms. Classrooms are traditionally appointed and students attend classes in a block schedule. Students have appointment times, and classes are offered that accommodate extended hours. The program also allows students to participate in extracurricular activities, attend "traditional" classes on campus, and interact with the other students on campus. Students describe the environment as a "family" within a

larger context. As reflected in the narratives, the satisfaction rate among students and teachers was very high.

School B is an AARC program within a traditional campus inside a suburban middle-class neighborhood. The school appears to be "newer" than School A. Classes are offered in a separate building from the main campus classrooms. The AARC program is also on a block schedule, and students can participate in both "traditional classes" and extracurricular activities. School B has a traditional classroom environment (rows of desks with computers) but does not have a student lounge or an onsite career counselor other than the director of the program, who is a guidance counselor and former teacher by training. The atmosphere is cordial, professional, and more formal than School A. With few exceptions, students attend classes as of the 11th grade once failure on the traditional campus is identified. Both School A and School B issue standard high school diplomas with no differentiation between traditional students and independent study students. Students are able to participate in sports and take regular courses on campus while in the alternative program. In contrast to traditional high school, which houses thousands of students, AARC programs in Schools A and B have no more than 200 students, each with their own appointment times, allowing for personal attention.

School C is a charter school that is a freestanding publicly funded independent study program in a community with a large number of military families. School C offers the same UC a-g standards-based education as the other programs. Although students are accepted as of 7th grade, the focus of this study is on high school. Unlike Schools A and B there is no requirement to demonstrate academic failure when applying. Parents and students self-select this program and neighborhood middle and high schools routinely

refer students. The learning center is located in a strip mall and resembles a library with one very large room. There are five teachers and five teaching assistants to support individual student achievement. Tables are both rectangular and circular. The site is lined with computers and a printer, scanner, and copier for students to use to aid in the completion of assignments. Further supplementation includes workshops on core subjects and individual tutoring on site. The environment is respectful, engaging, professional, and less formal that Schools A and B. Teachers routinely engage parents and students to ask about family, academics, health, and future goals and interests. Students are all addressed by name. Home visits and telephone calls are daily and commonplace. Career counseling is available on site. Personal counseling routinely occurs on site with the more significant challenges referred as appropriate. The site has no more than 200 student enrollees, each with their own appointment times. The school is open from 0700 to 1700 daily. A unique feature is that the day the child starts is the first day of their semester, so students are self-paced.

School D is a freestanding, online, ―virtual" high school located in a prefabricated building that is organizationally but not physically attached to a unified school district. Courses are UC a-g approved. Students at this school work from home, log in, and post their assignments. Teachers review their work online. Students meet in person with their teachers on an as-needed basis with a minimum monthly requirement. A unique feature of an online school is that it is open 24/7. Students can post their work at any time subject to academic deadlines. Students may also take classes at their neighborhood high school simultaneously and can choose to graduate from the online ―virtual" high school or ―walk" and graduate with their home school within the unified school district. The

principal of this school is a former military wife of two decades and is very familiar with the military lifestyle. Although students at the "virtual" site did not participate, teachers were delighted to share their perceptions, which will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Population. Table 3.1 reflects the research study design. Research was conducted in four phases and included both teachers and military dependent students in a publicly funded freestanding (charter) independent study learning center and two independent study programs within two publicly funded traditional comprehensive high schools and a virtual high school. Program administrators at each of the two traditional high schools and the virtual high school identified the independent study teachers at their schools. Independent study teachers identified the military students. Teachers at the freestanding school identified students. Only those students who wished to volunteer were asked to participate in the quick-write. Quick-write respondents were also interviewed. Teachers of the participating independent study students were interviewed. Students were in grades 9 through 12.

Instrumentation and Materials

Consent Forms. Appendixes A, B, H, and I represent the body of consent forms to be completed by students and/or parents prior to the commencement of the study. Appendix 1 is designed for adult students (18 years or older), Appendix 2 is designed for the parent or legal guardian of a minor student (13-17 years old), Appendix 8 is designed for minor students (13-17 years old), and Appendix 9 is designed as an audio recording release consent form so that the data can be recorded and used in a research article, study, or other public forum. Appendix 3 is a consent form that school officials and teachers

will be asked to complete to allow for teacher interviews and sharing of student transcripts. All consent forms have been extrapolated from and approved by the University of California, San Diego, Internal Review Board on Human Subjects.

Introduction to Study. Appendix 4 outlines a brief overview of the study talking points that teachers shared with the military dependent students so that the students were aware of the study and the value of their input.

Student Quick-Writes. Appendix 6 reflects the short essay questions that were asked of the military dependent students. Only those students who signed consent forms were asked to write the brief essays on school life, family dynamics, and teacher-student relationships. The quick-writes were designed to be short and reflective of the students' immediate thoughts. Moreover, quick-writes focus on the students' peak experiences in both traditional and independent study environments. Students identified an emotionally positive and/or academically positive activity within the learning context (Kvale, 2006). The essays will be used to probe students during the personal interviews. Quick-write questions included:

> Please share a time in Independent Study that you felt really good about your accomplishments. What did you do? Explain how it is different or the same as a positive experience you had in a traditional high school.
>
> AND
>
> What are the advantages of attending independent study? What are the disadvantages? Are they different or the same as your experience in traditional high school? Why?
>
> AND
>
> Please describe your relationship to your current teacher. How does it compare to your relationships with teachers in other settings? Does

independent study work better for your learning/lifestyle? Why or why not?

Student Interviews. Appendix 7 contains 19 questions that relate to the students' lives at home, work, and school. The questions were designed to allow students to elaborate on their strengths and challenges and share academic successes. The interview questions were previously used as a survey document as part of a pilot study in which military dependent students were queried about their academic and lifestyle choices (Schjolberg, 2007).

Composite Stories. The researcher stepped into the lives of at-risk military dependents and provided six sample and somewhat typical vignettes, which reflect the daily stressors and pressures that enlisted military families face. These stories have been shared with the researcher by high school students and reflect the psychosocial, physical, and academic challenges that impede high school graduation. These stories are just a few among many that present daily in classrooms around the country.

Transcript Review. Student participants shared transcript information, both pre- and post-independent study. The purpose of the review was to identify improvements/degradation of grades, course completion rate, and/or tracking for timely high school graduation. Appendix C is a consent form that school officials and teachers were asked to complete so that transcripts may be shared.

Teacher Interviews. Appendix E contains 10 questions directed specifically at independent study teachers to determine the extent to which they are aware of their students' academic and psychosocial dynamics and personal plans. These questions were

previously included as a survey document as part of a pilot study (Schjolberg, 2007). The skills and constructs covered by the interviews reflected:

1. Support of student learning (academic grades)
2. Student self-efficacy development (belief in future successes)
3. Student on track for graduation and post high school plan
4. Minimized at-risk behavior
5. Teacher-student relationships and mentorship
6. Improvement in student-family relationship

Data Collection Plan

Research was conducted in four phases and follows a specific flow of events.

Table 3.1 Research Study Process Replicated at Four Sites.

Phase 1 Identification	Phase 2 Principals	Phase 3 Teachers	Phase 4 Students
a. Identify up to 4 programs with high military populations who are willing participants	**a.** Call to meet with principals/staff **b**. Explain study; set meeting with teachers/staff	**a.** Meet with teachers explain study **b.** Teachers administer permission slips **c.** Complete teacher/staff interviews **d.** Teachers administer quick-writes to students **e.** Teachers share transcripts	**a.** Meet with military students **b.** Conduct interviews **c.** Review transcripts **d.** Transcription of interviews looking for similar emotional/academic behaviors **e.** Review tapes, transcribe and analyze data/member check **f.** Write up findings

Phases 1 and 2. After identifying the sites, principals were contacted and an overview of the proposed research study was shared. Principals were asked to identify program administrators and teachers who work with military students and allow the researcher access to the teachers, student transcripts, and military dependent students.

Phase 3. Appointments were made to meet with the teachers, establish rapport, and explain the purpose of the study. Teachers were interviewed to garner specific details around their perceptions of students, student-family nuances, program nuances, and general knowledge of each of the programs. Additionally, teachers were asked to participate in the management of student quick-write questions, share student transcripts, and obtain signed student-parent permission slips necessary for student participation. Teachers‘ perspectives on independent study and traditional high school were integral to this study because their input helped validate the effects of individual and personal attention offered to students who are highly mobile and often fragile (Military Child Coalition 2004). Observations, transcript data, and interviews were used to compare and contrast the four programs. Teachers were asked to identify students who meet the following criteria:

1. Student is a military dependent
2. Student is currently in grades 9-12
3. Student previously attended traditional high school
4. Student is currently in an independent study program
5. Student is a willing participant and has a signed permission slip from parent or guardian

Phase 4. Students with completed consent forms were asked to participate in the quick-writes. All interviews were audiotaped to ensure accuracy. The student portion of the study consisted of student quick-writes, student self-reported demographic information, interviews, vignettes, and self-perception of academic success via transcripts both pre- and post-independent study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during the spring of 2011. The interview protocol consisted of teachers and military dependent students from high school independent study programs who were asked open questions in a conversational manner. These questions queried student family dynamics, background, educational experiences and expectations. Interview questions utilized appreciative inquiry and were replicated to ensure consistency and commonality. Students were encouraged to share additional comments, information and anecdotes. This data helped negotiate student perceptions of personal worth, belonging and academic success. It also queried attitudes about school climate, student acceptance, and enjoyment of the school experience. The cultural nuances of military life were explored, perhaps unveiling new approaches to educating this unique high school population. Participants were interviewed one by one in a private room in their school to ensure both convenience and familiarity. All dates and times were confirmed in a matter consistent with school preference.

Data Analysis and Convergence

Four high schools adjacent to military installations were selected. Once consent forms were signed and quick-writes and interviews were completed, a review of transcripts occurred. Prior to conducting interviews, participants (students and teachers)

were reminded of the purpose of the study, and given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. To ensure privacy, the researcher elected not to videotape the interviews. Students, teachers, and individual schools were not identified in the study. All data were aggregated.

Triangulation. Consistent with a strategy recommended to enhance credibility, student interviews, quick-write responses, academic transcripts (document analysis), and teacher discussions and interviews were analyzed and hand coded to ensure personal understanding of the data and to identify common themes and subthemes. This process involved repeated listening to taped interviews and multiple reviews of the transcribed notes, all of which identified emerging themes consistent with the research questions. Additionally, there was deliberate overlap and restating of key themes and subthemes throughout the research questions and quick-writes to ensure validity and clarity of the responses from the respondents. This method improved the validity, credibility, and reliability of the study

Responses were filtered through a phenomenological lens, which assisted in the coding, comparing, and contrasting emerging themes so that inclusive and common categories were uncovered. Each of the four sites was subject to constant comparison analyses with interwoven responses to each of the research questions. An analytical process based on data immersion, repeated sorting and coding reflected cross-case analysis that compared and contrasted the programs. As expected, the survey data further identified particular belief constructs that are significant and/or unique to military culture, but can also be applied to other at-risk populations. Multiple case results are the focus of the summary report (Yin, 2009).

Positionality

The researcher has spent 28 years in the Navy (Active Duty and Reserve) working with military families and has been part of the military culture now being studied. As an insider, this "emic" perspective may skew the perception and meaning of the collected data. At the same time, being an insider afforded the researcher a deeper understanding of the nuances of the military culture than an "etic/outsider" perspective may possess. Moreover, in addition to teaching in a traditional setting, the researcher has spent more than five years teaching military dependent students in an independent study environment, and three decades in public health. To maintain objectivity, the researcher did not approach students in her classroom.

Summary

The methods and data analyses techniques presented in this chapter supported the primary purpose of this study and provided clarity into the experiences and perceptions of military dependent students in publicly funded traditional high school independent study programs, a free standing publicly funded charter independent study school, and a publicly funded virtual high school. The researcher attempted to understand the underlying stressors, beliefs and perceptions of both military dependent students and their teachers. The analyses addressed the primary research questions regarding teacher support or constraint of student academic, psychosocial, and at-risk behaviors in an independent study environment. Further, the data analyses aided in assessing the value of alternative education models for at-risk military dependent high school students as a support toward high school graduation.

Interestingly, data obtained from this study provides opportunities to apply similar analyses to other psychosocially stressed and highly mobile student population to validate alternative education models as a support toward high school graduation.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Background Information

Composite Stories. To highlight the complexities associated with military life, the researcher has presented six vignettes which are composite stories shared by military dependents of enlisted personnel. These vignettes reflect what life is like for a growing number of enlisted military families, and offer a glimpse of the stressors and pressures that at-risk military dependent students face every day. The research questions presented in this study were answered by these and other military dependent students, reflecting their daily experiences.

A day in the life…

> Sally is a 16-year-old girl. She cares about fashion and boys like any other teen, but she is committed to parenting her parent and stepbrother, who is both Hispanic and White. Sally is White and Black and from a previous marriage. Her mother is White. Her biological father is Black. One of her older brothers is from another father and same mother, and is Filipino/White. Another older brother is from another mother and current stepdad and is Hispanic. Her older brothers live with other parents in other states. They are all in the military. She talks to them from time to time, but has not seen them in two years. She has lived in five different states and overseas twice. Since moving to California, life is harder. She is away from extended family in the South. Things are expensive. Her stepdad likes a clean house and food on the table when he gets home. Her mom was sick during and after her pregnancy with Sally‘s younger brother, so Sally was responsible for cooking, laundry, and cleaning the house. Her current stepdad is an Enlisted Petty Officer 2nd class (E-5). He is deployed now and seeing action. Both Sally and her mom are so depressed that they take medication. She can‘t call her stepdad and he doesn‘t call home. Sally‘s mom stays in bed all the time so Sally does the cooking, cleaning, laundry, and caring for her younger brother. Sally‘s mom has no skills, has never worked, and obtained her GED, so they take in other kids to earn money. Sally worries that her mom is getting older. She is 34. She worries about where they would live if her stepdad decides that he doesn‘t want to be married to her mother anymore, like her other dads. She worries about him dying. Where would they live? Sally doesn‘t have time to go to traditional school while her stepdad is

deployed. She completes her homework when her brother and the other children are napping. She has thought about college but feels trapped in her life. She doesn't want to complain too much because she is afraid that when she turns 18 her parents will ~~–c~~ut her loose." As Sally says, ~~–T~~hen what will happen to me?"

A day in the life…

Arthur is a 17-year-old boy. His stepdad is a seaman (E-4). Arthur proudly shares that he is one of 10 children. He has two brothers and seven sisters. Two sisters were from his mom's previous relationship, five sisters from his dad's previous relationships, and two brothers from his dad and mom. Arthur describes his family as Black; his siblings as Black/White/Hispanic. All but his two brothers with the same parents live in Alabama, Oakland, San Diego, Colorado, and Florida. Arthur was happy when his father joined the military because he described his life in Alabama as ~~–g~~hetto." There were drugs and violence everywhere in their neighborhood and his dad joined the service to escape to a better life. His father has been deployed and his mother has been very depressed. She goes to the doctor often. His mother goes out at night a lot. He is stuck watching his younger brothers but he is afraid that his mom is going to meet someone else and leave because she doesn't like military life. He is the ~~–m~~an of the house," so he works part-time during the day to help support his family. He has his friends over at night and has learned to gamble for extra money. He hopes to graduate from high school before they move to their next duty station. When he turns 18, he will join the military and start a family of his own. He hopes to marry someone who does not want more than one child.

A day in the life…

Timmy is 17 years old. The family is White. He was raised by his grandparents who were both in the military. He was adopted by his grandparents after his mother met a young man while the family was stationed in Germany. She became pregnant at 12 and then again at 14, by two different young men who refused to marry her. To ensure that her children would get full benefits, the grandparents adopted both children and legally claim them as dependents. The grandparents are about to retire after 30 years of service. Tim has been living on military bases his entire life and has lived in Europe, Asia, and several states in the United States. It was very traumatic when he was told that his parents were really his grandparents, and his older sister was really his mother. Timmy states that he never met his real father and rarely sees his mother. She now lives somewhere in San Diego, but he doesn't know where. He went into depression, and started drinking and running with the ~~–w~~rong crowd." He

started counseling every week and now has a part-time job. He failed out of traditional school because he was always drunk and was admitted for intensive counseling. Now he is working part-time and attending independent study. He hopes to go to college and become an engineer. He will use his grandfather's GI Bill to pay for school.

A day in the life…

Judy is a 17 year old girl. She is in ninth grade. She is White. Her current stepdad is Hispanic. She has five other "siblings" from her mother's previous marriages and lives with her mother, stepfather, and a physically and mentally challenged sister. The other siblings live with her biological dad and previous stepdad. She moved with her mother to help take care of her handicapped sister. Her mother has no children with her current husband, who is in the military. Her mother wants to have a baby with the current husband, an Enlisted (E-4), who is 10 years younger than she, so he will stay. Judy has tried to commit suicide twice, has been hospitalized, and has asked to leave traditional school. She cannot read well, has a very poor self-image, and no goals beyond knowing that she will be the caregiver to her sister forever. Her current stepdad is deployed. She feels like her mother treats her like a maid. Judy almost never comes to school because of medical appointments unless her mother has help from a neighbor or a visiting nurse.

A day in the life…

Candy is a Black 17-year-old girl. She is one of 18 children who are all multiple ethnicities. Both her mother and father (both in the military) have had multiple relationships outside of marriage and have children with other people. They also have been married to others and each has children with other spouses, who also have children with other spouses. They live in California, Oregon, Florida, and Arizona. Candy claims nine sets of grandparents from these arrangements. They almost never see each other but they do talk on the phone. Candy lives with her now single mother, her mother's boyfriend, two siblings from other relationships, and two siblings from the current arrangement. Her mother is a third class petty officer (E-4). Candy has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and depression, has been hospitalized and is on medication. She works at home so she can watch her younger siblings while her mother is at work. She has had many boyfriends but does not "let anyone in," and hopes to get pregnant after she marries someone in the military so he can "take care of me for a change."

A day in the life…

> Jane is a 16-year-old girl. All members of her family are White. She has one older sister who is in college and one younger sister who is in middle school. They all have the same parents who have been married a long time. Dad is in the military and is a Chief Petty Officer (E-7). Mom is a homemaker. They have lived in five different states since Jane was born. Jane's only concern is that the requirements are different from state to state and it has been tough to stay on grade level and track for graduation. Before her dad retires next year, Jane chose to come to independent study to accelerate high school and ensure that she would graduate early and be ready for college when the family moves. Her younger sister Patty will be entering high school at that time, but she will be able to stay in one high school. Dad has never been deployed in a war zone but has been gone for months at a time for training. Jane feels that the military was a very positive experience and a great family adventure, but does not want to join. Dad hopes to work for a defense contractor when he retires.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact independent study programs have on the success of at-risk military dependent students in terms of both academic and psychosocial phenomena from the students' perspectives. Hence, this is a student voice study. Four high school programs were selected in which military students participated in quick-writes, interviews, and student/teacher perception of course completion rate. Teachers and administrators were also interviewed. The study was focused on answering five research questions from the perception of both students and teachers. The five research questions were:

1. What is the student self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent student?
2. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military high school students?
3. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent high school students?

4. In what ways are freestanding public independent study programs similar or different from traditional comprehensive high school independent study programs?
5. In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

Once the study was under way and the student interviews, teacher interviews, quick-writes, and student perceptions were reviewed, coded, and categorized, it became clear that the self-perceptions of the students and the faculty across all sites were so similar, that the comparative case method (Yin, 1984) was the most effective way of reporting the data. Consequently, once similarities were obviated, a qualitative constant comparison analysis was performed within and among four sites (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009). The study employed both student voice appreciative inquiry (AI) as the underlying foundation of the interviews and the coding methodology. The study participants included 22 students, nine teachers, four administrators, and two counselors, for a total of 37 participants. Twenty-two students were interviewed and provided quick-writes; three students (all at School D) declined to be interviewed. Research questions were derived from the literature discussed in Chapter 2, while themes were developed from student perceptions. The interviews were coded using In Vivo codes and a priori codes from the literature and theoretical framework.

In Vivo coding is the use of the students‘ own words aligned with the research to determine themes and codes (Saldaña, 2009). Using In Vivo codes provided the researcher with an ongoing connection to the actual words used by the participants of this study. As the researcher coded the transcribed interviews, participants‘ exact words were frequently used to identify, clarify, and label the data that described perceptions, behaviors, challenges, expectations, and successes. The theoretical framework presented

in Chapter 3 provided a strong foundation for the experiences associated with highly mobile military dependent high school students.

Within the five research questions, several themes were identified to further clarify specific lifestyle, psychosocial, and academic similarities and/or differences among the students. Responses to the research questions were presented from both student and teacher perspectives, and are represented by interwoven responses across Schools A, B, and C. Students from School D declined to participate; however, the teachers and principal were quite vocal and eager to share their perceptions on teacher-student relationship building that would not otherwise be mentioned.

Study Context

Participants for this study were at-risk military dependent high school students, teachers, program administrators, and counselors. Table 4.1 provides the list of participants at each of the four schools.

Table 4.1 Numbers of Participants at Four Sites (n=37)

Participant	School A	School B	School C	School D
Students	3 male 4 female	2 male 1 female	6 male 6 female	0 (non-participatory)
Teachers	2 female	1 male 1 female	2 male	1 male 2 female
Guidance / Career Counselors	1 male	0	1 male	0
Prog. Adm	1 female	1 male	1 female	1 female

Students were between the ages of 15 and 19 years old. Gender was equally distributed. Of the 22 students who were interviewed, 9 percent were 15 years old, 27%

were 16, 50% were 17, 9% were 18, and four percent were 19 years old. Of the 22 students, nine percent were in 10th grade, 72% were in 11th grade, and 18% were 12th grade.

Table 4.2 Age and Grade of Student Participants (n=22)

Demographic Data						
		School A	School B	School C	School D	Total
Gender	Male	3	2	6	N/A	11
	Female	4	1	6	N/A	11
Age	15	0	0	2	N/A	2
	16	2	0	4	N/A	6
	17	5	3	3	N/A	11
	18	0	0	2	N/A	2
	19	0	0	1	N/A	1
Grade	10th	0	0	2	N/A	2
	11th	6	2	8	N/A	16
	12th	1	1	2	N/A	4
Credit Recovery		7	3	10	N/A	20
Academic Acceleration		0	0	2	N/A	2

Self-Identification of Ethnicity. Consistent with the pilot study (Schjolberg, 2007) and classroom discussion, students were reluctant to self-identify ethnicity. All the students (n=22) self-identified as ―military." When pressed further for ethnicity, the next statement was, ―What do you mean, I'm an American." Three students shared that military children are taught to be color-blind because we are ―all in this together." Only when the researcher used herself as an example, did the students reflect on their own backgrounds. Consistent with the demographics reported by the Department of Defense (2001), 14 of the 22 students identified themselves as members of multiple ethnicities. Two students identified as Black only, three of the students self-identified as White only, two students identified as Hispanic only, and one self-identified as Native American.

Moreover, with the exception of one student, all students self-identified as having multiple siblings and multiple parents/stepparents. See Table 4.3 for the details.

Table 4.3 Students' Self-Perception of Ethnicity (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent %
*Ethnicity	Military/American	22	100
	Single Ethnicity	8	36
*The ethnicity of the student is not necessarily the ethnicity of the service-member or step-parent in the existing family relationship	Black only	2	9
	White only	3	14
	Hispanic only	2	9
	Native American only	1	5
	All different Blood	14	64
	Hispanic/White	5	23
	Hispanic/White/Black	1	5
	Hispanic/Black	3	14
	Hispanic/Black/Filipino	1	5
	Hispanic/White/Filipino	1	5
	Black/White	2	9
	White/Native American	1	5
	White/Black/Puerto Rican	1	5
Gender	Female	11	50
	Male	11	50

Data were organized around both quick-writes and interviews, which focused on five research questions and the subthemes within each question as represented in Figure 4.1. This differentiation was useful in the identification of the core findings related to each research question. Students were asked to respond with their immediate impressions to three questions relating to their academic achievements, school climate, and teacher relationships. The questions were posed prior to the interviews so as not to provide the students with information that could guide their responses. Once the quick-writes were completed, each student was interviewed privately on school property to obtain greater detail regarding the significance of the quick-write responses and to learn more about the student and family circumstances that may have impacted the student's

decision to attend an independent study program in lieu of continuing in a traditional high school.

In addition to the three quick-write questions, data presented in this chapter was organized to answer the five research questions. The five research questions were initially developed to probe the many aspects of military life including the effects of mobility, academic achievement, psychosocial development, career pathways, and similarity of experiences at various schools within the students‘ experiences.

Students were engaged, very animated, and open to describing their personal experiences as military dependent high school students. The researcher asked several questions couched in appreciative inquiry to ensure quality responses that were honest reflections of their lifestyles and school experiences. Students shared stories of moving multiple times, living in exciting places, leaving other friends and family behind at the last duty station, and generally feeling a mix of excitement, sadness, and fear, which affected academic performance, psychosocial and physical health, and relationships.

After the quick-writes were completed, students were encouraged to share additional comments, information, and anecdotes during the interview process. The data obtained from the interviews helped negotiate student perceptions of personal worth, belonging, and academic success, as well as attitudes about school climate, student acceptance, and enjoyment of the school experience. Data also speak to the cultural nuances of military life by unveiling unique stressors and characteristics. Students were open about their fears, increased family responsibilities, and daily school and life stressors. Each interview was approximately 45 minutes to one hour in duration and was conducted on the grounds of the school in a private office setting. Students consistently

spoke of feeling really good about themselves, being ~~–r~~eally happy" in school, and ~~–w~~orking harder" because they felt successful and ~~–in~~ control" in independent study.

Coding, Themes, and Subthemes

Consistent with von Eckartsberg's (1986) coding methodology for phenomenological research, responses were scrutinized to reveal their meaning, clustered to emphasize the configuration of meaning, coded, and utilized to form the basis of the themes and subthemes associated with the research questions. The quick-writes, themes, subthemes, and the self-perception of students around these themes is demonstrated in Figures 4.1, 4.2, and Table 4.4, which follow.

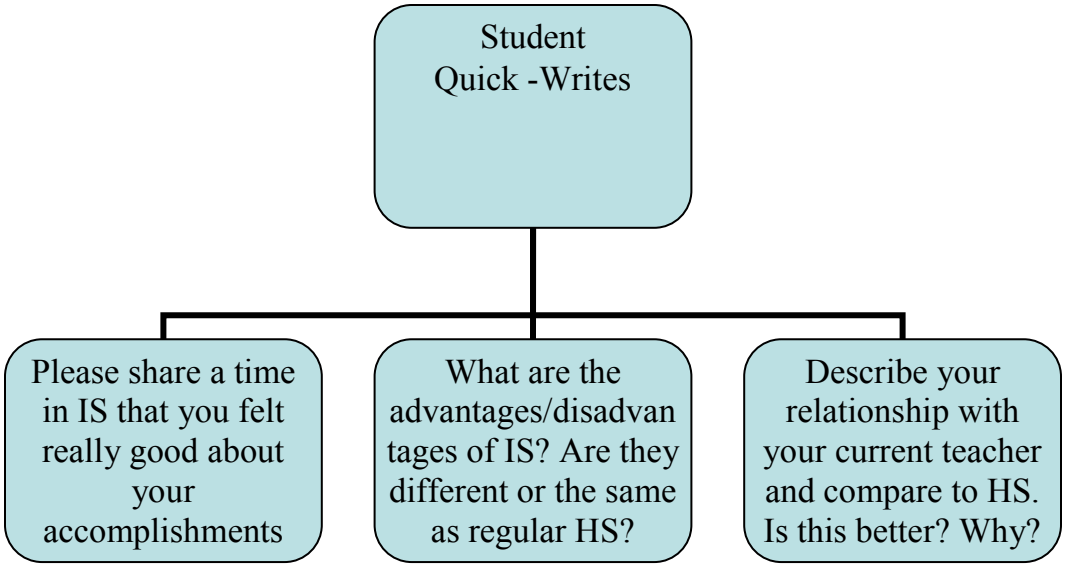

Figure 4 Summary of student quick-write topics

For clarity in the presentation, the data from the three quick-write questions have been segregated. Hence, the first section of this chapter reflects the responses from students from Schools A, B, and C as they related to the three quick-write questions. Students' were eager to share their experiences in independent study. Without exception,

students felt that they had an opportunity to learn more, complete courses in a timely manner consistent with family –military rotation" and as a result, students felt they were really doing well. Student self-perception of self-esteem was evident. Students shared how their focus had improved since participating in independent study and how as a result, they felt better about their accomplishments in independent study than when they were participating in other educational settings. Moreover, students universally applauded the concept of completing one or two courses at a time. Given what we know from previous studies (Astor 2010; Department of Defense, 2001; Department of Defense, 2007, Hefling, 2009) regarding the adverse impact of family stressors on military students, the lack of academic stress and increased motivation—reflected by course completion and satisfactory grades as a result of completing one or two courses at a time, rather than a full semester of classes—is consistent with lifestyle adjustments useful for military families.

Students felt that independent study allowed them to meet family and personal obligations as well as school commitments and still —moveforward." Student quotes reflect short descriptive literary sketches of their feelings surrounding their successes and challenges while attending high school. Students from each of the participating schools (A, B, and C) shared expressions of achievements and concerns. Also evident was the importance students placed on the relationships they developed with their teachers. Having a singular teacher, rather than many, made it easier to solidify a meaningful relationship.

Table 4.4 reflects the number and percentage of students who expressed common themes. Following Table 4.4 are sample comments made by students from each of the

participating schools. All interviews occurred between January and June 2011. Data has been aggregated to protect the identities of the participants.

Table 4.4 Quick-Write Questions—Student Focus (n=22)

Question Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent % Reported
1. Student accomplishments	work harder	22	100
	independence	22	100
	feel good	22	100
	successful	22	100
	happy	21	95
	more attention	20	91
	do well	20	91
	focused	22	100
	accomplishment	22	100
2. Independent study (IS) vs. traditional study (TS)	single focus	22	100
	no stress	22	100
	time for family	21	95
	one to one with teacher	22	100
	stay on track	18	82
	self-paced	22	100
	not held back by others	10	45
	no anxiety—IS	15	68
	high anxiety—TS	22	100
	no drama	22	100
3. School relationships	no drama	22	100
	teacher cares about me	20	91
	teacher know my name	22	100
	teacher talks to me about life	22	100
	teacher makes me feel good about my choices	22	100
	real relationship with teacher	21	95

Embedded Quick-Write Question 1

Please share a time in Independent Study that you felt really good about your accomplishments. What did you do? Explain how it is different or the same as

a positive experience you had in a traditional high school.

> When I got an ―A" on my final recently I was very happy because I received a ―D" on the one before in regular school. I really want to do well here and I feel that overall, I have been. I work independently because it is what I like to do. It's different than regular school because I pay much more attention and I am more focused. I am getting really good grades. (Student Interview)
>
> The times where I feel really accomplished is when I finish more lessons than needed. This is different from regular school because they have less work for you at one time. So, the more I do a day the better I feel about myself. This also motivates me to work harder. My teacher always talks to me and makes me feel that she cares about what I am doing. (Student Interview)
>
> There are times that I felt really good about myself is when I had completed a class in a short time with very few corrections. This felt really nice because it gave me that sense of accomplishment. I guess I could get this same feeling in a traditional high school by doing all my work and getting a good grade in the class, but it still takes six months to do a full class, and then I am moving in the middle and not getting any credit anyway, so why try. This is so much better. (Student Interview)

Embedded Quick-Write Question 2

What are the advantages of attending independent study? What are the disadvantages? Are they different or the same as your experience in traditional high school? Why?

> The advantage of being in independent study is that I am able to focus on one subject at a time. In traditional high school I had to do multiple assignments for each class every night which was stressful because I also have to watch my siblings while my mom works, clean the house, and parent them. I am able to get my work done doing one class at a time so I know that worst case, I can advance to the next grade if I have to move again. I am much more focused in independent study and since I have a one-on-one relationship with my teacher. (Student Interview)
>
> I feel better about being in independent study because I get work done and I am not held back by other students. I can work at my own pace and make sure that I complete a whole course in time to move on to the next one. I want to graduate on time and I have lots of class to catch up on. My teacher knows me and is great. He helps me when I have a question and he cares about my life plan. He keeps me on track and upbeat. (Student Interview)

> I have very bad anxiety in regular school. The drama in class is too much for me to handle. Who cares about making fun of clothes and stuff. I mean, I have real issues. What if my dad doesn't come home? In regular school there are lots of fights, and in class the teacher is always with their backs to you writing on the board while the kids are all talking. In independent study, I have everything I need. My teacher always talks to me to find out how I am feeling. I work at my own pace and can close a whole semester of a course in four to six weeks, just like college. I can pick up where I left off in school and not have to start over from the beginning in every class. When my father comes home, he will retire. Then I only have to move one more time. He promised that I could stay here until I finish high school before we move. I am working hard to make that happen and I am getting good grades. (Student Interview)
>
> The advantages of independent study are I get to work at my pace and work ahead if I want. Here, there really is no disadvantage because I get to do sports or clubs right on the school campus. Independent study gives me a lot more freedom to do my doctors' appointments or work. I have lots of appointments because I worry all the time about my family breaking up again and having to have new parents again. (Student Interview)

Embedded Quick-Write Question 3

Please describe your relationship to your current teacher. How does it compare to your relationships with teachers in other settings? Does independent study work better for your learning/lifestyle? Why or why not?

> Independent study is so much better for me. I can work and help my mom at home and get all my work done without any drama at school. I will be able to catch up on all my lost credits and graduate on time even though I am behind now. My teacher is cool. I only have one teacher so I always know what I have to do. My teacher asks about me all the time. She helps me with my personal problems and I can trust her. She ~~s~~sees" me and I am not just a number to her. I have one-on-one time and she even remembered my birthday. Here in independent study I am not just a student, I am somebody. (Student Interview)
>
> My teacher is so great. He makes me feel good about my choices. He helps me and I can go back to my desk knowing that I can do my assignments. I feel so lucky to have it. It was not available in the other places I lived. (Student Interview)

> Yes, independent study has absolutely had a positive impact on my academic career. As I stated before, my work output and quality has increased significantly. I get immediate feedback. My relationship with my teacher and teaching assistant is closer because we have a real relationship. I can go to them with questions or ask their opinions and talk out issues with them. I am a real person with feelings. (Student Interview)

Once students completed the three quick-write questions, interviews were scheduled. Based on the answers to the quick-writes, several themes developed that focused on the original research questions. These questions were then segregated, coded, and categorized. Themes focused on student perception of success in school, dealing with unique life stressors, demographics, family relationships, school relationships, future plans, and goal setting. Subthemes were developed to "drill down" into the meaning of these categories as they related to mobility, school support, family relationships, friends, teacher relationships, and traditional school/independent study experiences. The list of common themes that resulted was the basis for the hierarchy of themes and subthemes, which can be found in Figure 4.2 and Table 4.5.

To ensure that all student responses were captured and validated, several of the subthemes were replicated across the various themes. This replication was deliberate and reflected an attempt to review the data from multiple perspectives, as well as focus the issues across the four school sites.

Students across the sites represented four branches of the military. The commonality of responses across all schools was very telling. The students reflected their fears, responsibilities, strengths, and challenges—and, in doing so, further validated the need to recognize and remediate the academic and psychosocial stressors that impede adolescent learning.

As we talked, it became clear that the psychosocial stressors not only have a deleterious effect on students, but exacerbate the stressors already faced by other stateside family members as well as the service member. While students expressed concern that their family member may be injured or be killed; service members, worried about family members, in turn put their lives in greater peril due to lack of focus and concentration. As such, the psychosocial issues are family wide, and threaten the safety and readiness of the service member; the very problem students fear.

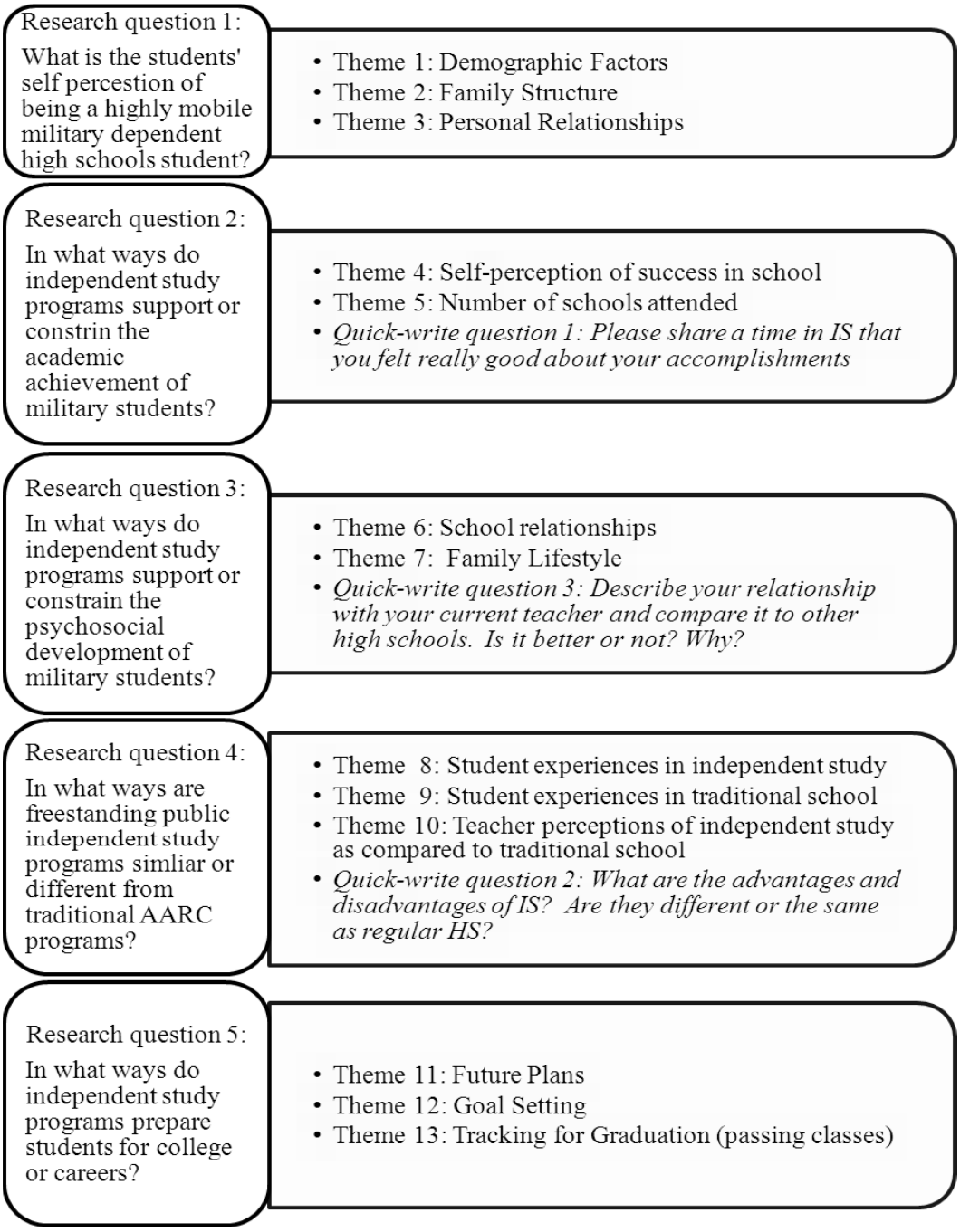

Figure 4.2 Themes related to the research questions.

Table 4.5 Hierarchy of Themes and Subthemes

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3	Research Question 4	Research Question 5
Theme 1: Demographics	**Theme 4: Success Self-Perception**	**Theme 6: School Relationships**	**Theme 8: Independent study**	**Theme 11: Future Plans**
Subthemes: - Mobility - Ethnicity - Age/grade - Gender	**Subthemes:** -Grade/perceived grade level -Teacher impact -Extracurricular scholastic support -Independent study experience	**Subthemes:** -Student to student relationships -Teacher to student relationships -Teacher impact	**Subthemes:** -Grade level/ perceived -Previous scholastic experience -Future educational plans (high school) -Traditional school experience -Teacher impact	**Subthemes:** - Future educational plans (high school) -Future educational plans (collegiate) -Career plans
Theme 2: Family Structure	**Theme 5: Schools attended**	**Theme 7: Family Lifestyle**	**Theme 9: Traditional school**	**Theme 12: Goal Setting**
Subthemes: - Family dynamics - Living arrangements - Parent deployment - Number of siblings	**Subthemes:** -Mobility - Number of schools attended - Previous scholastic experience -Traditional school experience	**Subthemes:** - Family dynamics -Work -Care giving responsibilities -Parent deployment -Extracurricular scholastic support -Mobility	**Subthemes:** -Number of schools attended - Previous scholastic experience -Teacher impact	**Subthemes:** -Teacher impact -Student input (improving personalized education)
Theme 3: Personal Relationships	***Quick-write 1: Student accomplishments***	***Quick-write 3: School relationships***	**Theme 10: Teacher Perceptions**	**Theme 13: Graduation**
Subthemes: - Friends -Sustained relationships -Mobility			**Subthemes:** -Student success - Teacher impact	**Subthemes:** Passing Classes Timely Tracking
			Quick-write 2: Independent study vs. traditional schooling	

Table 4.6 reflects the number of students and the percentage of the whole who shared common themes regarding self-perception related to demographics, family structure, and personal relationships. Note that the vast majority of students self-identified as having multiple siblings, multiple parents, and multiple ethnicities. They

moved more than five times since middle school, and lived with grandparents. Many students spoke of broken friendships, separation from family, and not feeling ~~–n~~ormal."

Table 4.6 Research Question 1: Student Self-Perception as a Highly Mobile Military Dependent (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent %
1. Demographics /Ethnicity	Military/American	22	100
	Single Ethnicity	8	36
	All different Blood	14	64
Mobility	More than 5 moves	20	91
Age	15 years old	2	9
	16 years old	6	27
	17 years old	11	50
	18 years old	2	9
	19 years old	1	5
Grade	10th grade	2	9
	11th grade	16	72
	12th grade	3	14
	fifth year senior	1	5
Gender	female	11	50
	male	11	50
2. Family Structure	different parents	20	91
	lived with grandparents	20	91
	*step-siblings/half-siblings	20	91
	fear of death/injury of deployed	21	95
	more than 5 moves	20	91
3. Personal Relationships	it stinks	22	100
	it‘s hard	21	95
	pulled from friends	20	91
	always moving	20	91
	different requirements	20	91
	lose friends	19	86
	fear of death of deployed	22	100
	fear of injury of deployed	20	91
	~~–n~~owhere to live"	15	68
	worrying all the time	20	91
	no close attachments	16	73

Research Question 1

What is the students' self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent high school student?

> It stinks because I am always moving away from my friends and having to make new friends. You get to really know someone and then you both have to move different places. Your Dad is always gone and you think about whether he is going to die all the time. (Student Interview).
>
> Being a high school student from a military family is difficult. Every state has different educational programs which has caused me to be behind of everyone else. I can't keep a boyfriend because we are never in the same place long enough. Moving has affected my relationships with people greatly. After moving, contact with friends is limited and it is hard to keep up with everyone. We live in housing. What would happen to us if my dad dies? Where would we go and how would we live? Our family would be destroyed. (Student Interview)
>
> It is hard when my dad deploys, then it's hard having one less parent and always worrying that he won't come home and something horrible will happen to him. Being a military family and moving constantly is hard because you grow close to friends and saying good-bye is hard because there is nothing you can do about it. (Student Interview)
>
> I've lived all over the world, but no place is really home, unless you count where my grandma lives. I visit with my real dad when I can, but mostly, when I am not with my step-dad and mom, I am living with my grandma in a totally different place than my sisters and brothers. We all have a different mom and different grandma, but we are sort of still a family. (Student Interview)
>
> I have lived in 8 places in Asia, Europe and several states in the U.S. I had to breakup with a girl because of the move. I never did take her to a dance because she moved away. I also moved with my grandparents while my dad relocated, my sister moved with my Aunt but we met up after a year when we were off to another location. (Student Interview)
>
> I don't feel normal in the States. My dad is always gone. It's like we have a broken home since my mom is remarried and my stepdad is always gone too. I don't like my step-mom so I lived with my grandma for a while, then my Auntie. Overseas, we were still all together with only military kids in school so we had the same problems and issues. Here kids care about stupid kid stuff. I worry about family members being killed and leaving me to raise kids, when I am still a kid myself. I have way

> more responsibilities than civilian kids and we have nothing in common. (Student Interview)
>
> Moving has affected my relationships a lot with friends and family. For example, while I was living overseas I met someone and we got pretty close. Then we both moved and we do talk on the computer but it's not the same as hanging out like we used to. I miss my family too. My siblings are everywhere and my grandparents are somewhere else. My parents are always separated. It's hard but living in Europe was so fun, so I guess it is worth being behind in school. I should be in 12th grade but I am only in 11th grade. (Student Interview)
>
> In April of next year my family might be moving to Hawaii but I am not going to go. I am sick of moving. I want to finish school and live a normal life in one place. Since I will be 18, my parents can't make me move. Maybe I will stay in San Diego and live with friends. (Student Interview)
>
> I joined the Young Marines when I was seven because I wanted my grandfather to be proud. I want a better life for myself. When I get out of high school, I want into the Marines like my family. I lived in Hawaii with my grandparents before I came here. I don't know my dad, he just moved on after my mom got pregnant. She comes around to check on my brother and me but my grandpa takes care of us. He is a Marine. He has a sense of pride and duty and honor. I want that in my life. (Student Interview)

Table 4.7 reflects the common student perceptions, reported in actual number and percentage of the whole, who responded the constraint and/or support for academic achievement in an independent study environment. Note that overwhelmingly, students felt that they should be one grade higher, had failed classes in traditional school, felt recognized by IS teachers, and reported that they were happier in independent study than they were previously. Students expressed feeling more comfortable with other students in independent study and less stressed. Students also indicated that they felt a sense of control over their own successes and academic choices. Following Table 4.7 are personal quotes reflecting the attitudes of students from all participating schools.

Table 4.7 Research Question 2: Independent Study (IS) as a Constraint or Support for Academic Achievement (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent Reported
1. Student self-perception of success	different requirements in school	22	100
	should be one grade up	20	91
	should be a senior	3	13
	second year senior	1	4
	failed classes in traditional school	20	91
	teacher in IS knows me	22	100
	teacher in IS cares about me	22	100
	teacher helps me learn	21	95
	IS helps me stay calm	19	86
	learn more and focus	22	100
	happier in IS	22	100
	in ROTC	1	4
	play sports	3	13
2. Schools attended	more than 5 moves	20	91
	lived overseas	18	82
	lived in other states	20	91
	lived with non-parents	20	91
	failed/ didn‘t finish courses in traditional school	19	86
	want to accelerate classes	5	22
	drama in traditional school	2	9
	didn‘t ―fit in” in traditional school	20	91
	less than 5 schools	2	9
	more than 5 schools	12	54
	more than 8 schools	15	68
	feel invisible in traditional school	18	82
	lost credits in traditional school	21	95
	drama in traditional school	22	100
	teacher didn‘t know me in traditional school	18	82

Research Question 2

In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military dependent high school students?

> I really liked being in a [Department of Defense] school overseas because we were all the same and understood each other. I don‘t like regular high school. The kids are shallow. The schoolwork is different in every place

and the teachers don‘t really get to know you or care about your success. No one would know if I didn‘t show up. I think independent study works best for me. Independent study helps me catch up because I can work at my own pace. I can go faster or slower and ask for help and the teacher knows me by name, so I do better. I have attended 10 different schools in lots of different places. I am making up for lost credits from moving around and my teacher is helping me check out colleges and jobs and I can still play high school sports if I want to. It‘s really cool. (Student Interview)

It‘s easier for me to feel successful, like I am smart, because I take one or two courses at a time. I can focus on the homework and I deal with one teacher who I can talk to when I need help. Also, I feel like I am catching up, so if we move again, I mean I have already been to lots of schools, I will be OK. (Student Interview)

The advantage to me is that I don‘t have to get stressed out because I know that I can get personal help and no one will laugh at my questions. That makes me feel really good because I would get frustrated with all the homework in regular school. This school lets me focus and close one course at a time on my own timetable. It‘s like being in college. I feel grown up. (Student Interview)

I should really be in college by now but I was kicked out of high school in Texas because I kept cutting class. Who wants to go if you feel unappreciated? I was hanging with the wrong crowd. I have been to 10 schools before coming here. I had to move to San Diego to live with my mother and stepdad after my dad died. Now that I am over 18 I have to be on my own, but I want to go to college but my parents are making plans without me so I guess I will join the Service so I have money and a place to live while I go to college. (Student Interview)

Student Self-Perception of Academic Success

I failed a lot of classes before. I never came to school or I was afraid to ask questions. Now I am catching up and passing everything. I might have a real shot at college. (Student Interview)

My grades are improving. I am setting an example for the younger kids. I don‘t want them to feel like losers. I am going to graduate and make them all proud. (Student Interview)

> I get a lot more done. I am more focused. I am passing every class and I am going to do something with my life. Now, I believe I can. (Student Interview)
>
> I am going to graduate on time. I am going to community college, then I am going to transfer to a four-year school and be a doctor or nurse. I am going to use my Dad‘s GI Bill. I am going to be someone. Before, I was nothing. I didn‘t believe in myself, but my grades are good and my teacher and parents get along, too. (Student Interview)

Table 4.8 focuses on the mental and emotional well-being of students and their perceptions surrounding acceptance, family, and school relationships. Interestingly, students connected their academic achievement with self-acceptance, personal well-being, and acceptance by others. School peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, and the importance of personal acknowledgement and caring were all cited as being important to the students. Additionally, each student (100%) reflected that the teacher showed a sense of ―earing‖ and that the traditional school environment was too big to feel comfortable or recognized. Overwhelmingly, students felt that they had been party to ―drama‖ in traditional school, and felt that they did not fit in.

Moreover, 95% of the students indicated that they think about parent injury or death daily. Although the researcher did not directly ask about the use of illegal drugs, illegal behaviors, or illegal use of alcohol, 77% of students reported the regular use of at-risk behaviors (sex, drugs, alcohol, and smoking) to ease fear and family tension. These behaviors are not only dangerous to the health of the student, but also create a public health issue associated with their effects on other family and community members. The percent of military dependent adolescents who engage in these behaviors is reflected in Table 4.8, which shares the details of the students‘ self-perception of their psychosocial needs.

Table 4.8 Research Question 3: Independent Study as a Constraint or Support of Psychosocial Development (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent Reported
1. School relationships	drama in traditional school	22	100
	petty thinking students	18	82
	don't ~~–fi~~t in"	20	91
	teacher knows me in IS	22	100
	teacher cares about how I feeling IS	22	100
	teacher cares if I pass in IS	22	100
	I can call day or night IS	20	91
	traditional school is too big	22	100
2. Family Lifestyle	going to school and working	3	13
	caregiver to family members	15	68
	parent deployment	20	91
	extracurricular scholastic support	10	45
	highly mobile	18	82
	worry about death/injury of deployed	21	95
	visit the doctor regularly/self/parent	10	45
	regular at-risk behavior to self-soothe (sex, drugs, alcohol, smoking)	17	77

In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent students?

> I have lived in four places all over the country since starting high school. I finally found a school that helps me learn and keep pace with grades. I have lots of time off to help my mom so we are getting along better. We talk now about what I want to do with my life. My teacher has helped me map out a plan because I am getting close to graduating next year (finally). I am so much happier that my mom says I am nicer and I feel calm. (Student Interview)

> I think I have grown up. I can do this! I know that my teacher won't let me fail. We talk about life and stuff. I have a part-time job now and that helps me feel good about myself because I can help my mom but also because my boss says I am a great worker. I feel like I have a future. (Student Interview)

> I told my friends about how cool independent study is. They say I am not as intense or angry anymore. I guess I can see where I am going. I am

> going to graduate and my parents are proud of me and that makes me feel good. (Student Interview)
>
> My mom says I am a nicer person now. My brother even comes to school here and we get along better, do our work, but have quiet time, too. There is no more drama in our life. I write my dad and he is happy and relaxed because I like school. (Student Interview)
>
> My mom says the school is better because they talk to her and she knows what I am doing so we get along better. I feel like I am going to make it and not get lost in the high school crowd. (Student Interview)
>
> My teacher checks on us and really tries to work with us so I am happy. The teacher is flexible with my hours so I can help with my five siblings, but I still get my work done. I feel good about getting good grades and I know I can see a real future. It‘s really cool and I feel really good about having choices. I don‘t feel stuck in a life I don‘t want. (Student Interview)

Table 4.9 reflects the students‘ perception of comparison between traditional programs and freestanding programs. Note that the majority of the students in the traditional AARC program failed courses before school guidance counselors urged them to consider independent study. By contrast, students who attended freestanding independent study, self-selected independent study–based family needs, family recommendation, and/or referral from guidance counselors or friends. Students in Schools A and B discussed their inclusion in campus activities even while attending AARC programs. School C is an academic program without campus activities. Students considered this environment a trade-off to campus life, but expressed that they missed activities, especially as a senior.

Table 4.9 Research Question 4: Independent Study in Comparison to Traditional AARC Programs (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent % Reported
1. Independent Study (IS)	pacing to catch up	20	91
	work faster independently	21	95
	one course at a time	22	100
	graduate on time	18	82
	graduate within 6 months	2	9
	graduate earlier	2	9
	happier	22	100
	focused	21	95
	teacher helpful	21	95
	teacher tutors me	22	100
2. Traditional School (TS) AARC programs	More time to work in free standing IS	21	95
	Can play sports/band, etc. at TS ARC	18	82
	Can see friends	2	9
	Campus is really big	12	54
	Drama on campus	15	68
	TS School waited for me to fail before offering IS option	18	82
3. Teacher Perceptions	*See Section on Teacher Perceptions*		

Students from both freestanding programs and programs that are housed on traditional campuses were interviewed. The students were not told about the other choices, but rather discussed the positive and negative aspects of selecting their program.

Research Question 4

In what ways are freestanding public independent study programs similar or different from traditional comprehensive high school independent study programs?

> I like independent study because I think it helps me get through my courses and catch up with my schoolwork, but I miss a real social life. I wish there were dances and sports and clubs. My school is just about schoolwork. (Student Interview)

> I know we can do sports at the neighborhood high school, but they really don‘t want us there so I miss out a lot. But my grades are good so I guess it‘s a trade-off. (Student Interview)
>
> There‘s no real campus. I just walk in and sit down. (Student Interview)
>
> I like being on independent study. I also take courses on the main campus so I see my friends and we can have lunch together. I play sports, too, so it is the best for me. (Student Interview)
>
> Independent study works for me for some courses that I am having trouble with. I also take courses on the main campus so I have both things going. I am in ROTC also on the main campus. I can go to dances and I will have the same diploma as my friends. I think it is all good. I wish they had these schools in other states. (Student Interview)
>
> I like going to my school. It looks like a library and everyone is friendly. I play ball at the high school, too, so I see my friends. I like it a lot and I am happy. (Student Interview)
>
> My friends go to regular classes. I have some so I do both. We come to school together but I don‘t have the drama if I don‘t want it. My grades are good and my teacher helps me in independent study. I feel good about myself. (Student Interview)

Students were asked to comment on how their program prepared them for the future and the confidence they felt as they thought about graduation. Interestingly, although students were generally excited about moving forward and had a plan, more than half of the students shared that they were told by parents that once they graduated they were expected to move and live on their own. Student perception was that parents would not support them beyond their 18th birthday, nor would they provide housing.

Students in independent study spoke to the importance of having someone help them focus on operationalizing their dreams for a brighter future. Consistent with the research—which reflects the increased mental health issues relating to students‘ perception that parents are often distracted, deployed, and unavailable (Department of

Defense, 2001, 2007b; Drummet et al., 2003)—students looked to their teachers and guidance counselors for direction (Croninger & Lee, 2008). Independent study programs were identified with a more direct approach to meeting students‘ needs and their individual potential. Students emphasized the importance of individual attention rather than the –five minutes" of attention students perceived in traditional programs.

Table 4.10 reflects the students‘ self-perceptions of their future plans and goals and how teachers impact those choices. Note that 91% of the students planned to attend college, and 100% felt that their teacher knew their name and cared about them. Despite the fact that 82% of students expect to be moving again, all the students wanted to stay in an independent study environment.

Table 4.10 Research Question 5: Impact of Independent Study on Future Plan Preparation (n=22)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent Reported
1. Future Plans	want to stay in independent study	22	100
	moving again	18	82
	want to go to college	20	91
	want to join the military	2	9
	professional	15	68
	trades	7	32
2. Goal Setting	teacher cares about me	22	100
	teacher knows my story	18	82
	teacher wants to help me succeed	21	95
	teacher knows me by name	22	100
	guidance program awesome	17	77
	Naviance helped me	8	36

Research Question 5

In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

> It is good that there is a counselor at my school just for independent study students that helped me find an internship and sort out college or trade school because now I have an idea of what I can do for my future. I can't live home after I graduate. My parents are moving again and I won't go, so me and my friend will share a place to live and work and go to school part-time. Teachers and the counselor here are so nice. They are real and they care about me. Now I sort of have a plan. (Student Interview)

> My teacher referred to the military counselor because I want to be like my dad, but better. She helped me figure out what branch of the service would be good for me and helped me find out about ROTC. I want to be an officer because I think they have a better life than I had with my family. I can always call her and she introduced me to people and even convinced my mom that it was a good idea to go to college. I am going to use the GI Bill from my dad so I am set. She showed us how to do it and even waited for my mom to be done with work late at night to meet her. No one ever helped me like that before. (Student Interview)

> My school has a career and personality program called Naviance. I learned about skills that I didn't know I had. It was a way to figure out my future. My teacher spent a lot of time with me discussing what I can do and said he would help me figure it out. It is like having a dad or big brother at school who looks out for you. It's funny because we all think he has a mom at school who looks out for him, too. We ask our school mom about stuff all the time even if she isn't our teacher. (Student Interview)

> I talked to my teacher and the director of my program. He referred me to the school counselor, but the real help was with my teacher. The guidance counselor was nice but was for the whole school and really busy, and I got my five minutes, but my teacher, he talks to me and helps me figure out my strengths. I have a plan now. I know that I am going to be successful. (Student Interview)

Teacher Demographics

Students from all the schools in the study routinely mentioned that teachers provided support and recognition that they did not experience in traditional settings. Educators themselves had an opportunity to share their perceptions of military dependent students and the independent study programs in which they chose to teach. Teachers

from Schools A and B previously taught in traditional high school programs both on and off their same campuses and were veteran educators with more than five years of experience. One teacher from School A was a military dependent wife. Teachers from School C had taught in traditional settings. One of the teachers from School C had taught in a traditional setting in another state prior to moving to California. At the time of their interviews, both teachers in School C had been teaching less than five years. Teachers at School D had varied experiences as well. Three of the teachers were seasoned, having taught for many years in a traditional setting. One teacher had taught in a traditional setting, but had total teaching experience of less than five years. All the teachers in School D self-selected an alternative ―virtual" educational environment in which to teach. All the teachers in Schools A, B, and C self- selected independent study. Overwhelmingly, teachers preferred to work in an alternative program because they felt that they had the greatest impact on at-risk students, and could share both their academic knowledge and their ability to empathize and present a holistic approach to understanding and educating their students.

Table 4.11 Teachers' Background (n=9)

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent Reported
Gender	male	4	44
	female	5	56
Number of years overall teaching	≥5 years	6	67
	< 5 years	3	33
Teaching experience	traditional school	9	100
	independent study	9	100
Age	< 40 years old	6	67
	Greater than 40 years old	3	33

> I have been teaching here for 8 years. I have been in the district for 24 years and in the AARC program for five years since its inception. I make a difference here. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I‘ve worked at regular public high schools, small schools, large schools, and tiny schools. I‘ve been teaching for a long time. Teaching in an AARC program touches not only the intellect but the heart. I couldn‘t feel more valued or want to teach anywhere else. (Teacher Interview)
>
> It was about five years ago when the AARC opened and I was already teaching here on the traditional campus. I was working happily as a resource specialist in Special Education. It was a natural transition for me. I enjoy helping students one-on-one, working through academic and life skill issues. They know I am open to supporting whatever they need to become successful adults. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I taught in a traditional environment in another state before I moved to California and elected to teach here. I have been teaching for less than five years. It was hectic in traditional school. There are fewer classroom management issues in independent study. It is very one-on-one and students respond to that. So do their parents. Working on one course at a time, and without the drama of traditional school, they have a chance to really excel. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I have been a teacher for 10 years and I taught at two different traditional high schools before I came here. I have been here for about two years. I helped build this program from the ground up. (Teacher Interview)

Teachers‘ and Administrators‘ Perceptions of Military Dependent Students

Two administrators had a previous experience with the military. One was a military wife of more than twenty years. The other was the child of a career military father. Additionally, one teacher was the wife of a career marine.

Although teachers were asked to focus only on military dependents, a large majority (78%) indicated that there was little difference between the at-risk military and at-risk non-military students in terms of their abilities and aspirations, but a significant

difference between the two groups as related to absences due to medical appointments, stress, and family responsibilities. This was particularly noted with teenage girls.

Female students did not attend school regularly because of family babysitting responsibilities and personal and family member medical appointments. These absences put them at an academic disadvantage and prompted their referral to AARC programs. Boys, also absent from class, most often had to work to help support the family while one parent was deployed. This was particularly noted among boys who were in 11th and 12th grades. Student self-perception was that they were the ―man in charge" in the absence of a father. Alternative education programs allowed them to continue their education on their own schedule, meeting both academic and family obligations. When teachers were asked to self-assess their most valuable personal traits, the primary responses were: empathetic, engaged and caring, and offering personal attention. Teachers felt that they offered academically challenging courses, knew their students by name, and took an individual approach to teaching. Moreover, 89% of teachers said that they were interested in the psychosocial development of their students as well as academics and took a holistic approach to educating their students. Flexibility was instrumental to their success.

Although 100% of the teachers felt all of their students (non-military and military) lived with more stress than other students on a traditional campus, 78% felt that the military dependents were subject to greater family stress than non-military counterparts as manifested by students‘ anecdotal incidents and comments. Teachers at two of the three schools felt that students were always verbalizing concern for the well-being of the absent family member and felt responsible for the care of younger siblings. Students

shared with teachers that punishment for ―normal" teenage infractions (being late, not completing chores) were either treated more severely in military households (corporal punishment) or totally ignored, as compared to the discipline found in the homes of civilian friends. The stay-at-home parent in military households was described by the student as being ―easy to anger and on edge," and then apologetic when the parent cooled down.

Table 4.12 Teachers'/Administrators' Perceptions of Personal and Student Experiences

Themes	Codes	Number Reported	Percent%
Comparison of IS and TS experience	IS personal. Traditional is large and impersonal.	9	100
Working preferences (IS vs. TS)	traditional school	0	0
	independent study	9	100
Teacher self-perception (personality profile)	empathetic	9	100
	interested in student psychosocial development	8	89
	engaged		
	caring	9	100
	mentorship	9	100
	academically challenging	8	89
	know student by name	9	100
	know student personal life	9	100
		9	100
Military vs. civilian student trauma	Military violence at home more prevalent/than civilian	8	89
	absence of parents	9	100
	military more (harm's way)	7	78
	no difference between populations	2	23
Student medical appointments during school time	≥ 5 per month; flexible hours allowed for course completion	7	78
	< 5 per month	2	23
Perceived change in student behavior (IS)	More Focused	9	100
	No drama	8	89
Perceived change in student academic success (IS)	Goal directed after high school	8	89
	More interested in school	7	78
	Students ask for help	8	89
	Students tracking for timely graduation	9	100

What have you noticed about military students in the AARC program that differentiates them from traditional high school students?

> The students might be a little more introverted in AARC, like maybe they didn't have a voice in a regular classroom and they were floundering but

> afraid to ask questions. That doesn‘t happen in AARC. The work is between the student and teacher. It is personal and focused and the students respond to the attention. They work at their own pace so they are in competition with themselves and they can still have time to work, make their doctor appointments, and help the family. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I‘ve taught in both environments and the success of the AARC program is the increased personal attention each student receives. They get much more one-on-one attention. (Teacher Interview)
>
> Students that were having problems with drama are now back on track and getting passing grades. Parents are reporting better attitudes at home. This program works. (Teacher Interview)
>
> The students are absent a lot. Always at the doctor or babysitting siblings or mom‘s sick. The beauty of this program is that they can still do work at home and bring it in and not be behind. We are nimble and flexible but have the same academic requirements as any UC a-g accredited high school so it works well. (Teacher Interview)
>
> Well, I think we are very different. I think the students are more accountable in a ―virtual" online environment. They have to log in every day and post work. They cannot avoid interacting with their teacher even though we don‘t see them. (Teacher Interview)
>
> Today‘s students text as a means of communication. They can get the word out without personal confrontation that way. They can say anything without consequence in their minds. We adapted our teaching to meet their lifestyle. More and more people are highly mobile. We develop relationships with parents online as well. We are all on the same team. It works. (Teacher Interview)

Do you think teachers are happier in alternative settings than in traditional schools?

> You know, I was part of the military myself. My husband was a Marine. We moved 12 times in 12 years when my own child was younger. It was very difficult for him and he had social anxiety so I understand the kids. This is the best of both worlds. It is the same curriculum as traditional school but it is self-paced and the students feel like they are in control of their ability to study and do better than taking multiple courses. It fits their lifestyle. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I know I am. I choose to be here and can see the difference I make every day. (Teacher Interview)

> I worked on the main campus for many years and was invited to try AARC. I love the one-on-one tutoring. I know my students well and I know what I can do to help each of my students learn. I would not want to go back to the main campus. (Teacher Interview)
>
> I think it takes a special person to work with at-risk students. Our school interviews many applicants before we make a selection. We only take the best [teachers]. Our retention is very high. (Administrator Interview)
>
> I think it is a mix and varies from day to day. Sometimes teachers report that online work can be very rewarding and other times it can be very mundane. It‘s not as stimulating as interacting in a live classroom with kids. They are responding to kids who have issues and the rewards are that they are a life line responding to immediate psychosocial needs first and academics next. But the academics are always done. That‘s part of the deal. (Administrator Interview)

Describe any improvement/degradation in your students' grades since arriving. Are they tracking for graduation?

> Students are much more focused and eager to do well. There is no drama because it is smaller and less threatening. (Student Interview)
>
> Students leave here more confident and with greater self-esteem. I love that, and it makes me feel like I am making a difference in someone‘s life. They‘re not just passing through like cattle. (Student Interview)
>
> My students are tracking for timely graduation. They have purpose and focus now. (Student Interview)
>
> We are a virtual school and that was a big draw for me. Students come for written exams and science labs, but most of the other work is done online, you know distance learning. It is great for the military kids because they tend to move around a lot. Their parents support it. Also, some students who are professional sportsmen or actors work well with this setup, too. There are many reasons that students come here. We had a student that was bedridden and could not go to regular school. She was getting D‘s and F‘s, now she has a scholarship to college and a 3.5 grade point average. (Teacher Interview)

Describe any changes you have seen in your students' behavior and/or attitudes since arriving.

> Students are more calm and focused. They become goal directed. I can see a new level of maturity. (Teacher Interview)

> Students today are very tech savvy. Also, for some students who might be too shy to talk about issues in person, the computer is the best way to chat about things on their minds. There is no facial interaction so students are less closed. They are more open because they are on email. I help them with their academics and they talk about personal issues. We have an opportunity to really communicate, although it may not be in person, and we have stronger relationships because I know their name and our conversations are one-on-one. Their interests and attitudes improve. (Administrator/Teacher Interviews)

Did your students fail any courses prior to attending AARC?

> Yes, absolutely. But, once she was accepted into our program, she bucked down and plowed through her courses. She now sees an opportunity to graduate and learn a skill or trade at community college. (Teacher Interview)

> Yes, it's pretty common. But the students turn around and focus here so they are able to make up the work and move forward. (Teacher Interview)

> Of course, but they track and refocus very well without all the high school drama and with one-on-one attention. If they stay in our school, they will graduate. If they relocate, they are academically *packaged* to pick up where they left off without repeating anything. (Teacher Interview)

Has your student shown a renewed interest in future planning for a career?

> Our school offers personalized career planning specifically for the AARC program. It has been really well received and the students have responded well so far. It is pretty new, so we are getting the word out as fast as we can. (Teacher Interview)

> We have the Senior Exhibition, the Senior Exhibition Military Careers, Naviance personal exploration, and one-on-one counseling. The elements are all mandatory. It really helps to focus the students on their future. (Teacher Interview)

> We track our students. Students who have graduated and changed directions still walk into the classroom to talk with their former teacher/counselor and ask for advice. Our relationships are ongoing. (Teacher Interview)

Student Self-Perception of Academic Success

> I failed a lot of classes before. I never came to school or I was afraid to ask questions. Now I am catching up and passing everything. I might have a real shot at college. (Student Interview)

> My grades are improving. I am setting an example for the younger kids. I don‘t want them to feel like losers. I am going to graduate and make them all proud. (Student Interview)

> I get a lot more done. I am more focused. I am passing every class and I am going to do something with my life. Now, I believe I can. (Student Interview)

> I am going to graduate on time. I am going to community college, and then I am going to transfer to a four-year school and be a doctor or nurse. I am going to use my Dad‘s GI Bill. I am going to be someone. Before, I was nothing. I didn‘t believe in myself, but my grades are good and my teacher and parents get along, too. (Student Interview)

Summary of Data Analysis

The findings in the study addressed the five research questions utilizing qualitative methods. Quick-writes, student interviews, and teacher/administrative staff interviews identified the key elements associated with academic and psychosocial needs of at-risk military students. Self-perceptions and teacher perceptions of their accomplishments and goals focused on the role alternative educational settings play in redirecting students to successful outcomes. Research question 1 and corresponding themes 1, 2, and 3 explored the self-identification of effects of high mobility when asking: What is the students‘ self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent high school student? Research question 2, and corresponding themes 4, 5, addressed the support or constraint of academic achievement when asking: In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military

dependent high school students? Research question 3, and corresponding themes 6, 7, explored psychosocial needs by asking: In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent high school students? Research question 4, along with themes 8, 9, and 10, addressed the issues of comparison between the traditional and alternative programs by asking: In what ways are freestanding public independent study programs similar or different from traditional school and their independent study programs? Research question 5 and themes 11, 12 and 13 addressed tracking for post–high school activities and timely graduation by asking: In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

Students and teachers were asked to comment on these issues and provided insight into how to maximize the academic opportunities for students who are at risk of becoming high school dropouts. Students and teachers shared the same perceptions regarding the importance of personalized, individualized, and meaningful relationships among teachers, students, and parents, as well as the deliberate mitigation of school stress by single subject focus and elimination of school drama.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a brief summary of previous chapters, including an overview of the problem, purpose of the study, findings related to the literature, a review of the methodology, and a summary of the findings. Additionally, this chapter contains discussion regarding the research limitations, implications for practice, implications for future research, implications for public policy, and concluding remarks. Findings are presented with support from current research. Implications for changes to public policy, educational practice, and future research are addressed later in this chapter with a focus on leadership and social justice.

Overview of the Problem

As previously outlined in Chapter 1, highly mobile students have a particularly difficult time academically and socially in traditional public school. They tend to fall one to two grade levels behind, lack consistent friends, have difficult family lives, and are at risk for dropping out of high school (Blum, 2005; Government Accounting Office, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

One of the most mobile and psychosocially challenged groups of students is military dependents. There are more than 1.9 million military dependent students in the United States. Of those, a growing number have significant challenges associated with timely high school graduation because of their high mobility and unique family stressors. Consistent with other highly mobile populations who represent a significant component of the ―achievement gap," military dependent students are often from blended families and are multiracial, multicultural, and have lower socioeconomic status (Military Child

Coalition, 2004). Students find that they live with friends, stepparents or other relatives who may reside in locations other than that of the core family, which often exacerbates feelings of isolation and fear (Department of Defense, 2001). These students represent a disproportionate share of public school students who are African American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian (Ellickson & McGuigan, 2000; Ruiz-de-Velasco et al., 2000; Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

American military service personnel and their families have endured unprecedented challenges including consistent operational demands and *recurring* deployments in combat zones (Hefling, 2009). At present, more than 1 million children have had at least one parent deployed. In 2007-2008, the demand for mental health services for military dependents doubled (2 million outpatient visits) and hospitalizations increased by 50% since the start of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Hefling, 2009). Mental health challenges and use of mental health services are 3.5 times greater than civilian children 4 to 17 years old and represents more than 35% of the dependent population (Department of Defense, 2007b). The stress of deployment and fear for the parent‘s safety permeate every facet of a student‘s life including mental and physical ailments, which preclude regular school attendance (Astor, 2010; Department of Defense, 2001; Drummet et al., 2003; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). These absences are deleterious to high school performance because of the structured environment in traditional high schools, which requires daily attendance, further denigrating the students‘ ability to stay on task and complete assignments. The frequency and urgency of the comments in this study from both teachers and students validate the assertion made by Astor (2010), in which he states educators and leaders in traditional schools are not

trained to understand and appropriately respond to these stressors and, as such, student behaviors are largely misunderstood, creating an environment that is generally unresponsive to their needs. As a result, students disengage.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to focus on how, as educators we might reduce the dropout rate for at-risk military dependent high school students utilizing alternative educational models. To that end, this study focused on the subset of military dependent students who are at-risk of not completing high school and have chosen to attend independent study high school programs to mitigate their challenges and prepare for college or enter the work force.

Four schools were studied: A publicly funded charter, two publicly funded traditional high schools with on campus AARC programs, and a publicly funded virtual high school. These schools, all with UC a-g approved courses, offer alternative methods of curriculum delivery, which include individualized and personalized attention, expanded school hours, specific student appointments, and a small classroom setting as an intervention to facilitate intensive academic and family-student social supports by creating a sense of neighborhood, belonging, and achievement, while reducing stress. The programs were studied to determine to what extent different independent study programs created a safe learning environment, improved high school graduation rates, relieved psychosocial pressures, and fostered a college-bound school culture.

To better understand the effects of independent study programs on students‘ attitudes toward schooling and military lifestyle, this study solicited self-perceptions of

students‘ and teachers‘ experiences about learning, mitigating psychosocial stressors, tracking for timely graduation, and post–high school plans. The research questions were:

1. What is the student self-perception of being a highly mobile military dependent student?
2. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the academic achievement of military high school students?
3. In what ways do independent study programs support or constrain the psychosocial development of military dependent high school students?
4. In what ways are freestanding public independent study programs similar or different from traditional comprehensive high school independent study programs?
5. In what ways do independent study programs prepare students for college or careers?

Findings Related to the Literature

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) was the primary theoretical framework used as the underpinning for this study, reflecting the importance of the students‘ ability to ―make meaning" by modeling behaviors. This theoretical framework speaks to the role society (school, peers, family) plays in the development of self-efficacy, mental stability, individual achievement, and communal belonging (Bandura, 1977; Bandura et al., 1996; Rumberger, 1990. Children *copy* parents, siblings, and friends, and are rewarded based on the assimilation of behaviors and attitudes. Conversely, deficits in behaviors and the ensuing life challenges due to lack of relevant role models is also germane. When role models are absent or parental deficits exist, the outcomes often yield aggressive, deviant, antisocial attitudes that promote at-risk behaviors, as previously

depicted in Figure 1.3. These diminished social skills generalize to antisocial behavior in the classroom and may ultimately lead to high rates of delinquent behavior and academic failure, as reflected by Patterson et al. (1989). Although many findings were not unique to military students, they do reflect outcomes associated with highly mobile at-risk populations and are, therefore, applicable to both civilian and military communities.

Findings represented in this study reflected that a sense of belonging is pivotal to student self-esteem and sense of security. Students who exhibit these feelings and attitudes have positive peer, family, and mentor relationships, and are more likely to graduate from high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1994; Military Child Education Coalition, 2004; Pittman & Bowen, 1994; Rumberger et al., 1990).

Responses from students in this study support what previous researchers have found. As evidenced by the student voice data reflected in student interviews and quick-writes, within the context of military life the absence of a stable home makes it difficult for students to plant roots in a school or neighborhood (Nettles et al., 2000). Frustration and aggression are often commonplace (Department of Defense, 2007b). Frequent moves often compounded by the anxiety of parental separation during deployments challenge the ease of transition not just from school to school, but from system to system across states, heightening the likelihood of academic failure (Department of Defense, 2007; Drummet et al., 2003).

Review of the Methodology

Revisiting the methodology and drawing upon the Schjolberg (2007) pilot, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact alternative education delivery models

have on the success of at-risk military dependent students in terms of both academic and psychosocial phenomena, across military branches, and at multiple schools. The research conducted was a qualitative single-case embedded study (four locations) and comparative case analyses utilizing a literal replication design (Yin, 2009). Focused on military dependent students of the same grades and ages (n=22), the research study reflected the use of a strengths-based approach using appreciative inquiry.

This was primarily a student voice study with teacher participation. The researcher employed quick-writes, student interviews, teacher interviews, and observations using appreciative inquiry (AI) techniques. Additionally, the researcher shared six composite vignettes to help the reader understand the phenomena associated with being an at-risk military dependent and analyzed participants‘ quotes guided by the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2. A phenomenological lens was used (Husserl, 1900) to enter the students‘ world to bring clarity to their perspectives and experiences, and uncover how best to promote positive psychosocial and family relationships, improve high school graduation rates, improve college admission, and enhance future career plans. Data included student quick-writes, student interviews, student self-perception of academic success relating to school life, family dynamics, and teacher-student relationships within the learning context (Kvale, 2006). Teachers and administrators were also interviewed. The skills and constructs identified by the teacher interviews reflected support of student learning, student self-efficacy development, tracking toward graduation, post–high school plans, minimized at-risk behavior, teacher-student mentorship, and improved family relationship and understanding. Data were

collected, transcribed, sorted, and coded, and common themes and subthemes were identified, from which findings were extrapolated.

Summary of Findings

Consistent with findings from the Schjolberg (2007) pilot study and Viadero (2005), at-risk military dependent students expressed ongoing concerns about academic performance, fitting in at school, and psychosocial family stressors that precluded their abilities to successfully perform in a traditional high school setting. Numerous responses reflected their high mobility, ongoing fear, and family responsibilities as factors denigrating their opportunity to succeed in traditional school.

Student Demographics and Self-Perception Regarding Mobility. In the current study (n=22), students were children of parents who were junior enlisted, with one exception. Fathers were not college graduates, and mothers were often GED recipients or high school graduates with no college. Parents were younger than civilian counterparts (Department of Defense 2001, 2007a, 2007b). Twenty-two students were equally distributed by gender. Table 4.3 reflected student ethnicity. Students identified themselves first as *military*, second as *American*, and, only when pressed, lastly by their personal race or ethnicity. Students made very clear that the military is ~~"c~~olor-blind" and promotes a cohesive ~~"o~~ne" as the military standard. Once personal ethnicity was self-identified, consistent with the previously reported statistics by the Department of Defense, 68% of students reflect that they were ~~"a~~ll different blood" and may not share the ethnicity of their current stepparent or siblings.

Table 4.6, which reflects military dependent students' self-perceptions, revealed a high degree of mobility (more than five moves) and frustration. Students described themselves (64%) as ―ld different blood," 91% described themselves as having ―different parents" from siblings, and 91% of students indicated that they have lived with grandparents intermittently. Of the 22 students, 91 % claim they worry all the time, with 95% fearing death or injury of their parent. Of the students interviewed, 73% claim that they have no close friends or attachments. Additionally, 91% of students indicated that they had failed classes prior to attending independent study.

Family Life of Military Dependent Students. Table 4.7 shared the students' concerns about family life and how it relates to school. Of the students studied, 68% are caregivers to younger siblings and utilize alternative settings such as AARC to meet family obligations while attending school. Thirteen percent of students are working to help with family finances. Ninety-one percent of the students feel like their parent is ―always deployed" and 95% stated that they focused on death or injury of a loved one daily, and that they or their adult parent or caregiver visited the doctor frequently, with 45% indicating that one or more family members are treated for stress or depression; a utilization which is 3.5 times that of their civilian counterparts (Department of Defense, 2007b; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Hefling, 2009).

These findings are consistent with the recognition that military students have psychosocial stressors that are manifested in public health issues (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Hefling, 2009). Moreover, 77% indicated that they regularly engage in at-risk behaviors (sex, alcohol, drugs, and smoking) to ease family stressors. These student self-assessments highlight the urgent need to provide psychosocial services on-site in school.

On its face, alternative scheduling and reduced pressure in the form of flexible academic scheduling will allow for adequate medical follow-up without denigration of educational programs, fostering the ability to learn.

Student Successes in Programs Related to Psychosocial Development. Table 4.8 addresses specific psychosocial phenomena. Student responses to all five of the research questions, quick-writes, teacher perceptions, and observations support the notion that at-risk military dependent students live complex, stressful, and often fragile lives. Teachers and students reported that academic and psychosocial improvements occur when the stress of everyday life has been reduced. Students reported that they responded to teachers who employ active listening, personal attention, and individualized curriculum. Moreover, students universally applauded the flexibility and simplicity of independent study and stated that independent study helped them feel "better about their capabilities and in control" of their future. Eighty-six percent of students indicated that their teacher helps them stay calm, talks with them about their challenges, and as a result students' perceived that they learn more and have a clearer focus. Students also reported that they can "seek each other out" and chat about issues internally without feeling constrained. These findings are consistent with those stated in previous research undertaken by Franklin et al. (2007), Lange (1998), and Raywid (1994).

Student Supports Related to Academic Achievement. As expressed in Table 4.9, students overwhelmingly reported that the relationship with teachers, flexibility of school schedule, the one-course-at-a-time philosophy, and a student-centered approach was instrumental in attracting them to the AARC programs. Of the 22 students, 100% responded favorably to the following statements: my teacher knows me by name, the

guidance counselor helps me plan my future, and my teacher cares about me. Student perceptions of teachers in the AARC programs are that teachers are available day or night to help (91%), the teacher knows them (100%), and the teacher cares about them (100%). In contrast, 100% of students indicated that maintaining a full load of five classes exacerbated stress and presented academic difficulty, resulting in 91% of students failing classes in a traditional setting. Students felt that they could not deal with the ―drama" in traditional school and that traditional school is ―too big". Findings from previous research cited in Chapter 2, the Schjolberg (2007) pilot, as well as this study, outline student concerns regarding family responsibilities, family stressors, medical appointments, and high mobility as deterrents to high school success. To that end, barriers in traditional school—including course sequencing, prerequisites, and consistent attendance—are counterintuitive and counterproductive to the military lifestyle and hamper student success because students are unable to attend regularly due to medical and family commitments. Also, because students move so frequently and sequencing and prerequisites are different from state to state, students expressed concern that they are unable to move forward.

Of the students interviewed, 73% claim to have no close friends or attachments. Relevant literature discussed in Chapter 2 (Astor, 2010; Hefling, 2009; Mmari et al., 2009; South & Haynie, 2004) supports the importance of having meaningful friendships to mitigate stress. Their findings speak to the importance of recognizing the unique stressors faced by military dependent high school students so that programs could be developed in support of students' psychosocial and academic needs. Meeting the

psychosocial needs of military dependent students appears to be the first step to ensuring academic achievement (Astor, 2010; Hefling, 2009).

Teachers and Counselors as Sources of Support for Students. Reflecting on the literature presented in Chapter 2, the importance of the teacher as a mentor, role model, and even surrogate parent in the absence of a family member is consistent with student success and with the findings reported by Croninger and Lee (2008), Foster, (2008), and Goddard et al. (2004), in which students excelled in school when they felt teachers supported them and knew them personally.

Students who have elected to attend alternative education programs to mitigate their academic and psychosocial challenges demonstrate a change in direction. This paradigm shift—from deviant behavior to positive member of society—validates the importance of educating at-risk students holistically, utilizing flexible schedules, personal awareness, and individual attention along with a rigorous curriculum. Flexible alternative education programs offer students the opportunity to demonstrate self-awareness, responsibility, and personal –control" over their daily lives while positioning them for high school graduation and future careers (Franklin et al., 2007; Lange, 1998; Ray, 1997; Raywid, 1994; Ross et al., 2000; Tucker et al., 1998; Viadero, 2005; Zehr, 2005). Figure 5.1 *modifies* the Patterson et al. (1989) representation of developmental progression for antisocial behavior, with the insertion of the independent study high school programs at Schools A, B, C, and D. Student and teacher comments in this study appear to substantiate the revised outcome which reflects interception and redirection from involvement with a deviant peer group and delinquency, to personal and academic success leading to becoming a positive member of society.

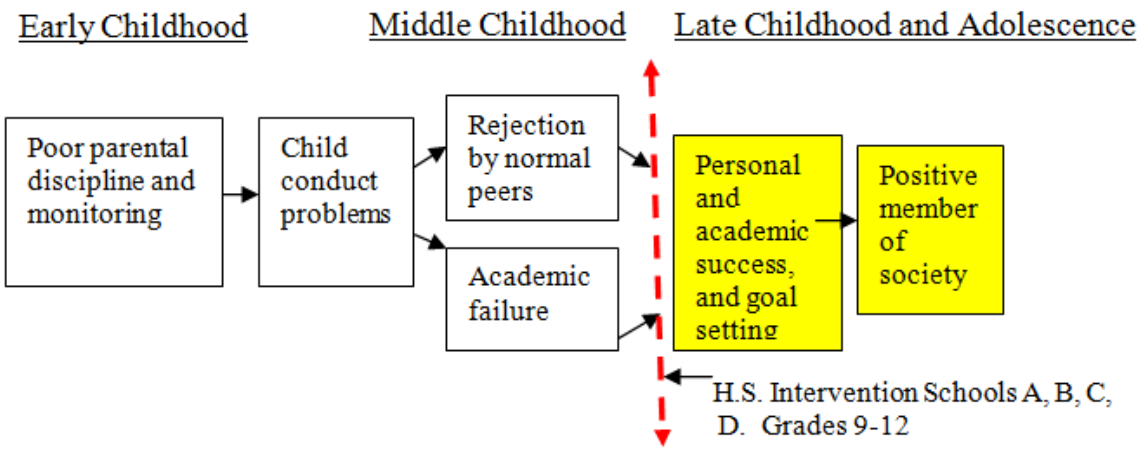

Figure 5.1 A developmental progression for antisocial behavior revised from Figure 1.3 (Patterson et al., 1989).

Limitations and Generalizability of Findings

The limitations of this study include sample size, participant bias, researcher bias, and duration of the study. This study was conducted at multiple sites focused on at-risk military dependent students of junior enlisted personnel in southern California and may not reflect findings in other states. The selection of students at each site was dependent upon the schools‘ identification and selection of students, and on the students‘ and parents‘ willingness to participate. The research only speaks to the perceptions and behaviors of those military dependent students who have elected independent study and does not provide insight into the students who have been successful in traditional high schools.

The researcher has spent 28 years in the Navy (Active Duty and Reserve) working with military families and has been part of the military culture now being studied. As an

insider, this "emic" perspective may skew the perception and meaning of the collected data. At the same time, being an insider afforded the researcher a deeper understanding of the nuances of the military culture not afforded someone with an "etic/outsider" perspective. Moreover, in addition to previously teaching in a traditional setting, the researcher has spent more than five years teaching military dependent students in an independent study environment, and more than three decades in public health. To maintain objectivity, the researcher did not approach students in her own classroom.

Despite these limitations, findings serve to inform the military, educational, public health, and research communities of the challenges faced by at-risk military dependent students as well as the academic and psychosocial supports offered by alternative education models, which lead to the successful and timely completion of high school for at-risk students. Consistent with the previous findings of Franklin et al. (2007), Lange (1998), Ray (1997), Raywid (1994), and Zehr (2005), as well as the numerous interviews, quick-writes, and anecdotal stories told to this researcher by students and teachers, at-risk military dependent students reaffirmed that independent study programs offer the best opportunity to graduate from high school and move on to college or a career.

Implications for Practice

Public education is reported to be at a crossroads because of competing forces, lack of funding, changing demographics of our student population, and the increased emphasis on technology in support of 21st-century skills. As educators, each of us must examine whether we wish to continue providing a high school education in the same

manner in which we, our parents, and our grandparents were educated, or recognize that due to high mobility, changing student demographics, diminished funding, and perceived educational deficits, we must proactively redesign the educational delivery system by validating and promoting choice in support of 21st-century skills and lifestyles.

As alternative educational models gain acceptance and outcomes become measurably competitive with traditional schools (Franklin et al., 2007) parents and educators are able to select the option that works best for their student to promote learning. To that end, each of us has to be open to the concept of focusing holistically on every child; not just as a history teacher or a math teacher, but as a life coach and mentor. Only when our approach to education is modified, will the educational outcomes for all students improve (Franklin et al., 2007; Raywid, 1994).

Recommendations for University Leadership. Institutions of higher learning, which are responsible for educating future teachers, must broaden the curriculum to become more inclusive of alternative delivery systems and develop/include courses in both 21st-century hard and soft skills including holistic training in educational methods, life skills, and psychosocial needs so that students of all backgrounds are embraced. Universities have an obligation to ensure that teacher credentialing programs prepare prospective teachers to educate students across all educational venues. Teachers must be academically and psychosocially prepared to select the venue most appropriate for their interests and teaching styles: traditional or alternative.

Recommendations for Current Educators and Students. To meet the needs of all students, leaders and teachers are compelled to find new ways to facilitate learning (Cohen, 2000; Lange, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Schjolberg, 2007). These enhanced methods

must include on-site professional training for teachers and administrators in support of psychosocial issues. There is a growing need to focus on holistic education by connecting academics to life experiences, and increased life skills training. Additionally, schools must provide non-sequential courses, alternative scheduling, and expanded school hours, and should remove prerequisites to courses. Additional courses in psychology and sociology, as well as psychosocial programs, must be available to students on site.

Implications for Future Research

This study focused on at-risk military dependents within four branches of the military and among children of junior enlisted personnel. Future research must be conducted to determine if students of officers and/or senior enlisted personnel encounter the same academic and psychosocial traumas. By looking at the entire military community, researchers and educators will glean nuances that will enable teachers, psychologists, and military leaders to effect change in behaviors among the junior ranks to improve educational and psychosocial outcomes of military dependents.

Moreover, additional study among military students who attend traditional high schools and a comparison of coping skills, resilience, academic successes, and family dynamics should be undertaken to determine the similarities or differences in lifestyles and expectations. Educators from all educational delivery systems must develop opportunities to share their observations and perceptions of the differentiating factors between students‘ successes in traditional school versus alternative educational programs.

Based on collective data, additional inferences can be drawn and interventions developed to potentially meet the needs of *all* children.

Implications for Public Policy

Recommendations for Public Policy. The Department of Defense must promote and enforce equal implementation of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Students, which includes reciprocity for credits, graduation, and high stakes tests. By imposing financial sanctions and rewards and adjusting the algorithm used to determine funding, equity and influence will adjust the current paradigm. Moreover, in support of at-risk military students, it is in the best interest of the Department of Defense to provide alternative education models (7-12*) on military installations* with expanded hours of service and support programs to include integrated psychosocial and medical counseling, connectivity to existing support programs, and connectivity to local college programs post–high school for both students and family members.

Considering the complex and stressful lives experienced by an increasing number of military dependent students, leaders and educators who affect public policy must ensure access and availability of funding in support of all types of educational programs and offer the best opportunity for a quality education and psychosocial support to all students. It is clear from this study, the Schjolberg (2007) pilot study, and the studies of numerous educators, a few of which are mentioned herein (Franklin et al., 2007; Hillenbrand, 1976; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Jensen et al., 1989; Rumberger, 1999; Swanson & Schneider, 1999), that a personalized, individualized, and flexible approach to academics with psychosocial intervention—particularly among highly mobile, highly stressed students—is the key to minimizing both at-risk behaviors and the high school

dropout rate, while fostering future opportunities that will prepare students with 21st-century skills. To that end, it is incumbent upon the Department of Defense to offer alternative high school educational intervention programs on stateside military installations to ensure parents can support their children‘s education through *choice* either on site or in the civilian community.

Alternative educational programs, situated on stateside military installations, would be inclusive of psychosocial support programs on campus, ensuring access to both students and family members, and connecting to existing college programs to facilitate a smooth transition from high school to college for both the student and the parent. Utilizing the AARC model as part of a traditional school, programs on military installations (similar to existing elementary schools) would be funded via local school districts. Additionally, similar to School C, freestanding public charter programs placed on military installations eliminates the need to bus students off site to a school with which they are unfamiliar, and where they continue the be the new kid trying to fit in (Viadero, 2005).

Implications for Social Justice

Ensuring the high school graduation of at-risk military dependent high school students is a moral imperative. Meeting the needs of the students whose parents are consistently placed in harm‘s way is the minimal commitment a society should make in support of its military. Freedom is not free. Society cannot expect parents to obviate their lives without a societal commitment to meet the needs of the families they are leaving behind.

Like all children, military dependents are the citizens of the future. We rely on them to fill the need for skilled, educated workers and leaders in industry, science, technology, education, the arts, and the military. However, unlike most parents, military parents often are unable to come home at the end of the day or routinely field phone calls from family. In addition to being a moral imperative, care of military dependents is also a readiness issue. Military members must be assured that their children are cared for so they are able to concentrate on the mission without impediment. Active duty personnel, who are also parents, spouses, and siblings, cannot focus solely on the mission when worried about their families at home. This is particularly important in wartime, when focus on the military mission and the military team, who may be anywhere in the world, is critical to reducing injury and death among our fighting forces.

Concluding Remarks

What are the magic ingredients? What makes a teacher more or less empathetic and interested in the "whole child," and does that really matter? Do alternative models that promote individual attention and flexible scheduling make the difference? This study, as described by Figure 5.2, supports the premise that the elements described herein (flexibility, individualization, teacher-student mentorship, psychosocial interventions) support student success by mitigating psychosocial stressors, promoting high school graduation, assisting with goal setting, and preparing students with a college-bound culture.

Figure 5.2 Factors that support graduation for at-risk military students.

As articulated by the students and teachers in this study, AARC programs meet the needs of at-risk students in a personal way, but because they are not strategically placed on stateside military installations, students still have difficulty gaining access. Students who participated in alternative education demonstrated increased interest in school and timely high school graduation while receiving the psychosocial and medical care they needed to ensure transition to a productive adult life. Allowing such programs on military installations provides students with immediate and local access to an educational model that meets their needs, permits continued availability for medical appointments and family obligations, secures psychosocial services and matriculation to colleges that are already well established on base, and improves the quality of life for the student and other family members.

Moreover, because of the connectivity to psychosocial programs and proximity to family quarters, the establishment of an Academic Acceleration and Recovery Center (AARC) on military installations minimizes the adverse ~~–t~~ownie versus military" mindset

of community students and educators, and potentially mitigates the stress and related trauma faced by many military students, as they struggle to fit in (Viadero, 2005). Anecdotally, but equally important as psychosocial stressors are reduced, there is a reduction in both hospital inpatient and outpatient visits which is reflected in a reduction in medically related spending (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007).

Without a quality education and support for psychosocial issues endemic to their culture, students and society remain unprepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Therefore, it is imperative that we use the data generated by psychologists, educators, and government agencies to support the need for alternative education high schools on military installations and life skills training to include mentorship, crisis management, and psychosocial programs as the underpinning to a rigorous, but flexible, curriculum to ensure every child (military or civilian) is supported and that *"no child is left behind."*

APPENDIX A

ADULT STUDENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Adult Student:

As a doctoral student at the University of California and California State University San Marcos, I am conducting research to learn about military dependent students‘ high school experiences in an independent study environment, and how academic performance relates to student attitudes about school. I will be interviewing teachers, and students associated with independent study programs. Participation is voluntary. A final report will be presented to UCSD to meet requirements for conferring a doctoral degree, and the results may be discussed in presentations and research papers.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to write a paragraph about their experiences in independent study, which will take about ten minutes. Your interview will take about thirty minutes and will be audio-recorded to improve the accuracy of our notes. The process is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if your child decides to participate. You may decide not to answer any question or change any answer. You can withdraw from the interview at any time or request that any portion of the audio recording be erased. You can withdraw from the study at any time, but telling the researcher. This decision will not affect your involvement in the school, will not be known to anyone else, and will have no consequences.

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study, except possibly loss of confidentiality. However, names will not be included in the dissertation, research articles or presentations. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but will not be associated with a named student or attributed to specific individuals. Any potentially identifying information will be removed and every effort will be made to protect confidentiality. Students‘ transcriptions of interviews will be stored on the principal investigator‘s password protected computer, with security codes necessary to open. Students‘ written paragraphs and interview files will be maintained in a locked file cabinet. Upon study completion, paper versions of all student writing and transcript files will be shredded, computer files will be deleted, and tapes will be physically destroyed. Additionally, all researchers who work on this project and who handle confidential data will have signed a confidentiality agreement. The only benefit is the chance to improve our knowledge about the academic experiences of military dependent students.

The faculty sponsor for this project is Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter. Her email address is: chofstetter@ucsd.edu, and her phone number is 858-822-6688.

Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the UCSD Institutional Review Board Human Subjects (858-455-5050).

You give your permission to provide a written paragraph about your school experiences as well as to be audio recorded during an interview or focus group for a research study about education. You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased. Participation is voluntary.

_____YES _____NO

Your Signature_____

Your Printed Name_____

APPENDIX B

PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN/MINOR STUDENT CONSENT

Dear Parent/Legal Guardian:

As a doctoral student at the University of California and California State University San Marcos, I am conducting research to learn about military dependent students‘ high school experiences in an independent study environment, and how academic performance relates to student attitudes about school. I will be interviewing teachers, school staff, and students associated with independent study programs. Participation is voluntary. A final report will be presented to UCSD to meet requirements for conferring a doctoral degree, and the results may be discussed in presentations and research papers.

If your child agrees to participate, he or she will be asked to write a paragraph about their experiences in independent study, which will take about ten minutes. His/her interview will take about thirty minutes and will be audio-recorded to improve the accuracy of our notes. The process is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if your child decides to participate. Your child may decide not to answer any question or change any answer. Your child can withdraw from the interview at any time or request that any portion of the audio recording be erased. He or she can withdraw from the study at any time, but telling the researcher. This decision will not affect your child‘s involvement in the school, will not be known to anyone else, and will have no consequences.

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study, except possibly loss of confidentiality. However, names will not be included in the dissertation, research articles or presentations. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but will not be associated with a named student or attributed to specific individuals. Any potentially identifying information will be removed and every effort will be made to protect confidentiality. Students‘ transcriptions of interviews will be stored on the principal investigator‘s password protected computer, with security codes necessary to open. Students‘ written paragraphs and interview files will be maintained in a locked file cabinet. Upon study completion, paper versions of all student writing and transcript files will be shredded, computer files will be deleted, and tapes will be physically destroyed. Additionally, all researchers who work on this project and who handle confidential data will have signed a confidentiality agreement. The only benefit is the chance to improve our knowledge about the academic experiences of military dependent students.

The faculty sponsor for this project is Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter. Her email address is: chofstetter@ucsd.edu, and her phone number is 858-822-6688.

Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the UCSD Institutional Review Board Human Subjects (858-455-5050).

You give your permission for your child to provide a written paragraph about her/his school experiences as well as to be audio recorded during an interview or focus group for a research study about education. Your child has the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased. Participation is voluntary.

_____YES _____NO

Your Signature_____

_____ _____

Parent/Guardian name (please print) Your child's name (please print)

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL STAFF (TEACHER, ADMINISTRATION, COUNSELOR, SUPPORT STAFF) CONSENT FORM

Dear School Staff:

As a doctoral student at the University of California and California State University San Marcos, I am conducting research to learn about military dependent students‘ high school experiences in an independent study environment, and how academic performance relates to student attitudes about school. I will be interviewing teachers, school staff, and students associated with independent study programs. Participation is voluntary. A final report will be presented to UCSD to meet requirements for conferring a doctoral degree, and the results may be discussed in presentations and research papers.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your observations regarding military dependent students and your interview will take about thirty minutes. It will be audio-recorded to improve the accuracy of our notes. The process is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if your child decides to participate. You may decide not to answer any question or change any answer. You can withdraw from the interview at any time or request that any portion of the audio recording be erased. You can withdraw from the study at any time, but telling the researcher. This decision will not be known to anyone else, and will have no consequences.

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study, except possibly loss of confidentiality. However, names will not be included in the dissertation, research articles or presentations. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but will not be associated with a named student or attributed to specific individuals. Any potentially identifying information will be removed and every effort will be made to protect confidentiality. Staff interviews will be stored on the principal investigator‘s password protected computer, with security codes necessary to open. Upon study completion, paper versions of all staff writing and transcript files will be shredded, computer files will be deleted, and tapes will be physically destroyed. Additionally, all researchers who work on this project and who handle confidential data will have signed a confidentiality agreement. The only benefit is the chance to improve our knowledge about the academic experiences of military dependent students.

The faculty sponsor for this project is Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter. Her email address is: chofstetter@ucsd.edu, and her phone number is 858-822-6688.

Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the UCSD Institutional Review Board Human Subjects (858-455-5050).

You give your permission to be audio recorded during an interview or focus group for a research study about education. You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased. Participation is voluntary.

_____YES _____NO

Your Signature_____

_____
Your position

APPENDIX D

TEACHER TALKING POINTS

Students, a current graduate student in the joint doctoral program in Educational Leadership at the University of California San Diego and California State University San Marcos would appreciate your assistance in learning more about how independent study programs can best meet the needs of military dependent high school students. This is important research designed to help meet the special needs of military students all over the world.

Mrs. Schjolberg will be using the following research procedures: Students will be asked to complete a short essay (Quick-write) on what you like about independent study. Students will also be asked interview questions that relate to school climate, friends, course work, travel and military family life. The researcher will also look at grades. **This essay should take 10 minutes and the interview should take 30 minutes. The interviews will be taped so we can accurately remember what was said. No names will be used in the research study paper.**

You may stop the process at any time. Real names will not be published and no one is required to participate but it would be a good learning experience, a chance to do something positive for other military students, and to tell your personal story.

If you are interested in participating in a study designed to help the military understand your needs more clearly, please take one of these permission slips home for your parent to sign. Please bring the permission slip back tomorrow.

APPENDIX E

STAFF/TEACHER PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. Why did you decide to work in an independent study environment?

2. Have you ever worked in a traditional classroom? What did you teach?

3. Describe the differences/similarities between the two settings.

4. Describe any changes you have seen in your student‘s behavior and/or attitude in the classroom.

5. Describe any improvement/degradation in your student‘s grades since arriving in independent study.

6. What do you know about your student‘s family dynamics?

7. What is the current pacing for your student‘s graduation from high school?

8. Did your student fail any classes prior to attending independent study? What about now?

9. Has your student showed increased interest in academics and his/her future plans? Have you discussed future options with your student?

10. How many schools has your student attended prior to joining your program?

11. Please share additional information as you feel appropriate.

APPENDIX F

STUDENT QUICK-WRITE TOPICS

Please share a time in Independent Study that you felt really good about your accomplishments. What did you do? Explain how it is different or the same as a positive experience you had in a traditional high school.

AND

What are the advantages of attending independent study? What are the disadvantages? Are they different or the same as your experience in traditional high school? Why?

AND

Please describe your relationship to your current teacher. How does it compare to your relationships with teachers in other settings? Does independent study work better for your learning/life style? Why or why not?

Students will be encouraged to share additional comments, information and anecdotes. This data will help negotiate student perceptions of personal worth, belonging, and academic success, as well as attitudes about school climate, student acceptance, and enjoyment of the school experience. It will also speak to the cultural nuances of military life, perhaps unveiling new approaches to educating this unique high school population. Since high mobility is endemic to our society, findings may be applied to other highly mobile populations.

APPENDIX G

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS POST QUICK-WRITE

OPTIONAL INFO: Name _____Gender_____

Age_____ Grade_____Ethnicity_____

1. What is like being a high school student from a military family?

2. Tell me a little about your family? Do you all live at the same place?

3. Tell me a little about your friends? Are they all local? Military? Civilian? Has moving affected your relationships? How?

4. How many schools/places have you lived since starting school in kindergarten or first grade? Where (city/state)? How long there?

5. Who have you lived with other than your birth parents? What was your relationship?

6. Who is your immediate caregiver?

7. Have you ever been a caregiver to someone else? Who and how often?

8. Tell me what it's like to have your parent deploy? How often/long does this happen?

9. Why have you chosen to come to an independent study program? How has independent study met your expectations?

10. What grade do you think you should be in? What grade are you in currently?

11. Has your teacher helped you improve your grades, make friends and adjust to school? Please describe.

12. What was your *last* school like? Where was it?

13. Do you get help with your homework?

14. When do you think you will be rotating to another location?

15. Has this program and/or your teacher helped you sort out your future plans? Please describe.

16. What did you like and/or dislike about traditional school?

17. Would you like to return to traditional school or stay in independent study? Why?

18. What can we do to make your learning experience more rewarding for you?

19. Please share any information you feel will help us help you!

APPENDIX H

CHILD ASSENT FORM (13-17 YEARS OF AGE)

Dear Student:

My name is Marsha Schjolberg. Like you, I attend school. I am a doctoral student at the University of California and California State University San Marcos, and I am conducting research to learn about military dependent students' **high school experiences in an independent study environment, and how academic** performance relates to student attitudes about school. My entire purpose is to learn about the needs of military students, and how to make school experiences better.

If you decide that you would like to be in my study, you will be asked to write a short essay on your experiences in school. It should take about 10 minutes. You may also be interviewed. The interview should take about 30 minutes. The interview will just be a casual conversation. I would like to audio tape (voice only; no pictures) our conversation so that I can remember what was said. I will be talking with your teacher and looking at your transcript. Your participation is totally up to you. A final report will be presented to UCSD to meet requirements for my degree and school assignment and the results may be discussed in presentations and research papers, but your name will never be mentioned.

The process is voluntary and there are no negative consequences if you decide to be in my study. Even if you are in my study, you may decide not to answer any question and you may change any answer. You can change your mind at any time, and stop the interview or essay, or ask that the audio is erased. You can withdraw from the study at any time, by telling me. This decision will not affect your involvement in the school, will not be known to anyone else, and will have no consequences.

Students will be chosen for interview at random, so you may not be selected to participate even if the permission slip is signed. If you become upset when sharing your experiences, you will be offered access to free counseling resources to help you work through any issues you may have.

Your name will not be included in my paper, research articles or presentations. No one will know who you are or what you specifically told me. No one will know that specific grades belonged to you. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but will not have your name as part of the quote. All your information will be protected and locked away and no one will know who you are or what you said. The benefit of participating in this study is the chance to improve our knowledge about school experiences of military dependent students so we can make things better for you and the students who are just starting school as well.

Your parent or guardian will have to say it's OK for you to be in the study. After they decide, you get to choose if you want to do it too. If you don't want to be in the

study, no one will be upset with you. If you want to be in the study and change your mind later, that's OK. You can stop at any time.

My telephone number is 760-492-7443 or mschjolber@aol.com. Call me if you have any questions about the study or if you decide you want to change your mind about participating.

The faculty sponsor for this project is Dr. Carolyn Hofstetter at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). Her email address is: chofstetter@ucsd.edu, and her phone number is 858-822-6688.

Any questions regarding your rights as a research participant may be addressed to the UCSD Institutional Review Board Human Subjects (858-455-5050).

Agreement: I have decided to be in the study even though I know that I don't have to do it. I know that I will not be personally identified in the study.

I agree to paragraph writing

_____YES _____NO

I agree to the interview I agree to audio taping

_____YES _____NO _____YES _____NO

Your Signature_____ Your Printed Name_____

APPENDIX I

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO
AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM

My name is Marsha Schjolberg. I am a doctoral student at the University of California and California State University San Marcos, and I am conducting research to learn about military dependent students‘ high school experiences in an independent study environment, and how academic performance relates to student attitudes about school. My entire purpose is to learn about the needs of military students, and how to make school experiences better.

As part of this project, I would like to ask your child to participate in an interview. If you agree to have your child interviewed, I may want to audio record your child‘s comments so I do not forget any of the details. Your child do not have to be audio recorded, but if you agree, please read and indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audio recording, names will not be identified. Your child may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of the recording. Please initial on the lines below.

1. The audio recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.
_____

2. The audio recording can be used for scientific publications.
_____

3. The audio recording can be reviewed at meetings of scientists interested in studying military dependent high school students.
_____

4. The audio recording can be reviewed in public presentations to non-scientific groups.
_____

You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased in full or in part at any time. You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audio recording as indicated above.

Parent Signature Date Witness Date

Student Name:

REFERENCES

Astone, N., & McLanahan, S. (1994). Family structure, residential mobility, and school dropout: A research note. *Demography, 31,* 575-584.

Astor, R. (2010). The building capacity to create highly supportive military-connected schools. Grant funded by Department of Defense (2010).

Audette, R., Algozzine, R., & Warden, M. (1993). Mobility and school achievement. *Psychological Reports, 72,* 701-703.

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development, 67*(3), 1206-1222.

Battistich, V., & Horn, A. (1997). The relationship between students‘ sense of their school as a community and their involvement in problem behaviors. *American Journal of Public Health, 87*(12).

Benard, B. (2004). Resiliency: What we have learned. *West Ed.*

Blum, R. (2005). School connectedness: improving the lives of students. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Cohen, C. (2000). Homeschooling: The teen years. Ten reasons to home school through high school. Prima.

Coleman, J. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology 94,* 120.

Connell, J., & Wellborn, J. (1991). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness: A motivational analysis of self-system processes. *Child Psychology, 23.*

CNN: Dobbs Report. (2007) Education Dropout Rates.

Croninger, R., & Lee, V. (2008). Social capital and dropping out of high school: Benefits to at-risk students of teachers‘ support and guidance. *Teachers College Record, 103*, 548-581.

Department of Defense. (2001). U.S. Army Secondary Education Transition Study.

Department of Defense. (2005). Army Profile.

Department of Defense. (2006). Military Child in Transition and Deployment Study.

Department of Defense. (2007). An Achievable Vision: Report of the Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health.

Department of Defense. (2007). The Psychological Needs of U.S. Military Service members and Their Families: A Preliminary Report.

Department of Defense. (2008). Profile of the Military Community Study.

Department of Defense. (2011). Military: The Early Brief. DoD budget cuts may spare family programs. Retrieved from http://military.com<mewslet @miltnews.com

Dey, I. (1993). Creating categories. *Qualitative data analysis* (94-112). London: Rutledge.

Druian, G. (1986). Effective schooling and at-risk youth: What the research shows. *Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.* Portland, OR.

Drummet, A., Coleman, M., & Cable, S. (2003). Military families under stress: Implications for family life education. *Family Relations, 52*(3), 279-287.

Dye, J., Schatz, I., Rosenberg, B., & Coleman S. (2000). Constant comparison method: A kaleidoscope of data. *The Qualitative Report* [online serial], *4*(1). Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3

Edwards, P., & Young, L. (1992). Beyond parents: Family, community, and school involvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 74*(1), 72-80.

Ellickson, P., & McGuigan, K. (2000). Early predictors of adolescent violence. *American Journal of Public Health, 90*(4), 566-572.

ERIC/CUE Digest. (1991). Highly mobile students: Educational problems and possible solutions. *ERIC/CUE Digest*, *73*(0889-8049).

Faunce, W. (1984). School achievement, social status, self-esteem. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 47,* 3-14.

Felner, R., Primavera, J., & Cauce, A. (1981). The impact of school transitions: A focus for preventive efforts. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 9*(4), 449-459.

Fine, M. (1991). Framing Dropouts. New York, NY: SUNY Press.

Finkel, L, & Ashby, J. (2003). Geographical mobility, family, and maternal variables as related to the psychosocial adjustment of military children. *Military Medicine, 168*(12), 1019-1024.

Finnigan, K. (2004). Evaluation of the charter schools program: Final report. U.S. Department of Education.

Finnigan, K. (2006). Charter high schools: Closing the achievement gap: innovations in education. *U.S. Department of Education.*

Foley, R., & Pang, L. (2006). Alternative education programs: Program and student characteristics. *High School Journal*, *89*(3), *10-21.*

Foster, K. (2008). The transformative potential of teacher care as described by students in a higher education access initiative. *Education and Urban Society. 41,* 104-126.

Franklin, C., Streeter, C., Kim, J., & Tripodi, S. (2007). The effectiveness of a solution-focused, public alternative school for dropout prevention and retrieval. *Children and Schools, 9,* 133-144.

Freudenberg, N., & Ruglis, J. (2007). Reframing school dropout as a public health issue. *Preventing Chronic Disease, Public Health Research, Practice, and Policy, 4*(4).

Government Accounting Office. (2005). (05-952). Military Personnel: Reporting Additional Service Member Demographics Could Enhance Congressional Oversight.

Gay, G. (2000). Culturally Responsive Teaching. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Goddard, R., Hoy, W., & Woolfolk, A. (2004). Collective efficacy beliefs: Theoretical developments, empirical evidence, and future directions. *Educational Researcher, 33*(3), 3-13.

Halpin, D. (1990). The sociology of education and the national curriculum. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 11*(1), 21-35.

Hefling, K. (2009). More military children seeking mental care. *The Associated Press.* Retrieved from http://www.armytimes.com/news.2009/07/

Huebner, A., & Mancini, J. (2005). Adjustments among adolescents in military families when a parent is deployed. *Final Report to the Military Family Research Institute and Department of Defense Quality of Life Office.* Retrieved from http://www.purdue.edu/mfri/pages

Husserl, E. (1990). Ideas pertaining to a pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy. *Kluwer Academic Publishers. The Netherlands.*

Israel, G., Beaulieu, L., & Hartless, G. (2001). The influence of family and community social capital on educational achievement. *Rural Sociology, 66*(1), 43-68.

Jensen, P., Grogan, D., Xenakis, S., & Bain, M. (1989). Father absence: Effects on child and maternal psychopathology. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 28*, 171-175.

Jensen, P., Martin, D., & Watanabe, H. (1996). Children's response to parental separation during Operation Desert Storm. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 35,* 433-441.

Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2004). Educational Research, Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches, 2nd edition, *Pearson Education.*

Kerbow, D. (1996). Patterns of urban student mobility and local school reform. *Journal of Education for Students Placed At-risk, I*(2), 147-169.

Kvale, S. (2006). Dominance through interviews and dialogues. *Qualitative Inquiry, 12,* 480-500.

Lange, C. (1998). Characteristics of alternative schools and programs serving at-risk students. *The High School Journal, 81,* 183-198.

Long, L. (1975). Does migration interfere with children's progress in school? *Sociology of Education, 48,* 369-381.

Military Child Education Coalition. (2004). DMDC Family File, Profile of the Military Community.

Military News. (2011). DoD Budget Cuts May Spare Family Programs. Retrieved from Military.com< Newsltr @miltnews.com>

Mmari, K., Roche, K., Sudhinaraset, M., & Blum, R. (2009). When a parent goes off to war: Exploring the issues faced by adolescents and their families. *Youth and Society, 40*.

Nettles, M., Mucherah, W., & Jones, D. (2000). Understanding resilience: The role of social resources. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at-risk, 5*(1/2), 47.

Newman, J. (1988). What should we do about the highly mobile student? A research brief. Mount Vernon, WA: Educational Service District 189.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self-efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research, 66*(4), 543-578.

Patterson, G., DeBaryshe, B., & Ramsey, E. (1989). A developmental perspective on antisocial behavior. *American Psychologist, 44,* 329-335.

Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pittman, J., & Bowen, G. (1994). Adolescents on the move: Adjustment to family relocation. *Youth and Society*, *26*(1).

Ray, B. (1997). *Strengths of their own: Home schoolers across America.* Salem, OR: National Home Education Research Institute.

Raywid, M. (1994). Alternative schools: The state of the art. *Educational Leadership, 52,* 26-31.

Ream, R. & Rumberger, R. (2008) Student engagement, peer social capital, and school dropouts among Mexican American and non-latino white students. *Sociology of Education.* 81, (109).

Ross, C., Reynolds, J., & Geis, K. (2000). The contingent meaning of neighborhood stability for residents‘ psychological well-being. *American Sociological Review, 65,* 581-597.

Ruiz-de-Velasco, J., & Fix, M. (2000). Overlooked & underserved: Immigrant students in U.S. secondary schools. *The Urban Institute.*

Rumberger, R. (2003). The causes and consequences of student mobility. *Journal of Negro Education, 72*(1).

Rumberger, R., Ghatak, R., Poulos, P., Ritter, R. & Dornbusch, S. (1990). Family influences on dropout behavior in one California high school. *Sociology of Education, 63*(4), 283-299.

Rumberger, R., & Larson, K. (1998). Student mobility and the increased risk of high school dropout. *American Journal of Education, 107*(1), 1-35.

Rumberger, R., Larson, K., Ream, R., & Palardy, G. (1999). The educational consequences of mobility for California students and schools. Policy Analysis for California Education, Berkeley, CA.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*.London. Sage Publications.

Sampson, R., Morenoff, J., Raudenbush, S., & Earls, F. (1999). Beyond social capital: Spatial Dynamics of collective efficacy for children. *American Sociological Review, 64*, 633-660.

Sanderson, D. (2003). Engaging highly transient students. *Education, 123.*

Schapps, E. (2003). *The role of supportive school environments in promoting academic success.* California Department of Education Press. Sacramento.

Schjolberg, M. (2007). *The value of an independent study program on the academic performance of military dependent students at-risk of becoming high school dropouts.* Master's Thesis. California State University, San Marcos.

Schuler, D. (1990). Effects of family mobility on student achievement. *Journal of School Research and Information, 8,* 17-24.

Simpson, G., & Fowler, M. (1994). Geographic mobility and children's emotional/behavioral adjustment and school functioning. *Pediatrics, 93*(2), 303-309.

South, S., & Haynie, D. (2004). Friendship networks of mobile adolescents. *Social Forces, 83,* 315-350.

Spaulding, R. (1964). Personality and social development: Peer and social influences. *Review of Educational Research, 34*(5), 588-598.

Straits, B. (1987). Residence migration and school progress. *Sociology of Education*, 6*0*(1), 34-43.

Swanson, C., & Schneider, B. (1999). Students on the move: Residential and educational mobility in America's schools. *Sociology of Education, 72*(1), 54-67.

Sweeten, G. (2006). Who will graduate? Disruption of high school education by arrest and court involvement. *Justice Quarterly, 23*(4).

Teachman, J., Paasch, K., & Carver, K. (1996). Social capital and dropping out of school early. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 58,* 773-783.

Tucker, C., Marx, J., & Long, L. (1998). Moving on: Residential mobility and children's school lives. *Sociology of Education, 71*(2), 111-129.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2009). *Estimates on number of school aged children and adults in the United States and Puerto Rico.* Retrieved from Uhttp://www.census.gov

U.S. Marine Corps. (2011). Marine Corps Community Services. Retrieved from http://www.usmc-mccs.org/contactus/helpcontactus.cfm

U.S. Navy. (2011). Fleet and Family Workshops. Retrieved from http://www.cnic.navy.mil/navylife.sw

van Kaam, A. (1966). Application of the henominological method. In A. van Kaam, *Existential foundations of psychology*. Lanham, MD; University Press of America.

Viadero, D. (2005). Schools told to help mobile military children feel at home. *Education Week.*

von Eckartsberg, R. (1986*). Life-world experience: Existential-phenomenological research approaches to psychology.* Washington, DC: Center for Advanced Research in Phenomenology & University Press of America.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

Wilson, D., & Elliott, D. (2003). The interface of school climate and school connectedness: An exploratory review and study. Center for Adolescent Health, University of Minnesota, Wingspread Conference. Racine, WI.

Wishart, D., Taylor, A., & Shultz, L. (2006). The construction and production of youth ‗at-risk'. *Journal of Education Policy*, *21*(3), 291-304.

Walter, L. (2004). Is distance education for you? Distance Education and Training Council. Washington, DC.

Yin, R. (1984). The case study crisis: Some answers. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 26,* 58-65.

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research design and methods, fourth edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zehr, M. (2005). Dropping in. *Education Week*, *25*(6), 28-31.