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Leave No Collegian Behind, Negotiated Access to College:

Micropolitics, Expectations, and College-Going Cultures

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by

Jonathan Carvin-Wayne Davis

2020

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Leave No Collegian Behind, Negotiated Access to College:

Micropolitics, Expectations, and College-Going Cultures

by

Jonathan Carvin-Wayne Davis

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Robert Cooper, Chair

Addressing disparities in access to higher education for students from historically marginalized backgrounds has long been the focus of policy makers at the federal, state, and local levels. Recent policy mandates have called into question the role and function of public secondary schools in mitigating disparities in college access. Of note, the overall culture of these school sites has been cited as the critical lever that must be turned in order to address longstanding disparities in college access. Research supports this line of reasoning and suggests school culture plays an instrumental role in fostering students' socio-emotional development, aspirational goals, and academic achievement outcomes. Despite these reported benefits, however, few educational researchers have explored the process by which school actors create and sustain school cultures that bolster these myriad outcomes, thereby leaving unaddressed the process by which this change takes place. To address this gap in the literature, the author of this study investigated the

manner in which school administrators, counselors, and educators in two large public comprehensive secondary schools negotiated college expectations in order to create and sustain college-going cultures *and* how/whether these perceived expectations affected students' college aspirations and behaviors in the college-going process, broadly defined. The author employed a fully mixed concurrent equal status multisite multiple embedded case study design and data from student and teacher surveys, focus group interviews, documents, observations, and field notes in an effort to respond to the study's principal research questions. Using an ecological systems theory and a micropolitical framework that both privileged the salience of processes and the effects of institutional contexts, the author found that school actors struggled to negotiate and agree upon a standard of college expectations, which resulted in the inequitable structuration of opportunities present within schools and largely adversely impacted students with regards to their college aspirations and behaviors in the college-going process. Implications from this study point to the need for policymakers, educational practitioners, and educational researchers to focus more intently on the policy implementation process and the micropolitical ways in which school actors negotiate expectations, power, and finite resources.

The dissertation of Jonathan Carvin-Wayne Davis is approved.

Daniel D. Liou

Michael Seltzer

Thomas M. Philip

Robert Cooper, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2020

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my village of family, friends, mentors, and peers. Each of you has played a vital role in my life and without you, my story would amount to little. To my parents, thank you for challenging me to be excellent, for believing in me, and for showering me with knowledge and wisdom no book could ever impart. To my in-laws, thank you for welcoming me into your family, as your son, and for trusting me with the second most precious gift God has ever created—your daughter. To my siblings, thank you for keeping me humble and for reminding me that a change in titles does not, nor should it ever, amount to a change in the person or what they stand for in life. To my extended family, both domestic and abroad, thank you for blessing me with memories and experiences that forever changed me in ways that escape words. To my mentors, thank you for your sacrifices of time, support, and, most importantly, love. You helped me see the forest from the trees and stay true to my values, beliefs, and purpose in a world where these traits waiver.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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VITA

EDUCATION

M.Ed., Higher Education Administration May 2014
Department of Leadership, Policy & Organizations (Vanderbilt University; Nashville, TN)
Awarded: Distinguished Academic Achievement and Service in Leadership, Policy & Org.

B.A., Philosophy, French minor (*cum laude*) May 2012
Departments of Philosophy & Foreign Languages (Berea College; Berea, KY)

RESEARCH AND ACADEMIC EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

Grad. Student Researcher, UCLA**,** AAP, Research, Assessment, and Evaluation Oct. 2014– Present
Assessing the impact of the Academic Advancement Program on underrepresented minority students' academic achievement outcomes; managing databases; supervising undergraduate research assistants; *Supervisor*: Alice Ho, Ph.D.

Sr. Research Associate, UCLA, Equity and Access Studies in Ed. Project June 2014– Present
Documenting the development of college-going cultures in public secondary schools and how these cultures are sustained over time; *Principal Investigator*: Robert Cooper, Ph.D.

Documenting the professional learning experiences of novice assistant principals working to address inequity in CA primary and secondary schools; *Principal Investigator*: Robert Cooper, Ph.D.

Grad. Student Researcher, UCLA, Summer Training for Excellence in Ed. Research June 2019–Present
Designed, developed, and co-taught an intensive 7-week course on quantitative methods in education research for undergraduate students from HBCUs; *Principal Investigators*: Robert Cooper, Ph.D. & Kimberley Gomez, Ph.D.

Applied Statistics Data Consultant, UCLA, Center for Policing Equity May– Aug. 2016
Assessed the relationship between police officers' attitudes and behaviors in a large metropolitan city's police department

FELLOWSHIPS

University of California's President's Dissertation Year Fellowship Program ($35,000) 2018
Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholarship ($224,000; *full-tuition and stipend*) 2008 – 2018
Conrad N. Hilton Summer Scholar Fellowship (UCLA; awarded, but declined; $6,800) 2017
Graduate Summer Research Mentorship Fellowship (UCLA; $12,000) 2015 & 2016
Merit Fellowship **(**UCLA; $18,000**)** 2014

PUBLICATIONS

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Kortegast, C. & **Davis, J.C.W**. (2017). Theorizing the self: Digital storytelling, applying theory, and multimodal learning. *Journal of College Teaching,* 1–9.

Cooper, R. & **Davis, J. C.W.** (2015). Problematizing the discourse: A quantitative analysis of African

American high school students' academic aspirations and motivation to excel. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *84*(3), 311–332.

Refereed Book Chapters

Alexander, C., **Davis, J. C.W**. & Tunstall, J. (in press). Silenced voices no longer: The import of summer bridge programs in bolstering academic and social integration. University of the Free State. South Africa.

TECHNICAL REPORTS

Cooper, R. & **Davis, J.C.W**. (2016). Clear college expectations. CSU's California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP). Long Beach: CA.

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SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Invited Talks

Davis, J.C.W. (2018, May). Finding my personal legend, my mission in life. Keynote address shared at the Carter G. Woodson Legacy Awards Banquet. Berea, KY.

Davis, J.C.W. (2018, June). College and Career Advisory Panel. Remarks shared at RCCG Jesus Embassy Los Angeles' Summer Algebra Institute's College & Career Advisory Panel.

International Refereed Conferences

Cooper, R., **Davis, J.C.W.***, & Salazar, M. (2017, September). Dreams deferred no longer: A mixed-methods exploration of the importance of a college-going culture and a caring school environment. Research paper presented at the World Education Leadership Symposium. Züg, Switzerland. [ORAL PRESENTATION]

National Refereed Conferences

Davis, J.C.W. *, Cooper, R., & Otis, B.* (2019, April). Negotiated Access to College: Micropolitics and College-Going Cultures. Research paper presented at the American Educational Research Association's Annual Conference. Toronto, Canada. [ORAL PRESENTATION].

Cooper, R. & **Davis, J.C.W. *** (2018, November). Developing institutional care. Research paper presented at the California Educational Research Association's Annual Conference. Anaheim, CA. [ORAL PRESENTATION].

* denotes presenting author when multiple authors present

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

For decades, students from underserved backgrounds (that is, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds) have encountered considerable obstacles on their path to higher education, whether legal (Allen & Jewell, 2002), academic (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010; Welton & Martinez, 2014), financial (Flores, 2010; Davis, Nagle, Richards, & Awokoya, 2013), informational (Avery, 2010; Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012), or structural (Bedolla, 2010; O'Day & Smith, 2016; Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). Improving preparation for and access to higher education has long been a focus of federal (e.g., Higher Education Act of '65) and state (e.g., Common Core State Standards) level educational policies. Yet, even with targeted policies and interventions, profound disparities persist in postsecondary matriculation rates between underserved student groups and their peers (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Kena et al., 2016). The recent reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA '65), titled *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA 2015), signaled a departure from past policy foci and a shift towards investigating, more intensively, the role of public schools in ameliorating this issue. Under the new federal mandate, states must now ensure all *public* schools meet *at least one* self-created indicator of quality *or* student success that "allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance…[and] is valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide" (ESSA, 2015, p.38). In order to meet this mandate, states have been permitted to include measures of postsecondary readiness, school climate and safety, and access to and completion of advanced coursework—among others (ESSA, 2015). A few concerns abound, however.

First, college readiness lacks a universally agreed upon definition and form of measurement. Broadly, research suggests that students are college ready when they are able to enroll in and succeed at a degree granting college or university without the need for remediation (Conley, 2008; Martorell & McFarlin, 2011). However, different definitions have led to the proliferation of measurement tools. For instance, Conley's (2008) model of college readiness, widely cited as one of the most extensive conceptualizations on the topic, is challenging to measure given its focus on students' cognitive abilities, their content knowledge, their self-management skills, *and* their college knowledge. In short, it is too broad. On the other hand, scholars have focused on standardized tests (e.g., Advanced Placement Exams, College Board, and ACT, etc.) and completion of high school coursework as measures of college-readiness (Klasik & Strayhorn, 2018; Maruyama, 2012). Conversely, some suggest these measures do not fully encompass what it means to be *college ready*. This lack of consensus has led to the adoption of multiple state-based measures of college readiness (see Blume & Zumeta, 2014; Welch, Feygin, & English, 2018). For instance, some states measure/assess a student's readiness for college through single measures of performance, like completion of AP/IB coursework and exams and college entrance exams, whereas other states, like California, embody a multitude of metrics (e.g., AP/IB exams, dual enrollment, A-G requirements, CTE pathway, and standardized tests). As such, it is probable that even if states demonstrate increased readiness in college-bound students, discrepancies in readiness will continue with such disparate measures.

Second, in an attempt to meet the aforementioned federal mandate, states have overlooked the existing context of public schools and how to change them. To elaborate, California recently introduced a number of indicators that speak to public school quality and student success, some of which include a new College/Career Indicator (CCI) as well as an

indicator of School Climate (see CDE, 2018). Though descriptive in how students can demonstrate readiness and how schools can measure climate, discussions of how to change a school's climate or to ensure students have access to the knowledge, information, and skills needed to demonstrate readiness are lacking from these indicators and the broader literature on college readiness. For many students, public schools are sites of suffering (Dumas, 2014). For others, schools function as sorting mechanisms, structuring learning opportunities in ways that run counter to the notion of 'choice' (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). The mere introduction of the aforementioned indicators and policy mandates does little to acknowledge this reality or to change it.

Considering new federal and state policy mandates, one argues that a renewed focus on school contexts and how to change them must feature prominently in discussions of college readiness. Klasik and Strayhorn (2018) contend "education is replete with attempts to make performance legible to policymakers—eliminating the idiosyncrasies of individual school context for the sake of producing general trends and helpful rules of thumb" (p. 336). Such attempts ignore existing school contexts and treat schools as neutral spaces where school actors passively adopt policy measures with fidelity and ease. Research on educational micropolitics suggests otherwise (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Malen, 1994). In essence, a study of school reform and the implementation of school policy must focus keenly on school politics and the political actors within these spaces. These concerns notwithstanding, one suggests a turn towards research on school culture. A shift towards school culture places bounds around a discussion of schooling contexts in ways that lead to greater analytic specificity.

Purpose

Long touted as an area worth further exploring, educational researchers have focused their conceptual and methodological attention on nuancing the relationship between a school's culture and students' educational outcomes. Specifically, scholars have explored how public high schools' college-going cultures affect students' academic preparedness and readiness for college and have reported positive findings. College-going cultures are schooling contexts—*intentionally* designed by school actors—that prepare all students for college (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). These school settings are context specific, meaning a college-going culture at one school site may differ significantly from another site. Over time, scholars have defined the term 'college-going cultures' (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002), explored how students' socio-emotional needs and academic outcomes are addressed and affected in these schooling contexts (Farmer-Hinton, 2011; McKillip, Godfrey, & Rawls, 2013), framed the importance of caring teacher practices (Knight-Diop, 2010), and documented increased student participation in key college-going activities (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011; Perry, 2013). Unfortunately, the above-cited scholars have focused rather exclusively on the manner in which college-going cultures affect students' educational outcomes and socio-emotional development at the expense of documenting how educators, counselors, administrators and staff develop and sustain these institutional cultures over time.

To elaborate, the above-cited scholars have not engaged the idea that schools are "arenas of struggle," "where actors use their power to advance their interests and ideals; where conflict, competition, cooperation, compromise, and co-optation coexist; and where both public and private transactions shape organizational priorities, processes, and outcomes" (Malen & Vincent, 2014, p.4). This dearth of research raises concerns in that examples of how educators, counselors, administrators, and (district) staff negotiate power and diverse beliefs to develop and

sustain college-going cultures within organizations remains understudied. In turn, the ways beliefs, or expectations, intersect with power dynamics and impact traditionally underserved student groups also remains underexplored—a point of consideration scholars have problematized (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Considering the current national policy focus on college and career readiness and school climate, one contends that this represents a notable gap in the literature. To address this gap, the author investigated, first, how school administrators, counselors, educators, and (district) staff in two large *public* California high schools negotiated expectations in an effort to create and sustain a college-going culture that would improve students' pathways to higher education. Second, the author investigated the manner in which these school actors' expectations affected students' aspirations to attend college and ultimately their behaviors and decisions to do so. This investigation unearthed multiple implications for policy, practice, and research, some of which include a way to measure college readiness.

Research Questions

Discussions of college-going cultures often decenter the actors and groups operating within schools, thereby ignoring the salience of these actors' power and beliefs, particularly their expectations about college access, and the role each play in the cultural reformation process of schools (Athanases, Achinstein, Curry, & Ogawa, 2016; Knight-Manuel et al., 2016). That said, there is a need for research that accounts for the ways in which school actors negotiate expectations about college access and preparation—that is a focus on *process*. Further, more research is needed that documents the salience of these school cultures, in particular the relationship between school actors' expectations and students' college aspirations and their behaviors in the college-going and college-choice processes—a focus on *outcomes*. The author

endeavored to address these gaps in the literature with the present study. This study followed the empirical research tradition and was therefore guided by the following questions:

1. How, if at all, do school actors negotiate college expectations in order to develop and sustain a college-going culture?
2. How, if at all, do expectations regarding college influence, or relate to, students' college aspirations and their behaviors in the college-choice and college-going processes?

Key terms used in this study are worth expounding upon here. To begin, schools are political organizations where various actors, or interest groups (Johnson, 2001), determine the direction of the organization and where political negotiations are a central part of this process (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). Scholars have referred to the manner in which these actors interact with one another as *micropolitics* (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Blase & Björk, 2010; Malen, 1994).

Implicit in the first research question is the assumption these actors, or groups, regard their role in addressing disparities in college access and preparation differently. With this assumption in mind, the author studied how these actors negotiated college expectations and preparation for *all* students. Focusing on school actors' college expectations was of the utmost importance considering expectations work as self-fulfilling prophecies and impact the opportunity structure available to students within schools (Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rist, 2000). The second and third research question stem from the human ecology research tradition (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1994), wherein one acknowledges that students' surrounding contexts affect their development, or in this case college aspirations, behaviors and decisions in the college-going and college-choice processes (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Iloh, 2018; Perna, 2006; Pitcher & Shahjahan, 2017). For the purposes of this study, the author defines aspirations as goals regarding future participation in higher education (Cooper,

2009; Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; Strayhorn, 2009) and explores the relationship between expectations, aspirations, and behaviors. Investigating the factors that influence aspirations, whether school or family, allows one to highlight gaps between opportunity and outcomes that might otherwise remain unearthed.

Advanced Organizing Statement

Forthcoming chapters are structured as follows. In **Chapter 2**, the author reviews literature that nuances the relationship between a college-going culture and students' college aspirations and behaviors. More specifically, the author delves into research on educational micropolitics and school actors' expectations and attempts to bring the overarching themes present within these larger bodies of scholarship in conversation, one with another. That is to say, this review of the literature is integrative in nature. In **Chapter 3**, the author opens with a discussion of policy contexts and urban schools. Thereafter, one introduces and discusses the relevance, affordances and limitations of two theories: ecological systems theory and micropolitical analyses of education. When used as a framework, these theories enabled the author to investigate the culture of, and the actors present within, two large, *public* high schools in ways that challenge existing organizational contexts and give rise to hope and the potential for organizational change. In **Chapter 4**, the author re-introduces the study's research questions, explains the appropriateness of the methodological approach employed to address said questions, presents key information regarding the sites under study, and discusses sampling, instrumentation, data collection and data analysis procedures. **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6** introduce the sites under study, Malcolm X High School (hereafter, *MXHS*) and Southside High School (hereafter, *SHS*), respectively, and findings for the study. **Chapter 7** provides an

occasion to contextualize these findings by placing them in conversation, one with another, and by situating them within the broader educational policy and school reform discourse. In **Chapter 8**, the author discusses limitations and the study's significance in the present policy, practice, and research context and concludes.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In the paragraphs that follow, the author integrates major themes from research on school culture, college-going cultures, educational micropolitics, educational aspirations, college expectations, and college-going and choice processes. In this integrative review of the literature, the author takes special care to scaffold the discussion surrounding major themes from the aforementioned areas. A few points are worth mentioning here as it pertains to the forthcoming review of the literature.

First, this review of the literature is by no means exhaustive. The author has selected seminal texts from each area that speak directly to the study's research questions. Peer reviewed journal articles, books chapters, and technical reports were carefully selected from three principal sources, those being: 1) published reference lists, 2) online library databases, and 3) online repositories (e.g., Google Scholar). The author used the earlier mentioned thematic keywords to narrow the search process.

Second, the use of the term school culture should in no way be conflated with the term school climate. As concepts, school culture and school climate differ and overlap in meaningful, yet subtle ways (see Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Stolp & Smith, 1995). In essence, their relationship can best "be represented by two circles" where "[c]ulture includes climate, but climate does not encompass all aspects of culture" (Stolp & Smith, 1995, p.16). As such, the author's primary focus on school culture is meant to differ from but not exclude a conversation surrounding school climate.

Third, the author's use of the phrase students from underserved backgrounds is a moniker for Students of Color (e.g., Latinx, African American, Native American, Asian and Pacific

Islander, etc.) and students from low-income backgrounds. Research clearly suggests that students from these groups experience school in ways that differ notably from their peers (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). Focusing on members from these groups provides an opportunity to identify gaps in the opportunity structure within schools and remedy them. *Fourth*, missing from this review of the literature is a discussion on *college readiness* (Conley, 2008; Blume & Zumeta, 2014; Welch, Feygin, & English, 2018). The author viewed this as an outcome/bi-product of developing a college-going culture at each of the sites under investigation and elected instead to discuss this concept in **Chapter 7** when discussing findings for each site.

And *fifth*, missing also from this review of the literature is a discussion of social and cultural capital. Although these elements have proven to be key in the college-going and choice process (Carey, 2016; Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Tierney & Venegas, 2006; Valadez, 2008; Yosso, 2005), the author elected to forgo a formal discussion/review of informational networks and social and cultural capital here considering the scope of this investigation. However, the author does engage such ideas in **Chapter 7** when discussing findings from each site.

School Cultures, College Aspirations, and College-Going Cultures

Since the mid-20th century, educational researchers have explored the relationship between students' schooling environments, their aspirational aims, and their academic achievement outcomes. Largely, researchers have found that student success, writ largely, is not the sole product of individual merit, but rather the bi-product of background characteristics, motivational considerations, and institutional contexts, or *school culture* (Haynes, Emmons, & Ben-Avie, 1997; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Maxwell, 2016; Nelson, 1972; O'Malley, Voight, Renshaw, & Eklund, 2015). A concept originating from organizational development (Peterson &

Deal, 2009), school culture "embraces not only the immediate environment [that people are exposed to] but also what people believe and value…" (Stolp & Smith, 1995, p.16). That is, a school's culture imparts value and meaning to those individuals exposed to it and prescribes "the ways in which people should act ... Culture, thus defines what is true and good" (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987, p. 37). In short, a school's culture relays messages to students and other institutional actors about *what* is valued and *who* is valued. In turn, these messages are then relayed through school actors (e.g., their expectations) and the school's structure (i.e., curriculum, discipline policies, post-secondary pathways, visual aesthetics, traditions, etc.; Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016). As such, it stands to reason that a positive school culture, and one where matriculating to college is valued and communicated, can exert a positive influence on students' aspirations, their achievement, and their overall preparation for and matriculation to college (Bryan, Farmer-Hinton, Rawls, &Woods, 2017; O'Malley et al., 2015; Stewart, 2007).

To elaborate, developmental psychologists argue that adolescents' thoughts about their future shape and influence choices and behaviors, which presumably affect school achievement (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Scholars have employed numerous terms to describe the ways in which youth discuss their future, some of which include: hoped-for selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), educational aspirations (Nelson, 1972), educational expectations and future-oriented cognitions (Beal & Crockett, 2010). Scholars contend, moreover, that students' conceptions of the future develop in an ongoing, reciprocal process. That is, as students participate in various programs and activities and interact with individuals, they receive feedback that shapes and re-shapes these conceptions for the future in ways that are often more realistic and grounded in their abilities (Beal & Crockett, 2010). Fortunately, the relationship between these future oriented cognitions and later adult educational attainment is positive and strong.

Unfortunately, some of the experiences and interactions that students have delimit their aspirations rather than foster them. This is especially true for what transpires in schools and with school actors (see Howard, 2003).

Cooper (2009) investigated the relationship between these idealistic preferences for the future and salient contextual factors, those being: school, peer, and family. In general, the author found that students' college aspirations changed over time and differed across racial and gendered identities. Specific to schools, however, Cooper (2009) found that participation in vocational and general high school curricular programs were negatively associated with whether 12th graders aspired to complete at least a bachelor's degree. That is, as students participated in these curricular pathways, their future college aspirations were likely to decline. Lack of rigor and academic preparation for post-secondary education are potential reasons why Cooper (2009) observed this type of relationship (see Bryant, 2015; Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). In addition, Cooper (2009) found that when students perceived that neither teachers nor counselors expected them to attend college, their college aspirations were likely to decline. This pattern is best described by self-expectancy theory, or the belief that expectations work in self-fulfilling ways (Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rist, 2000). In this case, low expectations can lead students to struggle academically and disengage from the learning process—both factors that can ultimately derail students' college aspirations.

Conversely, research also points to within school factors that contribute to development and actualization of students' college aspirations. For instance, visits to the school counselor *often* play an integral role in students applying to college (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Robinson & Roksa, 2016). Not only do counselors impart valuable information and resources students need as they begin preparing for college and engaging in the college-going process,

these interactions and relationships are *often* (but not always*)* grounded in high expectations for students. In addition, research suggests that peers can play a significant and positive role in bolstering students' college aspirations, influencing where students' decide to attend college, and communicating relevant college information (Cooper & Davis, 2015; Holland, 2011; Sokatch, 2006). Lastly, students' overall level of attachment to their school can play a positive role in supporting the formation of college aspirations (Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). The aforementioned findings highlight how school cultures can function both in positive and negative ways when measured by their impact upon students' college aspirations. However, the focus in the literature has largely been on the relationship between school culture and students' college aspirations, thereby leaving the relationship between a school's college-going culture and students' college aspirations not well defined.

Schooling environments where matriculating to college is the primary aim have been referred towards as college-going cultures (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Howard, 2003; Knight-Diop, 2010; McClafferty, McDonough, & Núñez, 2002; McClafferty-Jarsky, McDonough, & Núñez, 2009; McKillip, Godrey, & Rawls, 2013; Schneider, 2007; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). College-going cultures are school settings that are "accessible to all students and [are] saturated with ever present information and resources and on-going formal and informal conversations" that help *all* students in their journey of "preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from postsecondary academic institutions…" (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009, p. 26). Though specifically and intentionally designed to ensure students are college ready, these schooling environments are purported to play a central role in the development of students' college aspirations. Scholars have found a positive and statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of a college-going culture (i.e.,

their expectations and other key factors) and students' college aspirations (see Roderick, Coca, & Nagoaka, 2011).

However, less known is what actually transpires in these school settings and the overall impact it has upon students. This is especially relevant because students from underserved backgrounds have high levels of college aspirations (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006; Cooper, 2009; Freeman, 1997, 1999; Howard, 2003; Kiyama, 2010; Myers & Myers, 2012; Stewart, Stewart, & Simons, 2007). Yet, they continue to matriculate to college at low rates (see Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Kena et al., 2016). With the present investigation, the author hopes to illuminate better the relationship between a college-going culture and students' college aspirations. By doing so, one can better map gaps that exist between aspirations, opportunities, and outcomes and more effectively develop and implement strategies that remedy such issues.

College-Going Cultures, School Actors, and Micropolitics

Over the past two decades, educational researchers have increasingly focused their conceptual and empirical gaze on college-going cultures in public secondary schools and their impact on students' preparation for and matriculation to college. As this body of literature has grown with time, a few concerning themes have begun to emerge within the college-going culture corpus. First, scholars have focused rather intently on the effects of college-going cultures in schools with specific characteristics (i.e., small size, magnet schools, schools of choice, charter schools). Notably, educational researchers studying the effects of college-going cultures have found and argued that these schooling contexts prove most effective in small settings where school actors are better able to develop strong relationships with students and tailor instructional practices to meet students' needs (Athanases et al., 2016; Farmer-Hinton, 2011; Farmer-Hinton & Holland, 2008; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Knight-Diop, 2010;

Knight-Manuel et al., 2016; McKillip et al., 2013). The benefits of these strong interpersonal relationships, as scholars have found, materialized in students receiving more support in the college-going process and gaining acceptance to and enrolling in college at high rates. Other scholars have found that school actors have greater voice in the decision-making processes and structures of such schools (Malen & Vincent, 2014). Conversely, scholars have found that devoid of significant ideological change among school actors, which in turn is reflected throughout the school culture, small schools can also function as sites where inequities are reproduced across racialized lines (Liou & Rojas, 2018). Unfortunately, this narrow focus has left unaddressed the potential to change the culture of large, comprehensive high schools. These institutional contexts can evolve, change, and be changed over time.

Second, scholars have focused rather exclusively on the effects of these schooling environments at the expense of documenting the ways in which school actors fundamentally change these schooling contexts. That is, the process that school actors undergo to change a school's college-going culture have not been effectively investigated. To elaborate, Knight-Manuel et al. (2016) explored the impact of a professional development program on school actors' beliefs and knowledge of college-going cultures, as well as their practices to develop these cultures in their respective schools. The authors found that "participants' roles in schools affected ways they envisioned creating a culturally relevant, schoolwide [sic], college-going culture" (Knight-Manuel et al., 2016, p. 18). The authors provided examples of the different ways in which counselors, administrators and teachers uniquely helped prepare students for college. Unfortunately, Knight-Manuel et al. (2016) did not address how and/or whether program participants (n=18) from seven school sites negotiated, or even discussed, their respective visions for change and unique practices with their colleagues upon returning to their home institutions.

Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident but rather a reoccurring and problematic theme in the literature on college-going cultures (see Athanases et al., 2016; McKillip et al., 2013). Scholars purport that school actors can change a school's culture when they work together, engage in systems thinking, and interrogate assumptions, norms, and values shared by those who make up these organizations (Peterson & Deal, 2009; Stolp & Smith, 1995). This is especially important in large school settings. Here, the author suggests a turn to educational micropolitics in the study of college-going cultures, largely for its utility in mapping the ways in which school actors, especially those in large schooling environments, approach changing a school's culture.

Educational micropolitics is the study of power, conflict, competition, and the policy making process that unfolds within and around schools and among educators, administrators, and other school actors (Marshall & Scribner, 1991). Studying micropolitics affords one the occasion to assess how school actors negotiate diverse ideologies in an effort to facilitate change in schools (Achinstein, 2002). Scholars contend that in order to understand change within schools one must first understand and view these organizations as spaces immersed in power and power relationships (Blase & Björk, 2010; Willower, 1991). In short, schools should be thought of as 'arenas of struggle,' or contexts "where actors use their power to advance their interests and ideals; where conflict, competition, cooperation, compromise, and co-optation coexist; and where both public and private transactions shape organizational priorities, processes, and outcomes" (Malen & Vincent, 2014, p. 4). School actors are generally resistant of change efforts that do not align with their ideologies and that encroach upon their primary objectives (see Armstrong, Tuters, & Carrier, 2013; Corbett, Fireston, & Rossman, 1987). Reimagining and developing a school's college-going culture is an extensive change effort. Unfortunately, teachers' beliefs and objectives are not actively and explicitly investigated in the literature on

college-going cultures, nor the ways in which school actors negotiate these potentially conflicting perspectives. As the size of a school and the number of actors within a school increase so too does the opportunity for 'power, conflict, and competition' to emerge and thereby stunt change efforts (Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2010; Malen & Vincent, 2014).

Employing a micropolitical perspective in investigations of college-going cultures has the potential to amend the ways in which policymakers, school site actors, and educational researchers understand and approach change efforts of this sort and within large, comprehensive public secondary schools. While these sites have historically been seen as sites of failure (see Saltman, 2014), sites that cause trauma and suffering (see Dumas, 2014) and sites that reproduce inequity (see Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010), they can represent so much more. They can be sites of validation, empowerment, and liberation. Reimagining public schools in this way is a thought project; developing public schools into such places is a political project, albeit a difficult one. Nonetheless, it is a project worth undertaking. This investigation sought to elucidate this crucial work and the ways in which school actors approached and made sense of such efforts.

College-Going Culture, Micropolitics, and College Expectations

While a focus on micropolitics offers a path forward, what remains less clear is where the focus should lie considering the scope of schools as organizations and the complexity of a school's culture, particularly a college-going culture. McClafferty, McDonough, and Núñez (2002) are credited for the introduction of a *college culture*—a term that has since evolved into college-going culture—and for theorizing that such schooling environments were comprised of nine essential characteristics, those being: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty involvement, family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. While all of these characteristics are

essential, one in particular is of most interest, that being *clear expectations*. McClafferty, McDonough, and Núñez's (2002) firmly believed that "the expectations that teachers and counselors have of students are integral to the development and maintenance of college aspirations" (p. 13). In addition, these authors argued that when present and high, educators' expectations of students would help guide practice and the development and implementation of strategic plans, vision and mission statements, and institutional policies that further support students in meeting their aspirations (McClafferty, McDonough, & Núñez, 2002). In short, expectations serve as the foundation upon which the school's structure is based.

While school actors' college expectations have been widely studied in educational research, the relationship between these dispositions and school reform efforts discussed throughout this review of the literature largely remain understudied (see Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016). This is problematic in that the expectations school actors have of students "translate into the interpersonal relationships, learning environments, and the opportunity structure that assist students to meet these standards" (Liou & Rojas, 2016, p. 382). That is to say, when teachers and other school actors do not have high college expectations for students, it can adversely impact students (Bryan, Farmer-Hinton, Rawls, & Woods, 2017; Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rist, 2000; Rojas & Liou, 2017) and potentially thwart efforts to develop and sustain college-going (McClafferty, McDonough, & Núñez, 2002). Given these many considerations, one contends that the focus should be on school actors' college expectations, or their "internal beliefs and attitudes about students and their intellectual promise to meet those standards" (Liou, 2016, p.84). A focus on school actors' college expectations meshes well with a focus on educational micropolitics. However, what influence, if any, do these beliefs and attitudes exert upon students as they navigate the college-going and choice processes?

College Expectations and Behaviors and Choices

Attending college fairs, visiting college campuses, talking to school counselors, applying for financial aid and scholarships, and applying to college are a few of the many steps students must engage in as they attempt to actualize their college aspirations by navigating the *college-going process*. Ultimately, students must weigh admissions' and scholarship offers, consider institutional fit/match, and school location, among other factors, before selecting where they will attend college. This is known as the *college-choice process*. Research suggests that underserved student groups engage in the college-going process in ways that do not ensure their competitive eligibility for selective colleges and universities (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012; Executive Office of the President, 2014; Hoxby & Avery, 2012; Roderick, Cocoa, & Nagaoka, 2011; Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). In addition, frameworks that model students' progress through this process—some of which include Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) three-step linear model (pre-disposition, search, choice), Perna's (2000) social and cultural capital econometric model, Pitcher and Shahjahan's (2017) gustatory lemonade model, and Iloh's (2018) cyclical, time-opportunity-information ecological model—largely leave unaddressed the experiences and the individuals with whom students interact in schools. A focus on schools and the influence of school actors' expectations in these central processes is worthwhile.

To elaborate, school actors' expectations operate within an ecological system comprised of institutional structure, school culture, and student agency (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016). These central elements interrelate and create the conditions and contexts where students' either meet the high expectations school actors set for them or wither under the weight of apathy and low expectations. As such, it stands to reason that in a school where matriculating to any post-secondary educational institution is the purported aim/mission of the school, educators will

communicate expectations to students that align with said mission and students will perceive these expectations and, in turn, act upon them in measurable ways (i.e., engaging in the college-going process). For instance, Bryan, Farmer-Hinton, Rawls, and Woods (2017) found that as students reported frequent discussions of college expectations with educators and interactions around college talk, the likelihood they would attend college increased and was statistically significant. In short, these authors found that expectations and the communication of salient college information "translated into an action or set of actions that impacted going to college" (Bryan et al., 2016, p.102). That is, these outcomes were reflective of the strength of the various institutional elements that supported college-going within the school. Focusing on schools and school actors' expectations can help elucidate gaps in the opportunity structure that leave some students unable to participate effectively in the college-going and choice processes.

Discussion

Public schools are impacted by the larger socio-political context within which they are situated (Milner, 2012). Unfortunately, these external factors are often reflected within schools, which, in turn, then function as sites of production and reproduction (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010; Dixon, Royal, & Henry, 2014). Central in this (re)production process is a school's culture and institutional structure, as well as school actors. As documented throughout this review of the literature, a school's culture and structure, and school actors, communicate important messages to students. In addition, students meet the expectations school actors set for them, whether high or low and act upon the messages communicated through the culture and structure of the school. As such, the author has argued that by refocusing/changing a school's culture and structure to a college-going culture can help address disparities in college access and preparation. However, to do so requires the collective efforts of all institutional stakeholders. Educators can create these

institutional contexts and the conditions where all students perceive and experience high educational expectations, can aspire for college, and can actively work towards actualizing their aspirations. Less clear is what this process looks like when school actors negotiate expectations and endeavor to develop and sustain a college-going culture that improves students' pathways to college. When employed, the framework presented in the forthcoming chapter should help bring about greater clarity in this process.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In terms of scope, recent estimates suggest that nearly fifteen million students attended public high schools in the United States throughout the 2016-2017 academic year (Kena et al., 2016). In California, public high school enrollment accounted for the largest share of the national total, roughly thirteen percent, or two million students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Yet, concerns abound regarding the education students receive in the nation's public high schools (Bryant, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Warren, 2014). These concerns often surface in the form of noteworthy data trends and performance indicators. For instance, California recently experienced a record high in graduation rates (Torlakson, 2016). Approximately eighty-three percent of the entering 2011-2012 cohort graduated within four years, which represented a near two-percentage point increase from the prior year (Torlakson, 2016).

Yet, when one disaggregates these rates by racial group, ability status and salient background characteristics, it becomes clear that African Americans (70.8%), Latinx (78.5%), English Language Learners (69.4%), and students from low-income backgrounds (77.7%) graduate at lower rates than their White (88%), Asian (92.6%), Pacific Islander (82.2%), and middle-income peers (Torlakson, 2016). In some cases, percentage point differences reach twenty points. These trends signal a problem—one that policymakers in California have attempted to address through the introduction of new policy measures. With that said, in this chapter, the author focuses on the role, purpose, and salience of educational policy and policy implementation. Throughout, one discusses the role of educational policy in urban contexts and urban schools, considering the location of the two sites under study. In addition, the author introduces and provides an overview of notable theories in the politics of education field and lays

claim to why they fall short in serving as viable theoretical lenses in this study and for the recent adoption/implementation of the earlier mentioned policy mandates. To conclude, the author introduces micropolitical analyses of education (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Malen, 1994; Marshall & Scribner, 1991) and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1994) as two theories that complicate the introduction of the earlier mentioned federal and state policy mandates and that suggest a pathway forward, while also paying attention to the affordances and limitations of this framework.

Educational Policies as Statements of Purpose and Value

Since the early 20th century, the United States has moved from industrialization to deindustrialization and, now, to globalization (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, & Cunningham-Sabot, 2012). This rapid progression has called into question the purpose and function of schooling, magnified the importance of educational attainment, and placed considerable pressure on public educational institutions—particularly secondary schools—to produce an educated workforce (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010; Warren, 2014). As the needs of the country have changed over time, public schools have struggled to make adjustments to structure, curricular content, and have not always served the most underserved students well. Tasked with educating all students, it remains clear that public schools, whether primary or secondary, serve an important role in the United States. However, as Plank and Boyd (1994) suggest, "the diversity of goals that Americans seek to achieve through the educational systems leads inevitably to conflict over the relative priority to be assigned to different objects" (p.264). Fundamental questions like, 'who should go to school', 'what should be the purposes of schooling', 'what should children be taught', 'who should decide issues of school direction and policy', and 'who should pay' (Stout, Tallerico, & Scriber, 1994) are seldom answered explicitly,

but rather are communicated implicitly in and through educational policies. As such, educational policies become statements of purpose and value.

To elaborate, in **Chapter 1**, the author outlined the new federal mandate regarding postsecondary readiness and school climate (see ESSA, 2015), as well as the state level indicators introduced in California (see CDE, 2018). Each of these educational policies address the questions of 'what should be the purposes of schooling,' particularly at the secondary level, and 'what should children be taught'? In this way, the aforementioned educational policies serve as a response to a problem that warrants attention, specifically the lack of access to postsecondary education for all students, especially those from underserved backgrounds. Further, these policies were introduced on the public's behalf, and they outline a goal—that being, broader access and improved postsecondary readiness (Birkland, 2014). As such, these policies have become statements of purpose and value in the conversation on how best to improve access to and readiness for college. Nonetheless, the mere introduction of policies does not guarantee their success.

Implementing Educational Policies

Efforts to reform public schools and improve educational outcomes for underserved students are not new but rather are reoccurring. Since the late-1970's, waves of educational reform initiatives have been introduced and have largely failed to meet their stated objectives (Blase & Björk, 2010; DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). Some point to discrepancies in funding and human capital (Sherman, 2008), overreach (Heilig, Muhammad, & Tillman, 2014), and scale (Anyon, 2005; Lipman & Haines, 2007) as the leading reasons why externally mandated policies fail, whether federal or state. However, often missing from the broader discourse on educational policy is the recognition that all policies fail when school actors are unable to implement them

with fidelity (Malen, 1994; Marshall & Scribner, 1991; Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). Scholars have long argued that "externally imposed initiatives to change and reform schools must contend with existing internal political cultures that promote and protect the school's status quo" (Blase & Björk, 2010, p.241). This argument stems from the belief that schools are political organizations and the actors within schools—whether administrators, teachers, or staff—use their power to "determine which issues will be viewed as illogical, irrational, and wrong thinking," thereby, "defining the acceptable reality" (Marshall & Scribner, 1991, p.351). In this way, school actors remake educational policies in ways that more closely align with their perceived purpose and values for education or fail to adopt/implement those policies that radically depart from either of these perspectives. Greater emphasis on how school actors implement policies within local contexts is likely to ensure greater success of policy mandates. However, what role, if any, does space play in the policy implementation process?

Educational Policies, Urban Contexts and Urban Schools

Issues of race, class, and space complicate conversations surrounding the purpose of public schooling and the implementation of educational policies. Dixon, Royal, and Henry (2014) shine an important light on this ongoing conversation when they state …

> Some continue to argue that public schooling was never intended to provide a transition for the populations they served beyond their social standing—that urban schools, in particular, were created for social reproduction of the White, wealthy power structure and, therefore, are not intended to be used for African Americans to transcend their social positions. (Kindle Location 14695)

This harkens back to the belief and observation that public schools, especially those situated in urban contexts, function as sorting mechanisms (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). The conversation extends beyond a mere discussion of the purpose of schooling when discussing race, class, and space. That is, many large urban cities (e.g., Detroit, Chicago, etc.) have undergone a

considerable degree of change over the past fifty years. On one hand, deindustrialization and other factors have led to stark declines in public investment in these cities (Pedroni, 2011), whereas, globalization has "been concentrating resources, key infrastructure and intellectual assets in 'global cities', which acts as magnets for population and skills" (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012, p. 213). To counter the effects of deindustrialization, policymakers and industry actors in Chicago and Detroit, for example, have implemented broad social, economic, and educational policy reform measures in an effort to attract high paid, high skilled workers back to the city center (Lipman & Haines, 2007; Lipman, 2011; Weber, 2002). Unfortunately, as many scholars have found, this re-concentration of resources further pushes (often deliberately) poor and working-class families and communities of color in these city spaces to the margins, both literally and figuratively (Lipsitz, 2006; Pedroni, 2011; Saltman, 2014; Smith & Stovall, 2008, Weber, 2002).

Urban schools in these areas are not exempt from these issues and are often subjected to "declaration[s] of system failure" (Saltman, 2014, p.255). Such declarations create the context and conditions for extensive divestment and gentrification campaigns in the communities where these schools are located (Lipman, 2011; Smith & Stovall, 2008). Scholars suggest that disparities in educational outcomes, particularly for underserved youth, are complicated in urban (*def; footnote needed*) schools, where "the broader environments, outside of school factors such as housing, poverty, and transportation are directly connected to what happens inside of the school" (Milner, 2012, p.559). In sum, one cannot disassociate the external pressures impacting upon urban schools from what happens within them and the achievement outcomes they yield (Lipman & Haines, 2007; Smith & Stovall, 2008). Within such contexts, school actors may be averse to implementing particular policies in that doing so may have adverse effects, both on

their ability to perform their stated duties and on the youth they serve. In other contexts, external actors may exert pressure that hinders the ability of school actors to uphold their stated and perceived duties. In this way and in such contexts, educational policies are political statements of external actors' impositions of power, referred to by some as *policy micropolitics* (Hoyle, 1999; Willower, 1991) and others as *macropolitics* (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993). Focusing explicitly upon these dynamics and places is vital in efforts to adopt and implement educational policies.

Politics of Education: A Brief Overview of Theories

Complex, problems require thoughtful, innovative solutions. Inter-disciplinary research combines the strengths of multiple disciplinary traditions, thereby shoring up weaknesses in order to address complex problems in a comprehensive fashion. The politics of education field found its origins in political science, but has since expanded to 'adopt' concepts and methods from sociology, public policy, education, and economics (Birkland, 2014; Wong, 1994). Widely recognized as an applied research tradition, scholars studying politics of education focus on problem identification and problem solving and make considerable efforts to share findings broadly. For this reason, data are typically collected on the ground (i.e., at sites) in order to provide as much detail about contexts as possible (Wong, 1994).

Considering its political science origins, the focus, at least from a theoretical perspective, in the politics of education field has largely been on understanding the political and policy-making process (Wong, 1994). This focus has led to the advent of numerous theories, such as: the theory of policy feedback, multiple streams framework, punctuated equilibrium, and innovation and diffusion to name a few (see McClendon, Cohen-Vogel, & Machen, 2014). To elaborate, the *theory of policy feedback* suggests that adopted policies shape future political dynamics; as such, politics becomes an input and an output in the policy process (McDonnell,

2009). The *multiple-streams framework* suggests that policies are adopted when problems, ideas/solutions, and politics converge in opportune circumstances. On the other hand, the theory of *punctuated equilibrium* postulates that long periods of inactivity in the policy making process are followed by rapid changes. Finally, the theory of *innovation and diffusion* supports the idea of isomorphism in the policy making process. That is, as states and other governing bodies adopt policies, surrounding locales and governing bodies follow in doing the same. Each of these theories helps nuance and unpack the policy making and adoption process, but does little to help one understand the ways in which adopted policies get implemented on the ground by school actors, or 'street level' workers (Malen & Vincent, 2014; McClendon, Cohen-Vogel, & Machen, 2014).

Micropolitical Analyses of Education and the Implementation of Policy Mandates

Birkland (2014) noted that "policy is interpreted and implemented by public and private actors who have different interpretations of problems, solutions, and their own motivations" (p.9). Understanding the ways in which diverse school actors make sense of and approach problems, solutions, and manage their own motivations within schools as mini-political systems is referred towards as *micropolitics* (Marshall & Scribner, 1991) and is of paramount importance when considering the state of public education and previous reform initiatives. First, and as stated elsewhere, schools are complex political organizations (see Achinstein, 2002; Marshall & Scribner, 1991). Second, external and internal school actors compete for power and the ability to define the acceptable reality of what is afforded value and deemed normal (Malen, 1994). And, third, implementing reforms within schools is a process mired in power relationships and conflict (Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987; Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Malen, 1994; Malen & Vincent, 2014). As such, by studying micropolitics, one can assess how school actors work

together, or not, to affect change within schools (see Achinstein, 2002; Malen & Vincent, 2014). Micropolitics is not to be confused with rational choice theory, which suggests that all political actors behave in ways that lead to the maximization of their personal preferences and interests and at the least cost (Boyd, Crowson, & van Geel, 1994). That is, individual political actors act in their best interest. Though certainly applicable in discussions surrounding policy implementation, rational choice theory focuses largely on the individual actor thereby ignoring the salience/enactment of power within group processes—a central element in the policy implementation process within schools. For this reason, one transitions to a discussion of educational micropolitics.

Many scholars have found that decision-making processes and the success of implementing reforms within schools hinges upon the degree to which school leaders (Armstrong, Tuters, & Carrier, 2013; Flessa, 2009) and interest groups (Johnson, 2001), both internal and external to the school, communicate knowledge and build coalitions that span diverse ideological perspectives. With this in mind, one argues that educational researchers can use a micropolitical lens to elucidate the ways in which these external and internal school actors exercise power, negotiate conflict, and manage competition over limited resources or to effect change within schools (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Blase, 1998; Malen, 1994). As an example, one can map how, and whether, these actors work together to develop and sustain a college-going culture. To assist in such pursuits, scholars recommend the following: 1) identify what is being struggled over, 2) identify the unit of analysis (e.g., organization, group, or individual), 3) define how power operates, 4) identify the actors, and 5) specify the strategies these actors use (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993).

By employing a micropolitical lens in this study, the author aimed to move from a

singular focus on students' academic achievement outcomes to a discussion of processes as well—a point of emphasis in Malen and Vincent's (2014) review of the micropolitics literature. The author sought to uncover the power dynamics operating within and between multiple interest groups within two large, public urban high schools (e.g., ELA, Social Science, Science, Counselors, Administrators, etc.) and the strategies used to negotiate college expectations in order to develop and sustain college-going cultures (i.e., what is being struggled over). To define how power operates, the author employed Malen's (1994) *faces of power* as a lens through which to examine educators' actions and efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture.

Malen (1994) argued that power has *three faces*, those being: '*pluralist*' views, which "concentrate on the overt manifestations of power evidenced by influence (or noninfluence) on salient, contentions decisions" (p.148); '*elitist*' views, which "emphasize the more covert expressions of power apparent in the suppression of dissent, the confinement of agendas to 'safe' issues, the manipulation of symbols and the 'suffocation' of 'demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges"' (p.148); and, '*radical*' or '*critical*' views, which focuses on "how power relations shape aspirations and define interests through subtle but presumably detectable processes of socialization/indoctrination that elude the awareness of those who succumb to them…" (p.148). The research methods employed in this study, as outlined in **Chapter 4**, proved instrumental in unpacking these processes and the ways in which power operated in and among school actors in each of the schooling contexts under investigation. In particular, the present investigation focused keenly on the first two faces of power (e.g., how power operates in decisions and how power is used to suppress dissent and limit agendas). Such conceptions have been employed in comparable investigations (see Achinstein, 2002; Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987).

Ecological Systems Theory and The Significance of Contexts

A singular focus on educational micropolitics and the ways in which school actors implement policies does not address the ways in which students are impacted within these educational contexts. For decades, scholars have theorized, argued, and found that diverse contextual factors affect student's development and achievement. Credited as one of the pioneers of this research tradition, Bronfenbrenner (1977,1994) introduced ecological systems theory and its five nested layers as a framework scholars could use to explore such issues. He termed these five nested layers, micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems and positioned students at the center of the framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994). Since then, scholars studying college aspirations (Strayhorn, 2009), college choice (Iloh, 2018), and school climate (Hopson & Lee, 2011; Maxwell, 2016) have employed this theory in their investigations. A brief overview of the theory's tenets is presented below.

C*hronosystems* represent the temporal aspect of development for students, which captures changes in their environment (or, *mesosystems*) over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). *Macrosystems,* moreover*,* are the overarching layer of the framework and "are informal and implicit—carried, often unwittingly, in the minds of the society's members as ideology manifest through custom and practice in everyday life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). In short, *macrosystems* are ideologies, historical trends, or cultural norms and expectations. *Exosystems,* on the other hand*,* are defined as structures that operate at the local level and "impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found, and thereby influence, delimit, or even determine what goes on there" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 520). Considering these structures operate at the local level, one suggests that local and state educational agencies are examples of *exosystems*. Lastly, Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1994) theorized that while in school (or,

microsystems) students have frequent and lasting interactions with peers, educators, school staff, and other integral elements of the school's structure and its culture. Given the topic of the present study, the author used ecological systems theory as a way to frame the relationship between students' college-going aspirations, school actors' expectations, students' plans and behaviors, and factors that place additional pressures on the school and community contexts in which students find themselves.

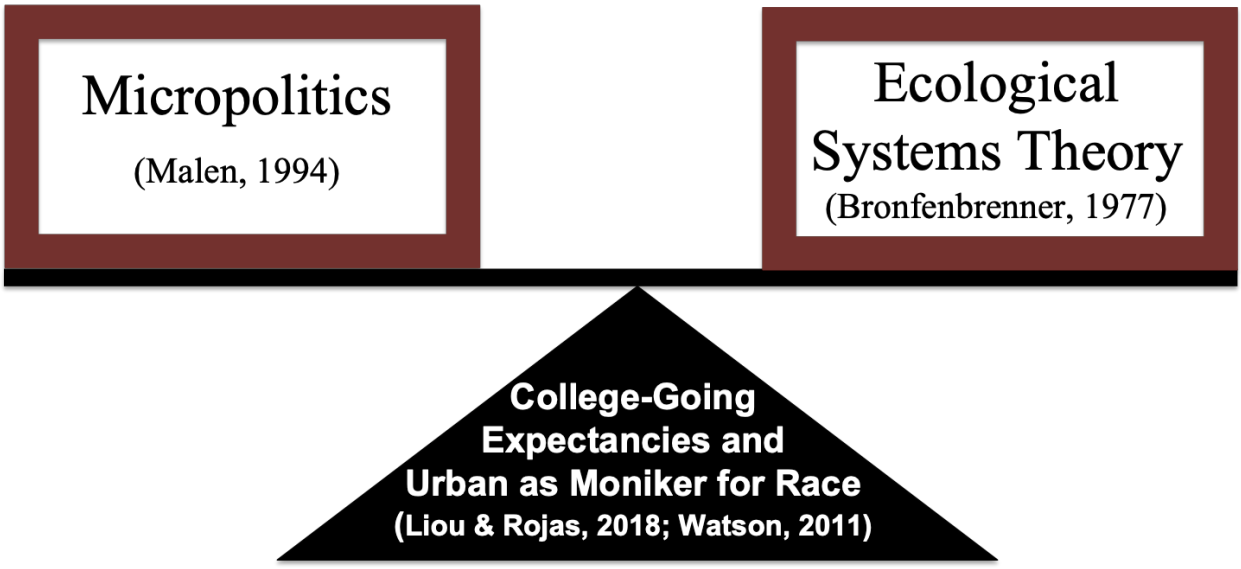

Figure 1. A Balanced Scale of Processes, Contexts, and Expectancies

Discussion

Each of the aforementioned theories provides a lens through which one can examine the reality of schools; that being, the ways in which actors negotiate expectations and exercise power and how the results of those negotiations and demonstrations of power impact students. However, when used alone, one finds that these theories prove insufficient by failing to account for the one of the two aforementioned perspectives. When used as a framework, one is better

able to attend to these perspectives and the nuances that exist therein. That is, one can effectively study and map the process by which school actors develop college-going cultures in large urban public high schools and the effects of these organizational contexts on students' post-secondary plans and behaviors. **Figure 1** provides a graphical representation of the balance achieved when one attends to issues of process and contexts within such investigations. This affordance is important for a number of reasons. For instance, scholars contend that "public education is closely connected to the challenge of income inequality, racial/ethnic disparities, and the urban environment in our society" (Wong, 2014, p. 211). As such, failing to problematize these conditions does not challenge the dominant narrative surrounding public education and student success, which ultimately leaves it intact. The aforementioned theories function as a framework wherein one is able to examine what transpires within and outside of public high schools (in terms of policy implementation and power) and how the enactment of these formal and informal policies impact students and their success, broadly defined.

To elaborate, a close examination of ecological systems theory and micropolitical analyses of education reveals that both theories account for the relationship between schools and external (f)actors. In the micropolitics of education literature, scholars define the interaction that takes place between schools and local educational agencies as *policy micropolitics* (Hoyle, 1999; Lindle, 1999). In the human ecology literature, Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1994) referred to this as *exosystems*. This is a particularly important consideration as external actors can exercise power in ways that thwart change/reform efforts. These similarities serve as a reminder that educational researchers must study and problematize the relationship between large urban public high schools, students' preparedness for college, and external factors and/or governing agencies that place untenable pressure on these schools and the actors within them.

As a limitation, when used together these theories portray students from underserved backgrounds as passive actors in their schooling experiences. That is, the aforementioned theoretical framework outlines how diverse contextual factors affect students at the expense of capturing how students express their individual agency in these contexts and what those expressions of agency signify. Simply centering students in these discussions does not question the integral ways in which they take ownership of their lives and educational experiences by countering contextual factors that prove inequitable and that delimit their academic and life opportunities. In short, this combination of theories decenters student voice in school reform initiatives implemented to 'benefit' them. To counteract such effects, the author intentionally centers student voice and agency in this study to capture the interplay between affecting and being affected.

As a secondary limitation, this framework does not account for the ways in which school actors grapple with and make sense of their expectations for students, issues of race and racism, the backgrounds of the students they serve, and their personal lived experiences surrounding these characteristics. As has been noted throughout, by their very structure, schools reify and reproduce “dominant cultural knowledge, literacies, and norms” while also contributing to the “raced, classed, and gendered stratification of society and the reproduction of the White-middle class ideology” (Allen, 2015, p.72). Central in this reproduction are institutional agents, or school actors. That is, research suggests that, especially within urban contexts and schools, school actors’ colorblind racial ideologies obscure and foster deficit-based thinking (Watson, 2011) which directly connects to lowered expectations for students and professional practices that maintain inequitable college-going opportunities along racial lines (Liou & Rojas, 2018). In short, one cannot study urban schools, school actors, and their expectations without also

attempting to elucidate how they make sense of their professional practice within diverse educational contexts and with student populations that differ from the perceived 'norm' (Allen, 2015; Watson, 2011).

In an effort to shore up this particular theoretical limitation, the author draws from Liou and Rojas' (2018) conceptualization of college-going expectancies and Watson's (2011) conceptualization of 'urban' as a moniker for race. These conceptualizations helped the author to situate findings—that touched upon the intersection of expectations, student background characteristics (e.g., race and class), and the lived experiences of school actors—within a larger discourse of race, schooling, and stratified educational opportunities. The author contends that the theory of micropolitics, when used with ecological systems theory, must address and engage these realities when employed within urban schools and contexts especially. For by doing so, one is able to make explicit the obscure and facilitate change.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY, RESEARCH METHODS AND RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Lived experiences play a profound role in shaping how individuals perceive and make meaning of the world around them. The author of this study most closely aligns with the transformative paradigm, which foregrounds the socially constructed nature of realities and the influence of social, political, cultural, economic, race and ethnic, and gendered factors in shaping these realities (Mertens, 2007). Compared to other research paradigms (e.g., positivist, post-positivist, constructivist, critical; Ponterotto, 2005), the transformative paradigm explicitly foregrounds the role of power at each stage of the research process, focuses keenly on differentiated power among groups under study, accounts for power dynamics between researcher and participants, situates knowledge and lived experiences in a complex cultural context, and seeks to further a social justice agenda (Mertens, 2007). This paradigm aligns with the author's use of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994) and educational micropolitics (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Blase, 1998; Malen, 1994; Marshall & Scribner, 1991), considering the focus on school culture and school actors' expectations, contextual factors, and how power operates within and between various interest groups in schools. With that said, one returns to the research questions introduced in **Chapter 1**.

Research Questions and Design

In this study, the author endeavored to address the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, do school actors negotiate college expectations in order to develop and sustain a college-going culture?
2. How, if at all, do expectations regarding college influence, or relate to, students' college aspirations and their behaviors in the college-choice and college-going process?

In an effort to address these questions, the author employed a fully mixed concurrent equal status multisite multiple embedded case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2006; Corbett, Firestone & Rossman, 1987; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Yin, 2013). In the paragraphs that follow, the author briefly discusses mixed – method designs and case study research.

A departure from mono - methodological designs, mixed - method designs combine various data strands (e.g., qualitative, quantitative) allowing for the examination of process and variable – oriented data (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Mistry, White, Chow, Griffin & Nenadal, 2016). Green (2012) expounded upon the utility of mixed – method designs when she stated, "these studies have the generative potential for meaningful insights—sometimes through dissonance—that can dialectically catalyze new and deep understandings not possible with one methodological standpoint alone" (p.758). That is to say, the product of a study where a researcher employs a mixed – method design should be the presentation of findings that are unequivocally greater than the sum of the study's individual parts (Bazeley, 2009; Mistry et al., 2016). As a note, the degree to which one 'mixes' these various methods (e.g., fully or partially) in the study design, how one structures data collection (i.e., concurrent or sequential) and data analysis process (i.e. partial or equal weight/status) vary depending upon a host of considerations (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

In this study, the author collected quantitative data (e.g., surveys) and qualitative data (e.g., semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, documents, field-notes, observations) concurrently throughout the course of the data collection period, AY 2017 – 2018 (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). In addition, the author took special care to mix and equally weigh these two methods in the research objective and in the analysis and inference stage of the research process (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Mistry et al., 2016). Together, these two strands

of data helped the author illuminate the process (RQ 1) by which school actors in large urban public high schools negotiated college expectations in order to develop and sustain college-going cultures. In addition, these strands of data helped the author explore how actors' expectations influence/impact students' colleges aspirations and their engagement in the college-going and college–choice process (RQ 2 & RQ 3). Given these principal aims, the author employed a case study design.

As a general note, case studies are "particularly well-suited for extensive and in-depth descriptions of complex social phenomena" (Baškarada, 2014, p.4), especially in situations where it is difficult to distinguish between phenomenon and context (Yin, 2013). Throughout this document, the author has discussed the ways in which contextual factors impact developing students, the effects of a school's college-going culture on students, and the lack of research on the ways in which school actors negotiate college expectations in an effort to develop these schooling contexts. These multiple considerations led the author to employ a multisite multiple embedded case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2006; Yin, 2013). Scholars note that case studies generate a rich analysis of a bounded system, whether an individual, group or institution (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1978). In this study, cases were bound at the process level by the phenomenon (i.e., negotiating expectations), contexts (i.e., two, large comprehensive secondary schools), and by reform/change effort (i.e., developing a college-going culture). In addition, and given research precedent, the author included, or embedded, multiple subunits of analysis, namely internal school actors, separated by role and subject matter/departments, and students (Yin, 2013; Corbett, Firestone, & Rossmnan, 1987). That is, the author sought to uncover how school actors situated within various departmental units within two schools engaged, or not, in the process of negotiating expectations in an effort to develop and sustain a college-going

culture. By bounding cases at the process level, embedding additional subunits of analysis, and employing a mixed-methods approach, the author was able to explore how school actors negotiated college expectations and the influence of these expectations on students by collecting data through surveys, formal and informal individual and focus group interviews, documents, observations (direct and participant; see **Appendix C** for direct observation protocol), and field notes. These multiple data sources and the resulting data served as essential building blocks the author used to produce a thick description of the phenomenon (i.e., negotiating expectations to develop a college-going culture), actors (i.e., ELA, Social Science, etc.), and contexts (i.e., *SHS* and *MXHS*) under investigation (Yin, 2013).

By conducting research at multiple school sites, the author aimed to describe the phenomenon, actors, and contexts thoroughly first and then to draw comparisons and highlight contrasts between these groups (Achinstein, 2002; Baškarada, 2014; Baxter & Jack, 2006; Corbett, Firestone, & Rossmnan, 1987; Yin, 2013). Each one of the school sites has a unique history, and the actors and groups within these schools have taken different approaches to develop and sustain college-going cultures. As such, one suggests that these two sites, the actors within them, and the phenomenon under investigation were *critical cases*, meaning they had strategic importance to the topic under investigation and warranted further study (Baškarada, 2014; Yin, 2013). Examining each of these bounded contexts independently initially and then comparatively helped illuminate trends and themes that would otherwise remain hidden in a holistic, single case study design (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013).

Background Information

In 2014, the California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) launched a grant initiative, titled “Creating a College-Going Culture,” to support educators at low-performing

California high schools who were interested in "enhancing their transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with specific activities and strategies, as supported by research, to increase the college-going culture of their school" (CAPP, 2014b, p.1). During the initial year of the grant, CAPP provided and supported educators at thirteen schools with financial resources and professional development sessions designed to help educators bolster students' pathways to college. Following the end of this one-year grant, CAPP re-issued a request for proposals (RFP) to the thirteen schools and changed the focus of the new 3-year grant to focus on issues of rigor in key content areas, those being: interdisciplinary literacy, counseling, and math. An external body selected ten of the initial thirteen schools to participate in the second grant.

At the onset of the initial grant cycle in 2014, CAPP contracted the services of the U.C.L.A. Equity and Access Studies in Education (EASE) Project and tasked this group with designing, developing, and disseminating student and teacher survey instruments for the ten sites. The EASE Project has since conducted extensive individual and focus group interviews with educators, administrators and other key stakeholders in each of these ten sites and collected student and teacher survey data from a sizable sample of each respective population at the participating school sites. The basis of this dissertation study stemmed from the author's involvement in the EASE Project and from the relationships built with educators, administrators and other stakeholders at two of these school sites spanning 3 years. IRB approval was granted for the larger study, under which this study fell given research focus, populations, protocols, timeline, and author's involvement (IRB #15-001441). The author introduces and presents key information on each site and actors in the space below.

Contexts

Malcolm X High School, hereafter *MXHS*, is a large, public high school nestled in an

economically disadvantaged neighborhood (View Park) in an urban northern California city. To elaborate, the percent of the neighborhood population living below the poverty line (30%) far exceeds city (22%), county (18%), state (16.3%), and national poverty levels (15.3%; Census, 2010). Due in part to large factory and military base closures, small and large business owners have elected to leave View Park and move closer to the recently renovated downtown city center. These changes in the community have left residents without immediate access to different retail stores, or entertainment and recreational venues. In spite of these changes in the broader community, students, educators, and community members cherish and revere *MXHS*. Generations of families have walked through the halls of *MXHS*, and educators and community members take great pride in the school and are committed to helping improve the services and offerings available to students. However, *MXHS* fits the demographic and performance profile of many schools in urban spaces that are on the margins. In the 2017 – 2018 academic school year, 1,934 students attended *MXHS*. During that time, demographically, 20.3 % of the student body at *MXHS* were African American, 15.7 % were Asian, 51.2 % were Latinx, 2.2% were Pacific Islander, 4.6 % were White, and 3.5 % multiracial. Approximately 15 % of the students were designated English Language Learners and 85 % qualified for Free/Reduced Priced Lunch. With regards to performance metrics, 11% and 43% of eleventh graders tested at or above the standard for the Mathematics and English Smarter Balanced Test, respectively, in the 2015 - 2016 academic year. For the 2017 – 2018 academic year, test scores for the Mathematics and English Smarter Balanced Tests improved by two and three percentage points, respectively. Additionally, for AY 2017-2018, 27.3% of students at *MXHS* were deemed *prepared* on college/career indicator (CDE, 2018).

The second site/context is also a large urban public high school. *Southside High School*,

hereafter *SHS*, is located in a middle-income area (Dakota Hills, *pseudonym*) in one of the wealthiest counties in the country. Yet, the percentage of people living below the poverty line in Dakota Hills is 21%, compared to the city (16.5%), county (12.8%), and state (16.3%) poverty levels (Census, 2010). Over time, demographic changes in the local community have resulted in noticeable changes in *SHS*'s student body population, particularly as it pertains to the percent of Students of Color and students from low-income backgrounds at the site. Of the 1,951 students at *SHS* in the 2017-2018 school year, 76.2 % identify as Latinx, 11.4 % as Asian (including Filipino) or Pacific Islander, 5.2% as White and 2.5 % as African American. Comparable to *MXHS*, 22.4 % and 84.2% of the students at *SHS* are English Language Learners and qualify for Free/Reduced Price meals, respectively. Additionally, approximately 17% of the student body identify as homeless youth. Yet, even with such changes, school actors have taken great strides to support current students. Recently, the California Department of Education recognized *SHS* as a 'Gold Ribbon School' for developing a model program (i.e., a senior capstone initiative) that other educational agencies could emulate. Notwithstanding these accolades however, roughly 84 % of students in the eleventh grade did not meet math proficiency standards on the Smarter Balanced Test (2016), as compared to 50% for the English Language Arts/Literacy exam. For the 2017-2018 school year, the ELA and Math proficiency test scores declined by 3 and 1 percentage points, respectively. And, only 37.2% of students were deemed college/career ready for AY 2017-2018 (CDE, 2018).

While similar in many ways (i.e., urban, large public high school, test scores, etc.), *MXHS* and *SHS* differ quite significantly in the degree to which school actors discuss college preparation and matriculation for all students as a normalized behavior. Moreover, these actors have taken different approaches to develop a college-going culture and have attained differing

levels of success in this process. In short, the processes taken at each site differ quite notably, as does the degree to which school actors negotiate expectations. The author's relationship with educators, administrators, and counselors and other school actors at these two school sites afforded the access and opportunity to investigate the overall culture of the school and how multiple actors, or groups, worked together to develop college-going cultures that fostered students' college aspirations and encouraged their behavior in the college-going and college-choice process. In the space below, the author presents details regarding the participants in this study.

Participants – Sample

Sampling techniques are an integral component of a study's design, irrespective of whether the study is quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods in nature. Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007) identified four major 'crises' in sampling designs that are worth discussing here, those being: representation (e.g., sufficient sample sizes and capturing lived experiences), validity (e.g., internal/credibility and external/transferability), integration (e.g., concerns regarding the merging of qualitative and quantitative data), and politics (e.g., the extent to which a study's findings sway stakeholders). In this study, the author employed a critical case non-random sampling scheme (Type 4; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007) where one collected both strands of data in a non-randomized fashion from participants whose inclusion in the study added compelling insight to the author's understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. While the use of randomized sampling techniques allows one to claim external validity, the use of such techniques in this study would have been at the expense of representation in sample sizes. This issue would have limited the author's ability to provide a nuanced analysis and thick description of the phenomenon, contexts, and actors under investigation. See **Appendix A** for an overview

of the demographic profile of the study's participants at each site. The author worked closely with liaisons at each site to secure access to potential participants, whether student or school actor. In most cases, the author was given free rein to move about the campus and to meet with school actors during planning periods. However, in some cases, school actors were invited to engage in planned discussions during their respective planning periods. In such cases, key liaisons selected and invited study participants.

Investigating the ways in which school actors negotiate expectations and a school's culture requires immersion to the extent where one's presence on a given campus becomes more familiar than non-familiar. The original participant sampling scheme, particularly the qualitative data strand, underwent notable changes from inception to execution. To the extent possible, the author attempted to keep the collection strategies comparable between the two sites. However, part of these unanticipated changes resulted from the uniqueness of the sites, the actors with whom the author interacted, and ever evolving nature of school schedules. Fortunately, the author was able to visit each site frequently and was able to engage in and observe (direct and participant) school leadership team meetings (at *SHS*), meet informally with principals and other key stakeholders (at *MXHS*), observe students and faculty (at *MXHS*), and observe key college-going events (at *SHS*). In total, the author spent approximately 108.5 hours at the two sites during the data collection period.

Research Procedure

Survey Instrumentation

At the start of the grant cycle, members of the EASE Project adapted scales and survey items from the following sources to create the *general student survey*: Transitional Choice Scales Survey (Cooper & Huh, 2008), National Gear Up survey, School Attitudes measurement

(Epstein & McPartland, 1976); Perceptions of Educational Barriers measurement (Kenny et al., 2003), and California Healthy Kids Resilience Assessment (Constantine, Benard, & Diaz, 1999). In total, the *general student survey* instrument contains 127 items, many of which sit on a five-point Likert response format (e.g. 1 -5, Strongly Disagree - Strongly Agree; Carifio & Perla, 2007).

A comparable process took place for the *senior survey*, which contains 78 items—approximately 50 of which sit on a five-point Likert response format. Twenty- three of the items on the *senior survey* are demographic measures and items that prompt seniors to discuss their college-going plans and reasons why they opted to pursue their reported plans. And, finally, the *teacher survey* instrument mirrors the *general student survey* instrument and thus provides for an opportunity to look at teachers' perceptions of the schooling environment and how effective the curriculum is in preparing students for a host of post-secondary educational opportunities. In total, the *teacher survey* instrument contains 141 items, the majority of which sit on a Likert response format. Readers can find additional information on each of these instruments in the data collection section of this chapter.

Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocols

The interview protocols employed in this study were developed around two principal themes: expectations and culture (see **Appendix B**). To elaborate, using information from a key document submitted from leadership teams at each site, the author started each interview and focus group discussion by prompting participants to reflect on progress made in raising expectations at the school site since 2014. This presented school actors with a chance to consider how and whether, as a school, they raised the level of expectations for students and the extent to which expectations might differ for particular student groups. Thereafter, school actors were

permitted with an opportunity to state, explicitly, what their expectations were for students regarding college readiness and matriculation and then to look outward towards staff within and beyond their respective departments. Finally, in an effort to elucidate the discursive ways in which power operates among and between school actors, the author engaged participants in a conversation around how/whether they negotiated expectations in instances where they differed. This protocol construction enabled the author to operationalize college expectations as belief systems that govern behaviors and triangulate expectations across interest groups (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Johnson, 2001; Liou, 2016).

Considering the nebulous ways in which school culture has been conceptualized in the literature, the author prompted school actors to define—in their own words—school culture, college-going culture, and then to reflect on whether a college-going culture was present at the school site. This approach provided nuanced accounts and understandings of school culture and college-going culture across departmental units and school sites. These conceptions challenge existing organizational contexts and offerings.

As it pertains to students, focus group interview protocols focused principally on the relationship between students' college aspirations and the school's culture, principally school actors' expectations, and students' behaviors in the college-going and college–choice processes. As a reminder, centering students' experiences and voice provided a space and opportunity to examine the school's culture, its purported reach, and potential effects. These conversations also provided an opportunity to explore the role and salience of family and other contextual factors in these students' development.

Direct Observation Protocol

The author adapted a direct observation protocol in this study in an effort to document

both how school actors enacted expectations in practice and the experiences of students within the schooling environment. Observing school actors in formal and informal spaces provided the author with an opportunity to assess broader aspects of the school's culture not discussed in interviews and helped contextualize school actors' statements within practice. Observing students shifted the gaze from a focus on school actors and processes to a focus on preparation and whether expectations, implicitly or explicitly, were being communicated to students and through practice (see **Appendix C**).

Data Collection Strategies

Focus Group and Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

In general, group interviews provide researchers with a setting and an occasion to explore a phenomenon, pre-test a questionnaire or protocol, or triangulate data (Currie & Kelly, 2012). Typically, small, ranging between 4 and 12 participants, group interviews, when successful, "generate rich data through participant interaction" (Currie & Kelly, 2012, p.408). This particular data collection strategy extends the focus of researcher-participant interaction to researcher-participant and participant-participant interactions. As such, conversations in these interviews are often spontaneous, chaotic and off topic (Currie & Kelly, 2012). More importantly, however, these interactions permit participants to challenge one another in ways that often reveal "more private, 'backstage' behaviours [sic]…allowing the discussion to move deeper into the topic area" (Robinson, 2012, p. 392). In the process, participants become co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge and meaning (Basch, 1987). For the purpose of this study, the author elected to conduct a series of focus group interviews with the school leadership team, educators, counselors, and students, where possible, at each site. Unlike group interviews, in focus group discussions, the researcher/interviewer *typically* has greater control of the recruitment of

participants and the focus of the conversation (Currie & Kelly, 2012; Robinson, 2012). Interviewers generally follow, though often loosely, a set protocol and ensure all participants have an opportunity to contribute to the conversation. As a data collection strategy, individual interviews can take the form of a rigid conversation that closely follows a scripted set of questions, a loosely structured format, or an unstructured format. For the purposes of this study, the author employed semi-structured individual interviews where "either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions" (Merriam, 2009, p.90). These conversations occurred in one-on-one settings.

To address the first research question, the author met with the following groups in a focus group discussion setting at *SHS*: school leadership team/department chairs (x2) and counselors (x1). Low participant turnout to scheduled focus group discussions prompted the author to conduct individual interviews with educators during their planning periods (x25). In total, the author met with approximately 40 educators, 1 administrator, and 3 counselors during the course of the data collection period. Considering the focus on diverse groups of school actors, the author met with educators from the World Languages, Math, English, History, Science, Special Education, and (Performing) Arts Department. This represents approximately 50 % of the educators at *SHS*. In comparison, at *MXHS*, the author was able to meet with educators (5 groups; n=17), department chairs (1 group, n=5), and counselors (1 group, n=5) in focus group settings throughout the course of the data collection period. Issues of scheduling complicated the degree to which the author was able to meet with additional school actors. In light of this development, the author conducted more observations of educators in practice. One hopes that the insights shared from these various meetings will help triangulate and/or contrast findings that emerge across groups. To address the second research question, the author met more frequently

with a group of seniors from each school site that he had a pre-existing relationship with prior to the start of the AY 2017 – 2018 data collection period. In particular, at SHS, the author met with the students (n=4) on one occasion in the Spring term. At *MXHS*, the author met with students (n=4) on four separate occasions throughout the data collection period, twice in Fall 2017 and twice in Spring 2018.

These discussions and interviews ranged in time between 30 and 55 minutes and took place over the course of the 2017 – 2018 academic year. In total, the author conducted 13 focus group interviews and 25 individual interviews over the course of the data collection period. To manage group dynamics, focus group discussions were limited to six participants. Only in one case did the group size exceed this threshold. The author recorded each session with an audio-recorder and later sent tapes to a professional transcription service (Temi). Thereafter, the author vetted and corrected transcribed files to ensure accuracy before uploading them, during the analytic process, to Atlas.ti (ver. 1.6.0), a qualitative data software package, for formal analysis. Findings from these conversations illuminated the extent to which school actors negotiated expectations and the relationship between school actors' expectations and students' college aspirations and behaviors in the college-going and choice processes. Each of the above listed groups has been instrumental in developing the college-going culture at *SHS* and *MXHS*. Presented in **Appendix A** are tables that present characteristics of participants that were interviewed throughout the data collection period.

Surveys

Using survey methods as a data collection strategy provides an occasion to assess how a sample, or population, of individuals respond to a battery of items. As previously discussed, the survey instruments developed by the EASE Project cover a breadth of themes. To reiterate, the

general student survey measures students' perceptions of their schooling environment and their knowledge of, attitudes toward, and their behaviors and participation in the college-going process. While comparable in focus to that of the general student survey, the *senior survey* focuses keenly on students' experiences in the college-going and college-choice process, their post-secondary plans and the relationship between those plans and the schooling environment. Finally, the *teacher survey* prompts educators to consider how the educational curriculum and schooling environment relate to students' post-secondary educational plans and preparation. Over the past three years, the response rate for the *general student* and *teacher survey* at each of the sites of interest has been high, greater than 50 %. In the 2016 – 2017 AY, roughly 50 % of seniors at *MXHS* completed the *senior survey* whereas approximately 85 % of the seniors at *SHS* completed the survey. During the data collection period, approximately 1,121 students responded to the general student survey at *MXHS* and 1,560 students at *SHS*, whereas 66 and 99 school actors responded to the teacher survey, and, 408 seniors from *SHS* responded to the senior survey (see **Appendix A** for response rates by site). Unfortunately, the response rate for seniors at MXHS was low (~16%). The author elected to forgo analyzing these responses.

Data collection for this strand of the study took place in two stages. The EASE Project administered the *general student survey* and *teacher survey* in early Fall 2017. Thereafter, seniors at each site received and completed a survey in late Spring 2018 before graduation. The author used the responses from students and school actors on each of these survey instruments to address the study's research questions, in particular questions surround expectations, aspirations, perceptions of rigor, and behaviors in the college-going and choice processes. Specifically, responses from the *general student survey* and the *senior survey* helped address the second research question, whereas responses to the *teacher survey* provided background information that

nuanced the first research question. Following collection and during the analytic process, the author uploaded all raw data files to SPSS (ver.25), a quantitative data software package, for formal analysis.

Documents

When coupled with other methods, the use of documents and document analysis in empirical research studies, especially case studies, afford researchers an occasion to triangulate data and themes that emerge from qualitative and quantitative data with historical files (Bowen, 2009; Wesley, 2010). Notably, document analysis can be particularly advantageous in generating a thick and full description of phenomenon and in reducing bias and bolstering credibility (Bowen, 2009; Wesley, 2010). Considering the mixed-methods multisite multiple embedded case study design, the author collected and analyzed a range of documents including but not limited to grant proposals, mission and vision statements, and college matriculation reports. These documents proved invaluable in helping "provide data on the context within which research participants operate" (Bowen, 2009, p. 29).

While data from the collected documents may not explicitly address the proposed study's research questions, it was helpful in illuminating the culture of the schools in question and the progress school actors have made since the beginning of the grant cycle. Throughout the data collection period, the author searched for and retrieved these key documents, either from publicly available sources, from actors in the granting external agency, or from contacts at each of the school sites. Once collected and during the analytic process, the author uploaded these files to Atlas.ti (ver. 1.6.0) for formal data analysis.

Direct and Participant Observations

Where possible, throughout the course of the 2017 – 2018 academic year, the author

observed administrators, educators, counselors, (district) staff, and students in meetings, classrooms, and other informal educational spaces and settings. At *SHS*, the author largely assumed the role of participant observer in these settings via invitation from school contacts, whereas at *MXHS*, the author assumed the role of non-participant observer. Using an adapted direct observation protocol (see **Appendix B**), the author was able to gain a more nuanced understanding of the conversations and negotiations that took place between and among these different groups, the processes students complete as they engage in the college – going and – choice process, and the ways in which school actors actualized expectations in practice. During and immediately after each visit, the author recorded reflections on the day. Within three days following each site visit, the author transferred field notes and observations into an electronic file and, subsequently, uploaded these documents into Atlas.ti (ver. 1.6.0). Data generated from these fieldnotes was particularly useful in providing contextual information to describe the phenomenon under study, actors within these institutions, and emerging themes.

Analytic Process

Ethically managing, analyzing, and reporting findings from multiple data sources is an integral part of a research study. Failing to do so can diminish the credibility of the researcher, invalidate the study, and bring harm to participants. To protect participants, individuals received a neutral pseudonym, where possible responses are shared in the aggregate, and all data files (e.g., documents, transcripts, sign in sheets, consent forms and raw survey data) are stored on a password protected computer and external hard drive. Considering the political nature of the data collected over time, the author elected not to share transcripts but rather to share findings once written in draft form with key institutional stakeholders and participants at each site as a way to member check (Mertens, 2007).

Within the context of case study research, a "researcher can feel overwhelmed by the large amount of information normally obtained from interviews, observations, and documents" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015, p. 56). With this in mind, the author developed what Merriam (2009) and others (Baškarada, 2014; Hancock & Algozzine, 2015) have referred to as a case database. This database was comprised of documents, focus group discussion transcripts, semi-structured interview transcripts, field notes, analytic memos from coding, and raw survey data. The author organized files by topic, date, site, and embedded subunit (where appropriate). Bearing in mind the fully mixed concurrent equal status multisite multiple embedded case study design, the analysis of the aforementioned data occurred in a fashion that treated all data sources with equal weight and took place over the course of data collection period and thereafter. In short, the analysis of data was both ongoing and iterative.

Analyzing the Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Initially introduced within the context of grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), constant comparison, as a method of data analysis, "is an iterative and inductive process of reducing the data through constant recoding…Incidents or data are compared to other incidents or data during the process of coding" (Fram, 2013, p.3). By doing so, one is able to uncover different patterns and themes that ultimately help address a study's research questions (Boeijie, 2002; Fram, 2013; Merriam, 2009). With the multisite multiple embedded mixed method case study design in mind, the author employed the constant comparison method of data analysis and adapted and combined Boeijie's (2002) five-step process and Yin's (2013) cross-case synthesis procedure in order to do so. As a note, the author took great measures to ensure the analysis of both strands of data took place in a fashion that was truly mixed (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). To elaborate, in order to analyze the qualitative data, the author began with

open/preliminary coding using *first cycle coding methods*, those being: descriptive coding, simultaneous coding, structural coding, and versus coding (see Saldaña, 2009). Thereafter and later in the analytic process, the author employed *second cycle coding methods,* particularly pattern coding and focused coding (see Saldaña, 2009). The four-step analytic procedure is expounded upon in the space below.

In **Step 1**, the author uploaded all relevant data sources, whether transcript, documents, or field notes, into Atlas.ti (ver. 1.6.0) by site/context (i.e., *MXHS* and *SHS*) and by subunit (e.g., school leadership team, educator, administrator, district staff, counselor, and student) and *open coded* each file using one of the aforementioned *first cycle coding methods*, where appropriate (Saldaña, 2009). During this initial step, the author began writing analytic memos to contextualize codes that emerged during the analysis of each individual file (Saldaña, 2009). Developing memos in this fashion helped manage the varying qualitative data sources and helped keep track of emerging codes and categories. In the same fashion, the author uploaded collected survey data to SPSS (version 25) and began the data cleaning process. By the end of **Step 1**, the author had the following: an analytic memo and a list of codes for all qualitative files, clean datasets, reliability estimates for constructed scales, frequencies, and descriptive statistics that shed light upon phenomenon and actors under investigation. The author addressed missing survey data on a case-by-case basis, particularly as it pertained to missingness on key scale constructs (Little, 1988; Soley-Bori, 2013). In cases where data were missing on key scale constructs, the author imputed values using the multiple imputation technique. When values were missing for categorical variables (e.g., race, gender, etc.), data were left untreated.

To analyze the survey data, the author used frequencies, descriptive statistics, mean comparisons, where appropriate, contingency tables with Pearson's χ^2 statistic, and logistic

regression to assess general trends and to assess the association between salient background characteristics and key outcome variables. For the teacher survey, in particular, the author limited the analysis of data to frequencies, descriptive statistics, and mean comparisons disaggregated by departmental affiliation. Variables of principle interest were school actors' perceptions of the school's expectations, their personal expectations of students, and their personal actions to support students in the college-going process. For the general student survey and senior survey, the author analyzed the data using contingency tables with Pearson's χ^2 of association and logistic regression—where college application behaviors, broadly defined, were key outcomes of interest. Model specifications are introduced in the subsequent chapters. The combined results of these tests provided invaluable information that helped triangulate themes and address both research questions. Perry's (2013) and Roderick, Coca and Nagaoka's (2011) investigations of the impact of college-going cultures on students' college-going behaviors served as precedent setting examples for the aforementioned analysis procedures.

In **Step 2**, the author reviewed the generated list of codes for each separate subunit by site and began to consolidate these codes into categories based on emerging relationships using the earlier mentioned *second style coding methods*. Specifically, the author compared codes emerging from interviews *within* the same subunit (e.g., ELA, etc.) and identified relationships between codes to generate larger categories (Boeije, 2002). In **Step 3**, the author compared codes and categories *across* subunits in an effort to allow for the continuous narrowing and expansion of categories. Finally, in **Step 4**, the author compared categories and findings across the qualitative and quantitative data in each site and generated themes and new understandings as it pertains to the study's research questions. Following this step, the author re-read interviews to explore potentially confirming and disconfirming evidence using the constant comparative

method. Considering the micropolitical perspective, alternative perspectives were included in the formal write up as a way to highlight the contrasting perspectives of school actors and students. This proved invaluable in the author's efforts to provide a thick description of the phenomenon, actors, and sites under investigation. Following the within case analysis, one synthesized themes at the site level (**Step 5**), which unveiled key information pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation (Yin, 2013; see **Chapter 7**). The author purports that as an approach, cross-case synthesis provides for a valuable account of the experiences and perspectives of school actors and students, given the subject of the present investigation, and that such approaches have been used in comparable investigations (see Achinstein, 2002).

Theoretical Considerations

With that said, the theoretical framework introduced in **Chapter 3** proved instrumental in the ways in which comparisons and contrasts emerged and were framed during the inference and writing process. For instance, given the use of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1994), where appropriate, the author considered and situated respondents' statements in varying contextual levels, largely the influence of school and familial actors on their development. Statements regarding interest groups, power, politics, negotiations and college expectations were viewed through the lens of educational micropolitics (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993) whereas comments regarding student ability and the intersection of race/class/family/space and expectations were viewed through the lenses of Liou and Rojas' (2018) conception of college-going expectancy and Watson's (2011) conception of 'urban' as a moniker for race. Together, this framework helped the author contextualize findings and situate them within a broader discourse of policy implementation, school reform, and college readiness. Together, this framework helped the author bring both processes and contexts to the forefront.

Positionality

This study stemmed directly from my lived experiences as a student in a high school much like *MXHS* in a community that has undergone slow change over time, like Dakota Hills. As a high school student, I struggled to make meaning of and articulate why my school resembled a prison, or why educators and administrators joyfully celebrated when we met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). I struggled to understand why so few of my peers matriculated to college after high school, even though they had aspirations of doing so. I struggled to make sense of why I was "so special" and deserving of numerous awards, scholarships and accolades that made my transition to and through higher education possible but not easy. I struggled to understand these varying factors until I came to realize my concerns were not isolated to my experiences—rather, they were symptoms of a much larger issue within education and society. These lived experiences position me as an insider-outsider.

I approached this study with a sincere belief in the potential of public education, broadly, and in large urban public high schools, specifically. At the end of this study, my faith in public education and in the actors serving within these spaces remained the same. Having been in spaces like *MXHS* and *SHS* as a student, I recognize the power school actors have to shape lives in ways that escape words, both positively and negatively. As an outsider to these schools and communities, I recognize the opportunity I have been afforded and the need to enter into these spaces as a partner and someone eager and willing to listen without judgment and assist without faltering in ways that are ethical. My commitment to this project was not temporal; rather, it was, and is, centrally related to who I am, both as a person and as a scholar. This became evident throughout the data collection and analysis process. I was frequently invited to participate in (in)formal meetings and celebrations, to serve as a recommender for college applications, to

participate on panels, and to be a listening ear. I became a trusted member of these communities and was valued not for the position I held, but because I was present and willing to work to help school actors think through complex issues and to help students on their path to college. My time at both sites and with actors therein reinforced the importance of relationships and the power that lies therein. These relationships compelled me to write and story-tell in way that gave credence and validity to all perspectives and experiences.

Limitations

The present investigation is not without limitations. *First*, the sample of schools was limited to two sites in distinct regions of California. This small sample of schools limits the extent to which one can, and should, generalize findings from this investigation. That said, educational researchers must continue to investigate college-going cultures and the processes school actors engaging to develop and sustain them, as well as their effects on students, in diverse contexts. *Second*, the data collection period for the investigation was limited to the 2017-2018 academic year even though the sites under study participated in a four-year imitative from Fall 2014 through Summer 2018. Scaffolding the present research design over the four-year initiative was beyond the scope of the author's ability. As such, the decision was made to focus on the last year of the grant initiative in order to access the processes school actors and students engaged in and to explore the extent to which change had occurred at these sites since the beginning of the grant. Where fiscal and human capital resources permit, educational researchers should extend such investigations beyond one academic year. And, *third*, the teacher, general, and senior survey instruments were comprised only of self-reported data. To account for this limitation, the author triangulated themes resulting from these instruments with qualitative data (e.g., documents, interviews, etc.).

CHAPTER FIVE

MALCOLM X HIGH SCHOOL

Public schools often embody the very fabric of local communities in that they function both as an educational setting and as a social center. These sites and the actors operating within them represent continuity in local contexts where stability might not be present. One of the sites under study in this investigation, Malcolm X High School, hereinafter *MXHS*, functions in this capacity. *MXHS* is a large, public high school situated in an urban Northern California city that has undergone sizable changes in recent years. These changes have also manifested in the neighborhood (View Park) where the school is located. In spite of these changes and the obstacles they present for residents, *MXHS* stands as a beacon in the community; a space where students feel valued, cared for, and a part of a larger community.

As previously stated, in the 2017 – 2018 academic school year, 1,934 students attended *MXHS*. During that time, demographically, 20.3 % of the student body at *MXHS* were African American, 15.7 % were Asian, 51.2 % were Latinx, 2.2% were Pacific Islander, 4.6 % were White, and 3.5 % multiracial. Approximately 15 % of the students were designated English Language Learners and 85 % qualified for Free/Reduced Priced Lunch. With regards to performance metrics, 11% and 43% of eleventh graders tested at or above the standard for the Mathematics and English Smarter Balanced Test, respectively, in the 2015 - 2016 academic year. For the 2017 – 2018 academic year, test scores for the Mathematics and English Smarter Balanced Tests improved by two and three percentage points, respectively. Although *MXHS* fits the demographic and performance profile of many schools in urban spaces that are on the margins, school site actors have gone to great lengths to provide students with what they perceive is a ‘quality’ education.

Throughout the grant cycle (AY 2014 – 2018), school site actors at *MXHS* periodically submitted self-assessments to the granting agency in an effort to provide updates on the progress made towards developing a college-going culture. These actors were prompted to indicate their progress (i.e., Phase 1 – Phase 5) along a number of scales, some being: student expectations, academic goals, rigorous coursework, and information about college going. Of principal interest considering the focus of this investigation is the progress school actors made in moving along the scale of *student expectations*. Though not explicitly defined on the self-assessment form, key concepts raised therein and that are worth mentioning here are 1) the beliefs educators have regarding student ability, 2) the existence of a school-wide plan that outlines how to raise expectations for all students, and 3) the existence of a mission that educators galvanize around.

In Winter 2014, prior to the start of the college-going culture grant, educators at *MXHS* noted that they were in *Phase 2* on the scale of *student expectations*, where:

> Some staff members have high expectations for all students; no school-wide plan addresses beliefs regarding student potential; discrepancies are based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, etc.

School leaders expounded upon why they selected *Phase 2* by noting that even though the majority of staff "truly believes that all students are capable of high academic standards, there is no school-wide plan that documents this as a core belief" (p.11). As a principal goal, school actors resolved themselves to develop a "structured school wide approach and plan that clearly delineates a college going culture including a core belief that all students can achieve high academic standards" (p.11). Four years later, in summer 2018, educators at *MXHS* paused to reflect on progress made towards developing a college-going culture. In particular and of note, school leaders indicated that they progressed to *Phase 3* on the *student expectations* scale, where:

> Most staff views all students as capable of learning rigorous content and high-level thinking; school-wide plan focuses on raising expectations for all students.

Moving from *Phase 2* to *Phase 3* on *student expectations* is a significant accomplishment. However, the nature of the self-assessment form masks the effort that took place to reach this milestone, as well as the potentially differing experiences and perspectives school actors might have had. This dilemma became the focal point of the investigation that took place at *MXHS* throughout the AY 2017 – 2018.

Table 1
Educators' Departmental Affiliation

Department	Sample Size (n)	% of total
AVID	1	2%
English & Language Arts	10	20%
Language	4	8%
Mathematics	4	8%
Physical Education	2	4%
Science	6	12%
Social Studies	8	16%
Other	14	28%
I Don't Teach	1	2%

Note: N=50; Sample size represents educators that responded to the 2017 Teacher Survey

To elaborate, in Fall 2017, educators, counselors, administrators, and staff at *MXHS* responded to the earlier mentioned teacher survey instrument that measured, among many things, educator's expectations for students, their perceptions of rigor in the academic curriculum, and their perceptions of student ability (see **Appendix D** for key items from instrument). Each of these broad areas was framed around the lens of college readiness. The author employed a two-fold approach in analyzing the aforementioned areas. First, he assessed descriptive statistics that nuanced how school actors responded, in general, to these myriad concepts. Second, the author disaggregated educators' responses to the data by position (e.g., teacher, counselor, administrator, staff) and department (e.g., English Language Arts, Social Science, Science, etc.). Details on completion rates, treatment of missing cases, and analytic procedures are presented in

Chapter 4. As a note, due to missing data among particular groups (i.e., counselors and administrators), teachers became the primary group for analysis (see **Table 2** and **Table 3** for demographics).

Table 2
Demographics of Educators

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Years Teaching at MXHS		
0-5	13	26%
6-10	7	14%
11-15	9	18%
16-20	11	22%
20+	9	18%
Not Reported	1	2%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	10	20%
Hispanic/Latino	3	6%
Asia/Pacific Islander	8	16%
White	25	50%
Other	2	4%
Multiracial	2	4%
Sex		
Male	25	50%
Female	25	50%
Non-Conforming	--	--

Note: N=50; Sample size represents educators that responded to the 2017 Teacher Survey
--denotes no respondents from group

First, with regards to the general descriptive statistics (see **Table 3**), school actors at *MXHS* had relatively high expectations for students. That is, they expected students to graduate from high school and expected them to attend college. However, educators were indifferent in how/whether they perceived students being prepared for college when examined in the aggregate. To elaborate, educators were afforded the opportunity to grade the level of preparation students received in core academic subject areas as it pertained to college, as well as the extent to which students demonstrated proficiency in key skills areas (e.g., critical thinking, ability to work in teams, ability to work independently, etc.). Invariably, school actors graded the

preparation that students received in these core subject areas and skills as a C (3) or lower (D, 2)(see **Table 4**).

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale Name	Mean	Cronbach's α	Min-Max	# of Items
General School Expectations	12.83 (1.75)	0.60	1-15	3
Ethos of College-Going	12.14 (2.18)	0.78	1-15	3
Personal Expectations	12.90 (2.07)	0.74	1-15	3
Personal Actions	60.49 (10.87)	0.92	1-80	16
Perceptions of Students	23.38 (3.33)	0.72	1-30	6
Perceptions of Families	13.88 (3.28)	0.81	1-20	4

Note: N=50; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Second, disaggregating the data by department level led the author to discover that the statistics previously reported in the aggregate varied widely. For instance, educators from language and social science departments were less in agreement that students were expected to and being prepared for the rigors of college. In addition, educators from all core departmental areas were less in agreement that they engaged in practices designed to help students better navigate the college-going process (e.g., helping fill out applications and advising to speak with counselors, etc.; see **Table 5**). Furthermore, some educators indicated that the quality of education students receive in math and science was poor (or, an F), as it pertained to college readiness (see **Table 6**). Disaggregating the survey data by department brought to the fore variability in educators' perspectives and provided a baseline and point of comparison in the larger review of school actors' expectations and the ways in which they negotiate them at a departmental level. The salient qualitative data presented below shifts the focus from an analysis of "what" towards a discussion of "why/how".

In this chapter, the author shares findings from data collected at *MXHS* throughout the data collection period that responds to the two research questions re-introduced in **Chapter 4**. Relevant findings are organized by *group* (i.e., educators, counselors, and students) and *subgroup* (i.e., math, English, etc.), where applicable. This organizational process lends itself to unpacking the myriad perspectives and experiences of school actors at *MXHS*, particularly as it pertains to negotiating college expectations in an effort to develop and sustain a college-going culture. Where relevant, the author details factors that impinge upon school actors' ability to negotiate college expectations, as well as their ability to develop and sustain a college-going culture. In addition, the author details whether and how school actors' expectations influence students' aspirations and behaviors in the college-going and choice processes using both qualitative and quantitative data. Following each section (i.e., school actors and students), the author briefly summarizes major themes ahead of a more detailed discussion in **Chapter 7**.

Table 4
Perceptions of Quality in Preparation for College in Core Academic Subjects and Skills

Subject Area/Skill	Mean
English	3.10 (1.27)
Math	2.46 (1.27)
Science	2.88 (1.45)
Social Studies	3.04 (1.51)
Ability to work in teams	3.12 (1.21)
Problem solving skills	2.56 (1.07)

Note: N=50; Corresponding scale is 0=I don't know; 1=F; 2=D; 3=C; 4=B; 5=A;

Table 5
Responses to Scales disaggregated by Departmental Affiliation

	AVID	English & Language Arts	Language	Math	Physical Education	Science	Social Studies	Other	I don't teach
Scale Name	Mean								
General School Expectations	13.00 (--)	13.63 (1.57)	11.25 (1.70)	12.25 (0.96)	13.50 (0.71)	12.50 (1.87)	11.75 (2.37)	13.50 (1.34)	13.00 (--)
Ethos of College-Going	12.00 (--)	12.90 (1.79)	10.50 (1.91)	12.25 (0.50)	10.50 (0.71)	12.33 (1.36)	11.75 (2.60)	12.43 (2.90)	12.00 (--)
Personal Expectations	15.00 (--)	12.77 (1.96)	13.75 (0.95)	13.00 (1.82)	11.50 (2.12)	12.83 (1.72)	11.72 (2.85)	13.46 (2.07)	13.00 (--)
Personal Actions	80.00 (--)	58.08 (11.96)	60.83 (10.98)	58.35 (7.51)	54.50 (2.12)	58.63 (10.85)	58.52 (8.15)	63.77 (12.63)	65.00 (--)
Perceptions of Families	16.00 (--)	14.85 (3.18)	13.25 (3.94)	13.75 (1.71)	12.00 (5.65)	14.02 (4.11)	13.44 (2.12)	13.50 (3.80)	17.00 (--)
Perceptions of Students	25.00 (--)	24.07 (2.76)	22.63 (3.15)	22.50 (1.91)	26.00 (5.65)	23.79 (1.71)	22.21 (4.19)	23.39 (4.04)	23.00 (--)

Note: N=50; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets;
Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Table 6
Perception of Quality in Core Subject Areas by Departmental Affiliation

	AVID	English & Language Arts	Language	Math	Physical Education	Science	Social Studies	Other	I don't teach
Perception Name	Mean								
English	2.00 (--)	2.90 (1.66)	3.25 (0.96)	3.50 (0.58)	3.50 (0.71)	3.33 (0.82)	3.13 (1.46)	2.93 (1.44)	4.00 (--)
Mathematics	2.00 (--)	1.50 (1.27)	2.00 (0.82)	3.25 (0.96)	3.50 (0.71)	2.67 (0.82)	2.50 (1.19)	2.79 (1.47)	3.00 (--)
Science	2.00 (--)	1.90 (1.72)	3.50 (0.58)	3.25 (0.50)	3.50 (0.71)	3.67 (0.82)	2.88 (1.25)	3.14 (1.61)	0.00 (--)
Social Studies	2.00 (--)	2.10 (1.85)	3.25 (0.50)	3.75 (0.96)	4.00 (1.41)	2.83 (2.23)	3.63 (0.52)	3.07 (1.54)	4.00 (--)

Note: N=50; Corresponding scale is 0=I don't know; 1=F; 2=D; 3=C;
4=B; 5=A

Educators

Math Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Speaking with educators from the math department at *MXHS* provided an opportunity to nuance their myriad experiences and perspectives and brought to the fore challenges they encountered in their efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. When asked whether they felt as though staff moved into *Phase Three* on the *student expectations* scale or whether there was still progress to be made in reaching that milestone, math educators' responses varied widely. For instance, one veteran educator (**School Actor 1**) noted the following:

> I think so. I don't think we're at a *two*, just 'some staff members'. We're edging more to a *four*, definitely a *three*, like a *three plus*. We're pretty close to almost all of them. I mean if you think about it, when you talk about their plans…when we talk to our students about what their plans are for when they graduate, a lot of them automatically go to college. It's not like "well, I'm going to do this". It's, it's college. Yeah. So then we ask, "what kind of college?" Then it gets a little more detailed, but yeah, that's their expectation now.

From this educators' perspective, the increase in students' college aspirations marked a departure from *Phase Two* to *Phase Three* and beyond. This, in turn, signaled a departure from the notion that 'some staff 'members have high expectations to 'most staff' members considering the pervasiveness in increased aspirations. Yet, not all students experience the benefits associated with higher expectations, nor do all educators in the math department share this perspective.

For some educators in the math department, issues of rigor occupy a space of significance whereas for others high expectations do. According to **School Actor 11**, "…we are still in Phase Two". When asked to elaborate on why this was the case, **School Actor 11** noted that there was a wide discrepancy among classes. That is, "sometimes some classes are rigorous, college prep classes…some are just really not rigorous, not every class is". This apparent lack of rigor in

some courses led some students to willingly seek out such opportunities. Unearthing the source of this lack of rigor led directly to disparate expectations among educators at the school site. In noting that they were still in *Phase Two*, **School Actor 18** posited that he encounters "a bunch of negativity on what we think our kids can and cannot do, which I get highly offended but what can you do." One particular way to combat such issues is through the development and implementation of a school-wide plan that addresses the beliefs and expectations that educators should have for students.

Scholars contend "vision-building is a central aspect of leading for success, defined in terms of learning outcomes for students" (Murphy & Torre, 2015, p. 177). Unfortunately, educators in the math department were not aware of a plan to raise expectations for all students, nor were some of them certain that even if a plan were in place that it would be executed with fidelity. **School Actor 18** noted the following:

> No, there isn't one. Well, no, let me correct myself. There might be a plan. There might be a shitload of plans, but it seems like we're always having plans. Now, the follow up…We seem to have a little bit of trouble with following through the plans. I mean like we started off this year with team Gold and team Blue and we had these little groups of students that a group of teachers was supposed to be responsible for and that plan lasted about five minutes and that kind of happens quite a lot. So there might be a plan, but if there is, I don't know about it.

These issues subsequently manifested on the departmental level and contributed to the general lack of certainty and clarity in math educators' expectations for college. This issue was further compounded by key findings outlined in the forthcoming paragraphs.

Meetings as a Normalizing Space

Normalizing expectations on a departmental level requires a concerted effort from educators within these departmental units. To accomplish this endeavor, educators must first assess their personal expectations for students and, second, negotiate their expectations with their

colleagues. Yet, in order for this to transpire, educators must be provided the space and opportunity to engage in such discussions. Unfortunately, there was considerable discrepancy in math educators' expectations of students. Contributing to this varying degree of expectations was the lack of departmental meetings held among math educators.

Reflecting upon the circumstances and contexts under which he began his tenure at *MXHS*, **School Actor 18** went to great lengths to problematize the low and sometimes non-existent expectations some of his colleagues held for students. For instance, he noted that he started,

> …Hearing things when we adopted [the new math book] this year… when I heard teachers say things in my department like, 'our kids can't, right, our kids can't do math like this. Our kids can't do the math'. And you know, when teachers are saying the kids can't, guess what… the kids won't. And I've found great offense at that. And I've worked really hard this year to prove that our kids can and my kids had been destroying the tests and they've been kicking ass and taking names, excuse my language.

Two prominent points stand out in this account. First, according to this educator, the low expectations some of his colleagues have for students manifest in students meeting those low expectations. That is to say, educators' low expectations ultimately work in a self-fulfilling way (Liou & Rojas, 2016). Second, this educator highlighted the power that lies in raising expectations for students. In doing so, he has effectively brought to light the need to adjust instructional practices (e.g., "I've worked really hard…) in ways that align with high expectations. Doing so, as one can see, often results in success for all involved parties: "…my kids had been destroying the tests and they've been kicking ass and taking names..." Yet, this is not the normative departmental approach. As previously stated, the lack of departmental meetings factors heavily in this dynamic.

Consider the following exchange that unfolded during a focus group interview with educators at *MXHS* in May 2018:

> *Interviewer*: If you all had to look more broadly outside of yourselves to the broader department, what would you say are the departmental expectations for students as it pertains to college readiness and matriculation and then in doing that, how do teachers within your department help actualize those expectations and help students meet them by scaffolding? Without naming names of course.
>
> *School Actor 1***:** Well, that's very difficult being that we don't have department meetings regularly. I mean that's one of the things that was just kind of pulled from us. How many meetings have you had as a department? Maybe this school year…
>
> *School Actor 12*: We've had two.
>
> *School Actor 1*: Two, yeah. We had about two.

Here, one observes that **School Actor 1**, an educator in the math department, sites the lack of regular department meetings as a factor that impedes normalizing departmental expectations. In short, **School Actor 1** is unclear on what his colleagues have done to ensure that their actions within the classroom support the overall departmental expectations. As seen in the above excerpt, **School Actor 1** suggested that sufficient allocated meeting time was not provided and that it was 'pulled'. He later went on to elaborate on the significance of these meetings when he noted, "we still have to meet as a department… We still have to talk things out and if we don't, people are just going to do their thing and hopefully it pans out, but you never know... If they had more input from the rest of us, maybe we could be a little more efficient". These sentiments were reaffirmed, in part, during a focus group interview with an additional group of educators during that same time period. In this space, **School Actor 18** confirmed the lack of departmental meetings when he said, "we don't have math department meetings. We just don't".

While it is not certain that meeting more frequently as a department would alleviate some of the challenges and concerns educators in the math department expressed throughout the data

collection period and in the space above, meeting more frequently is a starting point and necessary condition in normalizing departmental expectations. Educators within the department should be intentional in using the requested time and deliberate in ensuring that expectations are negotiated, normalized, and aligned with classroom practices and behaviors. Accordingly and in response to the first research question, educators in the math do not negotiate college expectations.

The Weight of External Pressures

Compounding the lack of clarity regarding college expectations is the school district's heightened pressure upon the math department to produce improved results on state and national standardized tests (i.e., SBAC). Effectively, this pressure to produce improved results has tied educators' hands in the classroom, obfuscated the direction to be taken within the department and how best to align that with college preparation, and led to high rates of teacher turnover. In a discussion with educators from multiple departments, **School Actor 11** expressed as much when he stated the following:

> I know teachers who left in our department because they've been so pressured. You know they, "you've got to keep pace with the curriculum like this, give tests, tests and you know standardized testing, the grading, and … a lot of kids are failing and then they blame the teachers. "How come you have some many kids failing?" "But, you told me to give this test, keep this pace, and we have to have standardized grading and this is what's happening".

The District sets the pace for the delivery of lessons and leaves little room for teacher autonomy, according to **School Actor 11**. Teachers are blamed for the perceived failures when goals are not met. As such, educators work to ensure students are equipped with the tools needed to pass the standardized tests: "…a lot of us were pulled to work with a group of students to help them to pass this [SBAC]…I don't think that's going to change next year. I think it's going to be the same thing..." (**School Actor 1**). However, educators in the math department contend that the

blame should be shared between both parties—the department and the school district—considering they are the "the ones who tie our hands in a sense" (**School Actor 1**). Moreover, educators in the math department feel as though the pressure to produce results is unequally felt across the remaining academic departments, thus creating the conditions where teachers "…don't do anything" (**School Actor 11**). In short, the effects of such pressures can destabilize an already fragile department.

High levels of external pressure from accountability agencies, like local educational agencies/districts, create unwelcoming work conditions and render educators unable to exert their autonomy within their respective classrooms. Conflict arises when change efforts do not align, or impinge upon, teachers' primary objectives—that being, teaching (Armstrong, Tuters, & Carrier, 2013; Corbett, Firestone, & Rossman, 1987). Mitigating these tensions might facilitate a path towards greater gains on the aforementioned standardized tests and allow the negotiation and norming of expectations throughout the math department at *MXHS*.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Equally numerous are the accounts of the schooling environment educators in the math department shared throughout the course of the data collection period. Educators' perceptions of the overall school culture, whether the school has a college-going culture, and expectations of students differed notably. For instance, understandings of school culture and its significance revolve around the idea of community, both internal to the school and external to the broader neighborhood for educators in the math department. One veteran math teacher opined on the salience of culture when he alluded to a discrepancy in community perceptions:

> I think school culture… it's kind of like two levels. It's the students here, how they look at themselves and it's also how the community looks at the school…A lot of times the way that community will look at…the school might be different than [what] actually

> happens at the school. So I just know that for the outside world... when they hear that I work at *MXHS* and stuff like that, there's a certain image about that opposed to, you know, I'm here. I mean... I'm in the mud, I'm doing all this stuff. But what they perceive out there and what we do are kind of different… What they think…. It really doesn't happen here at *MXHS*. They think it is kind of a violent place. They think it's all this other stuff that goes on at the school. But to be honest, we're actually pretty good... students are able to learn. … So the image is different for … what the public sees, the community sees and what the students who actually experience it. (**School Actor 1**)

As gleaned from the aforementioned quote, there is a clear mismatch in the perceptions members of the broader community have of the site and what educators and students at the site experience on a day-to-day basis. These conflicting perceptions of the school impact upon the work that takes place within the schooling environment and the *weight of external pressures* educators feel schoolwide.

When asked to define the school culture, one math educator (**School Actor 23**) referred to the high level of connectedness that exists between staff and students at *MXHS*, as well as the space within which the school fits in the broader community. Early in one focus group discussion, **School Actor 23** noted that "there is a spirit of community and I think there's also a spirit of that it is okay to be different here". *MXHS* and its spirit of community and connectedness has been a focal point in the community for generations. **School Actor 23** said as much when she noted the following later in the same discussion:

> This particular institution is the focal point of the community… We have generations of families that have gone through here. So one of the characteristics is that people's families or students' families have gone here… Because sometimes even if a student is not currently living in this particular area, they'll choose to come here just because their parents went here.

The above-cited quotes speak to the overall culture of the school, particularly from the perspective of perceptions of climate and what it feels like to be in the school. However, less clear is what students experience in the classroom. **School Actor 11** elaborated on the evolving nature of academic offerings in the math department and the process through which more

rigorous course offerings were introduced into the school—an arduous process met with resistance. When he attempted to introduce advanced placement (or, AP) courses to the department, his colleagues questioned him, labeled him as 'crazy', and wondered, "why would you do such a thing"? (**School Actor 11**). This particular educator was left with few options and ultimately took the issue to the assistant superintendent of the school district and was successful in doing so. The desire to present students with rigorous instructional opportunities connects with educators' desire to ensure students leave *MXHS* with the requisite skills to be successful in college and beyond.

When asked whether there is a *college-going culture* at *MXHS* and to define it, **School Actor 1** confirmed that "there is definitely one at *MXHS* and it's getting more defined every year, which is nice". The same educator later went on to define the school's college-going culture when he stated that students are expected to go beyond high school and matriculate to college and to reap the rewards afforded through higher education so that they can "get a higher paying job and get more experience, get more knowledge, and to be a better, let's say, member of the community" (**School Actor 1**). According to this educator, the act of matriculating to college and subsequently securing gainful employment was all in service to the community and the betterment of society.

Unfortunately, not all educators in the math department share this sentiment, nor do all students understand the perspectives from which educators operate and the expectations they have for them. To elaborate, **School Actor 18** nuanced the difference between an actual college-going culture and one that is merely talked about when he suggested, "we talk about college a lot. If that makes it a culture, then we have one". This connects back to the apparent lack of a schoolwide plan that ensures expectations are high for all students—a factor that plays out in the

post-secondary educational opportunities students are presented with as they approach high school graduation. Some students perceive a post-secondary education as matriculating to a four-year college or university and anything that departs from that standard as less than. One junior educator noted as much when she detailed conversations that take place with students as they near graduation:

> And a lot of them turned around and they go, "I'm *just* going to [local community college]". And I'm like, "nope, stop, stop right where you are. Take the just out of that sentence. There is nothing wrong with saying I am going to [local community college]. Just means you're diminishing that; it has the same value. You're going somewhere, you're learning some more. (**School Actor 26)**

Rightfully said, matriculating to any post-secondary educational institution should be celebrated as an accomplishment. Too often though, these decisions are made for students long before they are able to make these lasting decisions for themselves. For some students and depending upon the educators with whom they interact while in school, *MXHS* is a space of academic success and growth, whereas for others it is a space where academic dreams and aspirations wither under the weight of low expectations and apathy. Though some educators, especially in the math department, expect that their students "would have the option to go to college if that's what they choose to do" (**School Actor 23**), not all share this sentiment, unfortunately, as has been shared throughout. Efforts to normalize expectations are aided when one understands the perspectives and orientations from which educators operate. Unpacking math educators' perspectives and orientations helps illuminate the challenges that exist and creates a pathway towards addressing these obstacles.

English and Language Arts (ELA) Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Educators from the English Language Arts (hereinafter, ELA) department were present and participated in the focus group discussions that took place throughout the data collection period at *MXHS*, AY 2017 – 2018. These discussions afforded ELA educators an opportunity to share their perspectives and to co-collectively create meaning with other participants. What became clear from these conversations was that educators' understandings of the progress made in raising expectations varied according to two traits, those being: perspectives of individual teachers and perspectives of opportunities present at the school site. Those who ascribed to the first perspective were more likely to view progress on the *student expectations* scale as retrogressive, or declining, whereas those who ascribed to the second perspective were more inclined to see progression from *Phase Two*.

For instance, in response to a comment from an educator in the science department, **School Actor 24**, a veteran educator, suggested that because of students' backgrounds, some educators' expectations of students were not high and further that such low expectations were ultimately detrimental to students and their overall academic success:

> … and in some instances as I look at this [Phase] One where some teachers may believe that because the students are *who they are*, *how they are* and *where they're from*, that there are limitations. I think it's been more, for lack of a better word, more open about lower expectations in this climate. Yeah. And so I think students then get comfortable with the lower expectations, not knowing that it's detrimental. And so when they run across teachers that are expecting "what should be expected of all students"… Strong pushback. (emphasis added)

To provide additional context, *Phase One* on the scale of *student expectations* reads as follows, "selected students considered capable of taking rigorous coursework; staff conversation/planning reflects informal and formal labeling of students". When considered within the context of the statement above, it becomes clear that *some* educators' expectations for students vary and tend to be lower according who students are (i.e., underserved student groups), where they are from (i.e.,

an under-resourced community), and how they are (i.e., different learning styles and needs). Informally or not, *some* educators are making decisions about students based upon their background characteristics and how they present themselves within the schooling environment and unjustly acting from these perspectives and orientations. These remarks highlight how colorblind racial ideologies intersect with expectations. Unfortunately, these lowered expectations tend to delimit student potential and make it increasingly difficult for educators with high expectations to support students in maximizing their full potential, as seen in the comment above.

While identifying individual teachers that espouse low expectations for students was not the principal aim of the focus group discussions, educators were forthcoming in delineating between educators who espouse high expectations as compared to those that do not. **School Actor 15** articulated as much when he stated…

> …you're a 'Xer 4 Life' or you're not. Right. And, so there's this delineating component and for those who are, yes, we're in that *Phase Three*, *Phase Four*, *Phase Five* for all intents and purposes. But, there are these other…

In this case, who are the others? Earlier in the conversation, **School Actor 15** noted that the distinction was primarily connected to longevity/tenure at the site and ideological differences surrounding issues of race, class, and space (e.g., urban). That being, for those educators that are 'Xer's 4 Life', in most cases, they understand where students are from, their backgrounds, and see that as an asset, not a deficit. Accordingly, these educators' expectations for students are high whereas educators that are new to the site have not yet bought in to the dominant ideology surrounding expectations for students. This becomes clear when one considers **School Actor 15**'s statement, "So what systems, ideologies, or lack thereof they come with…I see that directly affecting handfuls of students whereas those who have been with [*MXHS*] for a long time, I can

actually say most do feel and believe that…". This comment and the others shared before account for the first perspective concerning efforts to raise expectations for students.

In contrast to the first perspective, the second perspective (i.e., opportunities available at the school site) speaks more to changes witnessed over an extended period of time at the school site. For some educators in the *ELA* department, progress is inextricably connected to accessible course and programmatic offerings. **School Actor 5** argued as much when she opined that…

> I think there's probably been growth and I look at it thinking we have added so much to the program offerings here that it would be difficult to say we didn't believe they could achieve it and still acknowledged that we added so much. Because there'd be no reason to bring in so many more resources and options for kids if we didn't really think they could handle it. You know. So I do think that there is a shift in making sure that all kids have more access to more options, and I think that signals a change in perspective.

According to this educator and particularly from a school-wide perspective, the inclusion of and increase in accessible course options for students serves as a testament to changes in educators' perspective and their desire to ensure all students receive an equitable education. This account departs rather significantly from the account shared in the preceding paragraphs. These conflicting perspectives on progress made in raising *student expectations* at the school site signal the need to take into consideration the unique experiences and accounts of all educators, not solely those in formal leadership positions. In short, whether *progress* was made depends on one's vantage point and experiences. More importantly, how are these differences in perspectives and expectations for students negotiated among educators in the *ELA* department, if at all? The author explores these broader issues in the paragraphs that follow and further nuances them with additional themes that emerged in the data analysis process.

Non-Compliance as a Threat to Progress

Maintaining a standard of high expectations within an academic department is imperative in efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. From the comments and quotes shared

in the space above and in the preceding section on the math department, achieving this goal is dependent upon a host of factors, chief among which is educators' ability and willingness to negotiate philosophical differences surrounding *student expectations*, particularly those pertaining to college. Comments from educators in the *ELA* department raise concerns in that not all educators operate from a position of high expectations for students, an issue that brings with it significant consequences. When asked to reflect on the expectations educators in her department have for students, **School Actor 5** stated the following:

> I believe that the majority of the teachers in my department have an expectation that kids will go to college. But, that being said, I do know that there is a segment of my department where there is a general negative attitude about the quality of students at *MXHS* in general, which I think really sort of taints the expectation. And therefore, taints the level of rigor in the curriculum, adherence to district policies relating to that. There's a non-compliant segment in my department.

A few salient points stand out in this excerpt and provide context for points raised in the preceding paragraphs of this section. **School Actor 5** confirms that the majority of educators within her department (i.e., *ELA*) have high expectations for students. However, she acknowledges the presence of a sub-group of educators that do not share in these expectations, due in part to perceptions of the overall "quality of student" at the school site. **School Actor 24** espoused a similar sentiment when she opined that *some* educators place limits on students' potential because of "*who they are*, *how they are* and *where they're from".* Again, these comments harken back to notions of colorblind racial ideology and lowered expectations.

Not only do these low expectations delimit student potential, but they also compromise the level of rigor in the curriculum, thereby jeopardizing compliance with district mandates and policies, and efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. **School Actor 5** elaborated upon additional consequences of these low expectations when she clarified that "a lack of expectation about college-going for our kids is not the root of it," but rather "the expectation that

our kids will go to college and having a negative attitude about that becomes an outcome". In this way, non-compliance becomes a threat to progress. **School Actor 5** was prompted to reflect upon the level of expectations within her department in a conversation that took place a few months after she shared her initial comments.

Though similar in tone and overall theme, in this instance, she opined that there was a shift taking place in the department in that some educators were beginning to come to the realization that they may not be best suited to provide students with the quality of education they are owed and deserve. **School Actor 5** reaffirmed the urgency of the moment and the plight of students who are subjected to these educators when she noted, "the fact that some people are getting ready to come to a realization about where they are does not help those kids who've been stuck there. So in that way it's kind of... that's still kind of frustrating". In the end, students suffer. However, educators in positions of leadership are best equipped to address non-compliance and the varying threats it poses.

Natural turnover within departments affords educators an opportunity to re-evaluate oft unaddressed ideologies and pedagogical practices. Yet, educators, particularly those in positions of power through leadership, must prime these conversations and evaluations when natural turnover is not as frequent. Following **School Actor 5's** initial comments regarding the conflicting expectations within the *ELA* department, the principal investigator questioned how she approached educators who were slowly beginning to realize they may not be best suited to provide students with the rigorous education they need. **School Actor 5** illuminated the challenges those placed in positions of leadership contend with when dealing with these broader contextual issues and conflict amidst colleagues…

> And I really don't want to. Again, I really made that known ... We've had very little turnover and so very little change has happened. And generally like in years prior to

> maybe the last 10, there was this fluctuation where we'd have two or three people either retire or move on to something else and then we'd get sort of fresh blood in there, right, with new ways of doing things and new thinking…And so I think some of the more seasoned folks would kind of latch onto that and things would improve for a bit. It's been a long time since we've had any turnover in our department. It's been kind of stagnant… And, so it used to sort of manage itself, and now we're in a position where we've had to really go to the admin and say, "this is beyond something a colleague can do. This is an administrative issue that you guys are going to have to address''…

Those placed in positions of leadership are tasked with addressing conflict when it arises amid colleagues. The act of doing so and the willingness therein prove to be an altogether different challenge, however. The aforementioned quote highlights the precarious position departmental leaders are placed in when conflict arises within their isolated schooling communities. Where natural turnover fails, school leaders must reinforce departmental standards or turn to those who can, as was the case in the above-cited comment. Developing and sustaining a college-going culture requires consensus about departmental norms, expectations, and standards. Non-compliance represents a threat to these efforts—one that must be addressed, head on, and not avoided or circumvented. For doing so leaves students vulnerable and most likely to suffer. **School Actor 5's** unwillingness to engage colleagues speak to Malen's (1994) second *face of power*—used to focus on safe issues. Similar to the math department, this suggests that school actors in the *ELA* department do not negotiate expectations.

The Politics of Opportunity and Trade-Offs

Unfortunately, schools, by their very structure, often reproduce the inequity in outcomes educators toil to mitigate (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010; Watson, 2011). Put more specifically, who has access to what resources is not solely a function of student choice and agency but is also a function of the choices school actors make in structuring the schooling environment in a particular fashion. At *MXHS*, programs like *Advancement Via Individual Determination* (or, AVID), specialized learning environments (i.e., academic academies), and Advanced Placement

(or, AP) courses are regarded as 'rigorous' programs and academic offerings that better prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities. Yet, when these programs and academic offerings are seemingly reserved for a select group of students, access to important opportunities and resources becomes political.

As a rough estimate, slightly more than a third of the students at *MXHS* participate in these programs and courses, according to the study's participants. This effectively leaves those students who could benefit most from these programs and courses less equipped and ready for college. Consider the following statement from **School Actor 24** on the subject:

> What she was saying about AVID in the 9th grade, I think that is our new way of tracking because I think those skills and that exposure should be to all students because we don't know where they are. We don't know where the student [is] that just needs that spark and that guidance. And, so, however they get to AVID, I think that still those are all of our students who get into honors [courses], those still are our students who get into AP…

Illuminating the inequitable access to opportunities and resources the majority of students at *MXHS* have is not an indictment of school actors but rather serves as an opportunity to reimagine a schooling environment where all students, not a select few, have access to the opportunities and resources they need most: "I'm looking for those concepts and seeing how I can integrate them in to serve my students who are the ones who are not even at the 'almost' where AVID has its focus" (**School Actor 24**). Access to important opportunities and resources should not be political, but it all too often is, unfortunately.

When educators within a department have differing levels of expectations for students, as has been documented throughout this section, teacher and course assignments become a political decision-making process, or a trade-off. Unfortunately, such decisions re-inscribe inequity and place students, and those in leadership roles, in vulnerable positions. Consider the following…

> But you know when you're leveraging, "where can you minimize damage? That is a terrible thing to realize that I'm sitting here trying to figure this out based on who's going

> to harm kids the least in which roles. That is a terrible place to be. That should not be an issue. Right? We should have a strong enough teaching staff that that's not a concern…We don't have that luxury. It's frustrating. So frustrating. (**School Actor 5**)

The unintended consequences of these trade-offs are far-reaching and less obvious but felt nonetheless in the degree to which students are being prepared for college.

For instance, later in the conversation, **School Actor 5** detailed some of the challenges that contribute to the notable decline in student enrollment observed from 9th to 12th grade. She suggested as much when she stated, "when you've got maybe not the strongest teachers at 9th and 10th [grade] and then you've got these enormous classes…it all conspires to create credit deficient juniors. And that's where our 300 kids go, you know?". While certainly not the only factor that contributes to the loss of enrollment from 9th to 12th grade and extreme credit deficiency, **School Actor 5's** comments do beg the question of, why the strongest teachers are not assigned to the students in the most need? Consider the following statement:

> I think it has to do with the college going culture. Quite frankly, I think it's been a strategic approach to make sure that we've got the strongest people at the tail-end to do the last minute prep to get them into college... to try to make up the gaps. And, I mean the curriculum is more rigorous the higher up you go. And, some of those teachers don't have content area knowledge that makes it possible for them to teach them [students] well. So you kind of gotta [sic] use what you got, you know. (**School Actor 5)**

Evidently, part of the challenge lies in credentialing and requisite content knowledge, as **School Actor 5** noted in the statements above. Nonetheless, the challenge and the act of 'trading off' is also connected to efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. The effects of trade-offs and the political nature of opportunities within the schooling environment become apparent when students begin to exert their agency in ways that seemingly run counter to the pursuit of preparing for college.

Building upon her earlier comments regarding teachers that lack the expertise needed to support students, **School Actor 5** noted that students have figured out where and how to avoid such teachers and confirmed the effects of such when she stated,

> And they know if they've been sort of victimized by that squeaky wheel. And there are some who look at who they had for 9th grade and then look at who they got for 10th grade and that will cause them to not pursue AP in 11 or 12 because they're like, "I didn't learn any thing in 9th or 10th, I'm not ready to go do this". So I do think it impacts them.

Low expectations, politics of opportunity, and trade-offs coalesce in ways that adversely impact students and the decisions students make about their post-secondary futures. Inequitable access to opportunities hinders efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. When access to these opportunities becomes political and students' futures are traded-off, they ultimately suffer. Normalizing expectations is an important starting point in this broader movement.

The Weight of External Pressures

Similar to the math department, educators in the ELA department expressed concern and frustration regarding the weight of external pressure placed upon them from district actors. Common throughout these sentiments was the belief that district actors continue to place added pressures upon school actors in the ELA department without removing responsibilities and without providing the additional support and resources needed to uphold district mandates and policies. **School Actor 12** confirmed as much when she noted, "there's more demands being placed on the teachers from the district…but nothing's been taken off the table. So teachers are feeling squeezed…". This feeling of being 'squeezed' creates counter-productive tension between district actors and educators, which ultimately, and unfortunately, impacts 'teacher morale', 'school culture,' and contributes to 'teacher burnout'.

In addition, this heightened tension negatively impacts students. School actors are placed in a precarious position and in situations where the relationship between the District and

educators is not productive. This results in school actors being forced to make decisions that oft run counter to what they perceive as being in the best interest of the student. Consider the following statement from **School Actor 12**…

> And, the change next year to have EL kinds [integrated] into the regular curriculum without support and the year after that they're going to integrate all the Special Ed kids into the classes and, you know, no additional support. No professional development… So, you know, as a teacher, it gets really disheartening because again…you put more on the table for the teacher with less support and I mean in my mind it's a civil rights issue…And, so there just seems some decisions at the district that are having a tremendous impact on our day-to-day instruction and it makes our jobs more difficult. But, then, the microscope is on us, right? The test scores with our names attached to it and the district might go, 'oh, but it's the district'. But, they make their money and they go home and then they don't deal with the kids one-on-one and see the effect it [has].

Seemingly at the heart of this tension are differing perceptions of expertise and *who* should do *what* in the best interest of the student. Where these perceptions differ is where conflict and tension between internal and external school actors arise. Mitigating these tensions might facilitate a path towards normalizing expectations throughout the department and ensuring students that need the most support do not fall victim to the politics of opportunity and trade-offs.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Educators in the ELA department were also questioned on their understandings of school culture, college-going culture, and college expectations. Yet, again, educators' perceptions of these varying aspects of the schooling environment were myriad—thus offering an opportunity to explore the diversity in thought and experiences present at *MXHS* from the perspective of the ELA department. The student experience featured prominently in school actors' understandings of school culture, positively and in ways that illuminate areas for growth. For instance, educators in the ELA department described the role of the school being to purposefully meet students'

needs, which helps facilitate buy-in among members of the student body. Consider the following comment from **School Actor 12**:

> And I think in general our school culture, there is a sense of purposefulness and I think that that has come from the counselors reaching out to students and teachers being more mindful of explaining the long-term ramifications or the connections between learning this and the next step. And you know, having this conversation and the ability to be able to think critically and question those in authority… So I think as a school culture, students... we try to create one that is, um, that students feel more in control of what they're learning and more empowered, which I guess goes to the next question you wanted to ask about *MXHS* specifically. But I just think school culture is, has to do with how kids perceive and whether or not they feel they're welcomed and that they're an integral part of it and the staff have to feel that way too. Or, they're not going to have to buy-in.

Reinforced in the aforementioned comment is the idea that feeling welcomed is a necessary condition for the establishment of the school culture, for teachers and students, especially when seeking to achieve buy-in on collective visions and purposes. As previously stated, not all students are well served at *MXHS.* This could potentially be a contributing factor in the extreme credit deficiency mentioned throughout this section.

To elaborate, educators spoke about the need to know students and their names, as well as the need to recognize that the school has to do a better job of ensuring students are presented with the resources, interventions, and opportunities they most need and when they need them, ideally before it is too late. **School Actor 5** suggested as much when she stated,

> I think we have a lot of transiency… I mean just in general…just the kids who are in foster care or have homeless situation. So, I think we lost a lot of kids that way too. But, the issue with moving on to continuation…that is the thing we need to be looking at I think very carefully around here.

Identifying and resolving problems is the hallmark of an effective organization. In large part, educators in the ELA department expressed a willingness to engage in such activities, even when they proved difficult and even when faced with notable challenges. Doing so, according to these actors, is a testament to their affinity for the school, their students, and the space the school holds

within the local community. **School Actor 24** reflected on her understanding of *MXHS*'s school culture when she stated,

> I think it's kind of like you're a fish in the water. You don't realize there's water but you're in it. And, I think it's *the way we do*, *how we do*, *what we do*. And, when we're from *MXHS* and we tell people we're from *MXHS*, they can see the difference even though we just think it's an is… Yes, I mean it's just this concept of "Xer 4 Life". Thick and thin. So like we've just had a loss of a teacher. We had loss of students. Our district office was useless…But this family spirit and community spirit about our school when time are hard, in times of challenge, you can't define it…But I think we shine best in struggle. (emphasis added)

Adversity strengthens a community's bond and brings to the fore what matters most—family and community spirit. This ability to address challenges, rather than avoid them, was evident throughout ELA educators' comments and understandings of a college-going culture and whether one was present at *MXHS*.

For some, a college-going culture is a school setting where students are being prepared for college with an education that is applicable to real-life circumstances and that makes relevant the different skills needed to be successful at the post-secondary level. **School Actor 12** spoke at length about this responsibility when she stated the following,

> I think it's... so how I define it. Um, having kids feel like they are being prepared to take that next step. So having curriculum that is rigorous, that is diverse so that it prepares them for a lot of different subject areas. So, for example, they're learning math, but in that conversation of learning math, telling kids this would help you in coding if you want to do coding or having my kids write an argument persuasion essay, but talking about how when you want to buy a car, this is a kind of thing, you know…what are the pros and cons? 'Let's look at the five cars that you're interested in and how do you come to a determination that this is the car that's the best one for me?' Well, it's the same, that's the same thought process that you're using to write this argument persuasion paper. So what you're learning here, you know, I tell them the essay is the vehicle…but the essay is the vehicle that we are using to develop our ability to think and communicate regardless of whether you're buying a car or thinking about career or getting married or signing a lease or choosing your college. It's all about the same kind of thinking. So what we're working on is developing our thinking and so talking...or having conversations with kids about that that's college-going culture because you're not saying it's the subject and this math problem or this paragraph that's not the thing, that's the tool. That's…the vehicle we're

> using to get you to the next phase of your ability to think. So to me, that's part of a college going culture.

Ensuring students have the requisite skillset to be successful in life was **School Actor 12**'s understanding of a college-going culture, or at least a part of it. She later went on to elaborate on the messaging students receive throughout the school site and how it potentially leaves some members of the schooling community as feeling less than in their post-secondary decision-making processes.

For instance, a school culture that prioritizes going to college, especially four-year colleges and universities, leaves unaddressed the diverse interests, skills, and talents students enter school with. Such an environment can be exclusionary. Some students, **School Actor 12** confirmed, "feel apologetic that they're going to go to a junior college and they should not be feeling that way". She elaborated and stated that they, "feel like it has to be a four-year college and…I think that we've skewed the message a little bit and we're losing some of the kids that are on the fence". This theme of 'losing kids on the fence' rang true for other ELA educators when discussing a college-going culture. Consider the following statement from **School Actor 15** in the ELA department,

> So when I walk down the halls, I see students of all potential features and some who are fully aware of where they'd like to go versus those who aren't. Long story short is it's hard to create a blanket image for what a college-going culture ought to be in an environment where college is not the goal or end goal for everybody there.

Yet, those potentials are not acted upon when school actors' singular focus is to prepare students for post-secondary educational opportunities. **School Actor 15** discussed how the visual aesthetics of the schooling community, particularly "pendants and college acceptance letters", can lead to feelings of inadequacy and isolationism among the student body, especially those students who do not share in these aspirations. This is evidenced, in part, by sizable student

attrition at *MXHS*, as briefly mentioned in earlier paragraphs: “we start off with almost close to 700 [students] and have a graduating class of little over 300 … That’s evidence in and of itself that college is not the track for everyone”, as stated by **School Actor 15**. Ensuring that students have ample opportunity to explore careers and interests (e.g., vocational, military, etc.) that extend beyond post-secondary educational opportunities is necessary. However, expectations play a significant role in directing students’ paths and post-secondary decisions.

Notably, educators in the ELA department shared fairly consistent and high expectations for students as it pertained to post-secondary education. In short, they expected students to acquire *some* post-secondary education. What got nuanced, however, was the ways in which these expectations were actualized within professional practice and from an ideological perspective. **School Actor 24** spoke from an asset-based frame and highlighted the need to tap into students’ gifts in efforts to prepare them best for post-secondary educational opportunities, whether college or trade school:

> ‘So what is your gifting and then how can you find a way to monetize it, for lack of a better term’? And, then I also let them know that ‘some of you have gifts that the jobs aren't even created’. So just trying to open up as many options for them... to let them know that you can make it and there are many ways to make it…

Other educators spoke highly about the act of encouraging students to step outside of their comfort zone and to take rigorous academic courses (e.g., AP)…

> We had... I started the year with 110 kids. They were crammed into three sections, but there was 110 of them. And to me, we've opened it up. I mean any kid can play... can come into AP and that's good. But what it also suggests to me is that somewhere along the line kids have been told, ‘you should try, you could do this’, right? (**School Actor 5**)

And, others spoke to the need to recognize the diversity of interests among the student body and not to create a blanket image that blindly assumes all students want or need to matriculate to college…

> That's a really hard question to answer because as we're all speaking, I'm realizing we serve all walks of life. We have those who come here with the ambition to be in a white gown … top 20 graduates in their class who are on that UC track and then we have some more first time in high school for their families and merely graduating is going to be considered a success in and of itself. (**School Actor 15**)

In and of themselves, these differing enactments of expectations should not lead one to believe that expectations must be lowered for those students that do not ascribe to normative post-secondary educational pathways. Rather, these differing enactments of expectations highlight the growing need to ensure that all students are presented with the opportunities, resources, and information they need to make the decision that is best for them, whether college, trade school, military, and so on. Further, comments shared throughout this section of the chapter suggest this is not presently the case at *MXHS* as a sizable proportion of the student body are subject to the politics of opportunity and trade-offs. Creating and sustaining a college-going culture begins with the negotiation of expectations and is further fostered by and through addressing inequitable conditions that leave students unable to decide for themselves. As noted throughout, external pressures and non-compliance can complicate efforts to accomplish these aims and should be addressed, not avoided.

Social Science Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

While on average perceptions of growth tended to be positive, progress on raising expectations for students at *MXHS* schoolwide varied for educators in the social science department, as was the case with the Math and ELA departments. Specifically, educators' understandings of expectations differed according to their tenure at the school site, their perceptions of student mobility and ability, and their perceptions of other school actors'

expectations. For instance, **School Actor 4**, a veteran educator in the department, was reserved in his comments on progress made in raising expectations due largely to the "most staff" qualifier in the scale description. He noted, "I see that *Phase Three* starts out with most staff and I think that's a big jump" in moving from "some staff to most staff. I don't feel that we've gotten that far". Other educators in the department were far more optimistic about the progress made on raising expectations.

School Actor 27, a former student and now educator at *MXHS,* made clear her position when she reflected on student mobility and the increase in students pursuing rigorous educational opportunities, particularly AP courses…

> …When I first started here I was only teaching Hmong and then now I'm teaching the AP Psychology class and I do see that…the number in that class is increasing…last year when I first started I had a larger number but then they kind of decreased towards the end of the year and then my numbers were pretty consistent for this year. So, I think it's growing.

This comment suggests a few things. *First*, the number of students that are pursuing 'rigorous' educational opportunities is increasing. *Second*, students are persisting in these courses. *Third*, additional supports are likely in place to ensure that students are successful in these courses. Less clear from the perspective of educators, however, is the extent to which these courses are preparing students for diverse post-secondary educational opportunities. Consider the comments from **School Actor 16**, a new educator at *MXHS,* when he states,

> This is my first year at *MXHS*, so most of the staff that I'm aware of definitely knows or views our students as capable of learning rigorous content. For the most part from what I've seen so far this year, there is a heavy emphasis on going to college and making sure that they are capable of the content. Whether or not they are remains to be seen for me. I know that a lot of them end up passing some of the classes, but I'm not sure if that's a good indicator of whether or not they actually are ready…

Although educators have high expectations for students, less clear is what is perceived as being *college ready* and whether the courses students take at *MXHS* prepare them to be *college ready*.

In isolation, this comment does not raise concern for the overall level of preparation students are receiving. Yet, when considered with the two major themes in this section, that is to say, the politics of opportunity and unclear departmental expectations, the aforementioned comment suggests that a deeper discussion surrounding *college readiness* is necessary.

The Politics of Opportunity

Who has access to which opportunities, courses, and resources is as much a function of student agency as it is a function of the ways in which opportunities have been structured within the overall schooling environment. As stated in the section on the ELA department, the majority of students at *MXHS* do not have access to the most rigorous course offerings and specialized learning environments. In effect, these students are not privy to the benefits that come with participating in these courses, programs, and academies. This theme was re-affirmed in conversations with educators from the social science department.

For example, **School Actor 4** commented on how field trips to different colleges and universities are an issue of privilege—the effects of these structured opportunities far reaching and long-lasting—when he noted the following,

> If you're in an academy, you probably have a higher chance of having a college visit during your time in high school. If you're in certain groups, AP classes or other things, there's probably a higher chance that you're going to visit, but that's leaving out are our least likely kids the entire time that they're in high school, they're not going to have those, those visits. And it's not necessarily that graduating, you know, at the highest part of my class is the goal when we're talking about college. And so I just have that issue because I really think they can do it.

Notwithstanding finite capital resources, the aforementioned opportunities help students envision the next step following their time in high school and whether continuing their education at a college or university fits within their life goals. Reserving these opportunities for those select students that participate in these specialized programs, courses, and academies reinforces

inequity and delimits the development of goals and aspirations: “I think that more of them would set their goals higher and have even an understanding of the image that if we got more of our freshman on college visits because now it’s that privilege issue” (**School Actor 4**). Those students not in positions of *privilege* suffer in other ways.

When detailing perceptions of student motivation at *MXHS*, **School Actor 27** elaborated upon the structuration of opportunities at the site when she stated the stronger teachers are in the AP courses. The impact that these structured opportunities have on students labeled ‘mainstream’, particularly their motivation, was visible to **School Actor 27**. She later went on to state that she witnessed these students, “who are so driven…be put into some of those classes and then they come out just with no more motivation”. Gleaned from comments shared throughout, perceptions of rigor vary widely, largely by function of academic program (e.g., academy, AVID, etc.) and courses (e.g., AP and honors) students participate in. Similarly, within the department, *college expectations* are not clearly defined. Together, these conditions lead to inequitable access to resources, opportunities, and information among members of the student body, particularly those students traversing courses within the social science department, and enable the continuation of the politics of opportunity.

Developing and sustaining a college-going culture requires that educators ensure *all* students are equipped with the skills, knowledge, information, and resources necessary to actualize their motivation in pursuit of their goals, whether college or otherwise. The fact that students ‘leave’ certain courses, presumably where ‘rigor’ is not prevalent and expectations are low, without the motivation they entered these courses with hinders efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. Addressing concerns surrounding rigor and *college expectations*

begins with a discussion of how educators negotiate their *college expectations*. Unfortunately, it is not apparent that educators in the social science department engaged in such discussions.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Unlike perceptions of the schooling environment discussed in the aforementioned sections of this chapter, educators in the social science department expressed notably similar understandings of the school's culture. Multiple educators from the social science department elaborated upon the importance of connecting with students in meaningful ways that afford the opportunity to get to know them and their personal stories. **School Actor 27** detailed as much when she described the actors within the school as a 'family' that is 'forgiving, loving, and supportive'. Well after **School Actor 27** graduated from *MXHS*, she remained in contact with former teachers and was ultimately able to reflect on the meaning of 'family': "it's just taking you into the[ir] arms and just saying that we'll take care of you…". Supporting students in this way is a radical departure from educators' job description. Nonetheless, it appears to be an important part of their role at *MXHS.*

When discussing their role, educators referred to this act of connecting with students as "connecting the head to the heart". **School Actor 14** detailed the story of a young man who "wasn't coming to class…and the first thing you think of, you know, they're just cutting class". However, the student's story was a bit more complex than what it appeared to be at first glance. In fact, the student's "mom had surgery. He had to help his mom at home, and there's always a story". Understanding where students come from (i.e., 'connecting to the heart') and their stories better position school actors to reach students academically (i.e., 'connecting to the head'). More importantly, the act of 'connecting the head to the heart' enables school actors to better meet students' needs and post-secondary goals.

As has been detailed throughout, school actors perceive students as in need of diverse educational opportunities that extend beyond the normative post-secondary educational pathway (e.g., vocational opportunities). When asked to reflect upon whether a *college-going culture* was present at *MXHS*, **School Actor 14** stated the following:

> I think there is a college-going climate. But, I also think that we need to think of a vocational climate also, because not all kids are going to go to college. And, you know, budget cuts and all that stuff. No [auto] shop. No nothing.

Ensuring students have access to multiple post-secondary educational pathways is invaluable, but comes at a fiscal cost, as noted in the above comment. Nevertheless, should such opportunities become available to students, educators would have to structure pathways equitably and for all students, considering the politicization of opportunities. That is to say, the addition of a vocational pathway at *MXHS* would have to be an option, not *the* option for students regarded as 'non-college material':

> The problem that I have with the not everyone is made for college is what does that mean? Does that mean graduating? Does that mean two years, and I learn something and I move on? I would put that bar earlier. So, does that mean that then everyone is not made for high school? I mean, what is it about this idea of college that they can't at least benefit from some of that education? And, so that's what I have a hard time with. I think that more of them would set their goals higher and have an even an understanding of the image of that if we got more of our freshman on college visits because now it's again, it's that privilege issue. (**School Actor 4**)

Self-expectancy theory suggests that students meet the expectations educators set for them, whether high or low (see Rist, 2000). Lack of clarity on the expectations educators have for students at *MXHS* create a context where access to opportunities and resources are structured according to the myriad expectations set for students. To elaborate, educators in the social science department spoke about the need to ensure students are able to advocate for themselves upon matriculating to college and are prepared with the skills and tools needed to be successful in college. These high but differing expectations will lead to discrepancy in what students are

prepared and able to do if acted upon. This reality highlights the importance of normalizing expectations for students within and across departments.

Science Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Perspectives shared in the preceding sections of this chapter have all underscored the vantage points from which educators engage in reform initiatives and how they make sense of these efforts as well as factors that hinder them. Discussions with educators from the *science* department at *MXHS* proved no different. That is, in discussing *progress on raising expectations schoolwide*, educators from the science department illuminated the challenge that lies in ensuring *all* students receive an equitable education and cited the lack of a schoolwide plan as a *factor* that hinders efforts to accomplish this aim. In reflecting on which *Phase* educators had progressed towards, **School Actor 25** brought this concern to life when he stated the following:

> One of the issues that I think we face here at the site is that it's very possible I think for a student to come through and get a fabulous education. And they know how to navigate, you know, which teachers to work with and they do great. But as far as the whole campus and all students, I think getting an education that challenges them, that is, I guess I'll go so far as to say, respectful, I still don't see that happening across the board.

Though not clear what this educator meant by 'respectful', what is clear is that those students that are able to navigate the school and teachers receive a high-quality education. It stands to reason that these students would be those in the academies, AP and honors courses, and AVID. Therefore, those students not engaged in these programs and courses are likely to receive an education that fails to challenge them and is not 'respectful'. Ensuring that all students, irrespective of which academic program or academic pathway they choose, receive a rigorous education requires the creation of systems and structures that facilitate the accomplishment of such aims.

Unfortunately, educators from the science department at *MXHS* struggled to articulate the connection between systems, structures, and supports in place that ensure expectations are consistent for all students and in accordance with the schoolwide plan. **School Actor 19** toggled between *Phase Two* and *Phase Three* in his comments:

> As I look through what *Phase Three* and *Phase Two* are some of the wording that I guess I would say that *most staff* do have high expectations for students, but as far as the school wide plan, I think that's where I drop back to *Phase Two*. I would say *most staff* view students as capable. But as far as schoolwide plan for addressing issues where what that means to be capable and what you can do in regard of getting work done in class...We don't have [one]… (emphasis added)

Although different programs and initiatives are in place at *MXHS* that support students and supplement instruction, these programs are not clearly connected to a broader schoolwide plan that makes clear the expectations *all* school actors should have for all students. This uncertainty creates the context where low expectations for students are acceptable and remain unchallenged. In addition, the lack of a schoolwide plan manifests in the form of high levels of uncertainty within departments—the science department being no exception.

Educators were clear to suggest that in spite of the close nature of their department, directive from the leadership team was needed to clarify tasks and goals: "within our department, it's much more connected and close, but those are very informal and you're not going to have a formal conversation where there are goals and ways to implement those goals without directive from leadership" (**School Actor 21**). Yet, academic academies proved to be a space of refuge for students and educators. That is to say, although educators are not having these important conversations within the larger science department, educators teaching within the academy structure report having explicit conversations that center on "what can we do, how do we support our students, where would you want to go" (**School Actor 21**). Throughout the course of the data

collection period, educators from the science department made clear the opportunities afforded to students that participate in the academies and the privilege that lies therein.

The Secret Life of Academic Academies

In previous sections, educators' perspectives underscored the *politics of opportunity* present at *MXHS* that afford certain students exclusive opportunities due to their participation in specialized academic programs and courses. Educators from the science department reaffirmed these initial ideas and surfaced the unique role academic academies play in this broader process of stratified opportunities. According to educators in the science department, this stratification is expressed through the school's college-going culture, career and technical pathways, and conceptions of privilege.

To reiterate, a sizable contingent of the student body at *MXHS* is not affiliated with the different academic academies. As such, the mere existence of these academies creates the illusion that students have choice in whether they can be a part of these specialized communities. However, as gleaned from educators in the science department, these programs are capped for logistical, fiscal, and political reasons. Consider the following statement from an educator responding to whether all students could be placed in an academy:

> I don't think that would be logistically possible or even politically because we've provided everybody choice. And so if you say, "well I don't want to be part of the academy." ... I mean because part of the academy also is being a *privilege*, which is one of the reasons why the academies work because every academy has the right to go and say, "you know what, you're not following your obligations to join this academy. We're sorry, you're out." Right. And, so I think that's important because it's not that it builds this elitism that's inside the academy, but it provides that buy-in to do things. (**School Actor 21;** emphasis added)

Creating 'buy-in' comes at the expense of access to an invaluable educational opportunity, thus creating a schooling context of exclusion and inequity.

By definition, college-going cultures prepare students for myriad post-secondary educational opportunities, chief among which is to matriculate to a four-year college or university. Educators in the science department suggested that the college-going culture at *MXHS* is "mostly found within our academy structure…in particular, it's the GEO academy and the CJ academy" (**School Actor 21**). In addition, the *CTE* courses are housed within the academic academies—a reality that further limits access to an already limited pathway. Those students excluded from these programs suffer: "But if you're not part of an academy at this campus, I feel like you're really kind of left out as far as who is there to look at your future and support you to reach those goals*" (***School Actor 21**). The aforementioned comments raise one principle question, that being: if a college-going culture is specific to the academic academies and space within these specialized programs is limited or reserved due to conceptions of privilege and logistical capacity, how best does one develop and sustain a college-going culture that prepares *all* students for a host of post-secondary educational opportunities? Though not raised in educators' comments during the data collection period, efforts to create equitable schooling environments of this sort require a radical departure from standard operating procedures. Though not a silver bullet, negotiating expectations is a crucial starting point in this broader cultural shift. Unfortunately, within the science department, educators have not fully engaged in this arduous work.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Developing and sustaining a college-going culture is a formidable task and challenge, especially in a schooling context where opportunities, resources, and information have been unfairly allocated according to school actors implicit and explicit expectations of students. Changing the structure of opportunity begins by changing educators' expectations. First, one

must better understand the ideological perspectives educators bring to their practice and service to students. The comments and points raised by science educators highlight the complexity of this work and the task at hand. Similar to the other core academic departments discussed in the preceding pages of this chapter, educators in the science department perceive the culture at *MXHS* as evolving, welcoming, nurturing, and connected. Yet, as has been noted throughout, perceptions of the school's college-going culture are attributed to notions of exclusion. Invariably, this leaves some of the students most in need of additional supports and opportunities without support and less likely to actualize their motivations in order to fulfill their aspirations. The expectations educators within the science department have are structured along these lines of opportunity, which ultimately reinforces inequitable access to invaluable opportunities.

As a departmental unit, the act of negotiating expectations affords colleagues the occasion to standardize expectations in spaces where they vary. More importantly, it affords educators the opportunity to work together and across differences, whether in practice, pedagogical strategies, or philosophical leanings. Normalizing is a central developmental task that must be executed as educators work toward developing and sustaining a college-going culture. The challenges shared throughout this section and the preceding section, unfortunately, prevent/hinder educators' ability to engage in this central task. Addressing these barriers and their intended and unintended consequences is of paramount importance.

Non-Core Academic Subjects

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

This study's research design privileged the experiences and perspectives of educators that serve in non-core academic subjects areas, such as physical education (PE), foreign languages,

and career and technical pathways (CTE), as much as those who serve within the core academic subject areas. Considering the systemic nature of developing and sustaining college-going culture, one must take into consideration all experiences and perspectives, largely as a point of comparison but also as a point of information. Like their colleagues, these educators' perspectives varied. For some, progress in raising expectations for students schoolwide stalled due to recalcitrant educators, whereas, for others, progress was made in raising expectations due to an increase in curriculum offerings and educators' positive expectations.

To elaborate, **School Actor 22** was less optimistic about the progress that had been made at the school site given the similarity between his experience as a student at *MXHS* years before and what he observed transpiring at the site present day:

> I think that we're still in *Phase Two* too. I still see some of my teachers that when I went here we're still here. And, now being a teacher here, I still know which teacher(s) are the ones that are challenging their students and which one(s) are the ones where, you know, they're not challenging their students. And, even the students tell me, you know, I teach PE, they tell me and they tell me, "oh, so and so is like this". And when I went here, still the same thing. They're still that teacher, you know. (emphasis added)

On the other hand, **School Actor 20** was focused on the high expectations educators have for their students but was less certain these expectations were communicated to students in ways they received or of the existence of a schoolwide plan:

> I would agree with everything you've said. This is my first year here at *MXHS*, but um, and I agree that most of the educators I've spoken with have high achieving goals and want their students to succeed.

Later in the exchange, this educator clarified that she did not "know of any schoolwide plan". Even still, others from these non-core academic subject areas focused on the uptick in diverse course offerings for students at the site, a change witnessed over a decade: "I've been here for 10 years and so I have seen a lot of growth with regards to the rigorous content and having kids take these higher level classes" (**School Actor 3**). These myriad experiences and perspectives

highlight the value in using a micropolitical research design to understand better how school actors from multiple departments, leadership positions, and career experience levels engage in and make sense of school reform initiatives. Whether progress has been made in raising expectations for students schoolwide depends. That is, it depends on who one asks as much as it depends upon these individuals lived experiences and understandings of expectations. Unpacking the nuances that exist within the varied experiences educators have in changing a school's culture, particularly at *MXHS*, highlight the difficulty that lies therein.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Like their colleagues, educators in these non-core academic subject areas reified understandings and perceptions of the schooling community shared in the preceding pages and paragraphs of this chapter. When sharing their perceptions of what a school culture is, broadly defined, and what the school culture at *MXHS* is, educators were clear to suggest that any school has to be a welcoming place, a place where students want to come and learn, and a place where learning is celebrated:

> I feel that school culture should just be somewhere that there's welcoming... a place where learning happens and it's celebrated and it's acknowledged and hopefully they're excited to come back the next day and learn more... But, it's just a place where they feel welcomed to come to and they want to come and they want to learn. Now, that's the educator's idea. (**School Actor 20**)

Particular to *MXHS*, however, an educator from the physical education department discussed the import of community within the school and the ever-present challenge of managing discrepancies in perceptions that members of the broader community have and place upon the school and those that work and study there:

> But I have seen a positive change here, especially at *MXHS*. Like we do say "Xer 4 Life". It's a community. But when I've venture out to a different community or just like as of right now I'm out in Elk Grove coaching soccer and I tell them that I came from *MXHS* and then they look at me and I could see in their facial expression and they're like, "oh,

> okay, you're from *MXHS*." Let's say... when a lot of those people out there, they think when they hear about *MXHS*, they think about the ghetto. And, when I tell them I'm from *MXHS* and they... there was this one experience where one of the parents came up to me and is like they thought that I was from [affluent community] just because I'm Asian... I'm just thinking about that. And I told them I'm from *MXHS* and they was like, "where do you live"? I said, "I live in north [California city]". And they say, "what, Natomese?". I said, "no View Park". And they looked at me and they were like... they gave me that... you know, you could see it in the look. They gave me that look and I was like, "well you don't act like you're out there". (**School Actor 22**)

And, finally, educators described *MXHS's* culture ever evolving. For this educator, this process of evolution provided an opportunity to question and examine the extent to which the school is serving its purpose and whether it is meeting its institutional goals, whether preparing students for college, career, or other post-secondary educational pathways:

> I guess it's kinda [sic] like it's ever evolving, like you said, evolving, but also what are you coming to? What is the purpose? Every kid college, you know, gung ho, workforce, gung ho, just graduate. You know, I think it's kind of finding that medium of we're all trying to find a common goal. The ultimate goal would be, yes, we'd love for every kid to go to college. You know, yes, go get further educated, go do more. But then on the flip side is we kind of had to know sometimes that ain't [sic] going to happen, but everybody should have the intent of it. But on the flip side of that, if they don't get this route, can they function outside of here doing something in a job? (**School Actor 3**)

Above all else, educators viewed preparing students to be productive members of society as their chief aim.

This sentiment was expressed in educators' understandings of the school's college-going culture and their expectations for students. For instance, one educator wanted to ensure that students were able to articulate their needs and advocate for themselves: "With like the college going culture that we were talking about… focusing on one point is just being able to self-advocate for yourself and being able to communicate with different people" (**School Actor 13**). Other educators were adamant that the push for a college-going culture leaves students with limited options and opportunities (e.g., trade school, military, etc.) following their time in high school.

This point of contention is notable in that educators' expectations for students were multifaceted in nature and not solely tied to matriculating to college post-high school:

> But, you want them to go, you want them to go right after high school, but like **School Actor 25** and **School Actor 24** says maybe some of them are not ready. Maybe it's trade school that they should go to, you know. Maybe they need to take a year off, a few years off and find out what they're interested in and then go, you know, because you don't want to send that student to go to college and they're not ready. You know, they're going to get bad grades, academic probation and that's it. And then once they try to go back in in the future it is going to be hard because they have to petition that. (**School Actor 22**)

Consistent throughout these educators' comments was their purpose in serving as educators, that being to nurture students, prepare them for a host of post-secondary educational pathways, and to help them develop into productive members of society. Unfortunately, like their colleagues, it is not clear the degree and extent to which they negotiated their expectations in an effort to ensure all students perceived their expectations equally within their respective academic departments.

Counseling Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Throughout the data collection process, it became clear that the counseling department at *MXHS* was tasked with spearheading efforts to ensure students were equipped with the necessary information and resources needed to engage, competitively, in the college-going process. That is to say, that in the absence of a clear schoolwide plan, the counseling department set the standard, tone, and pace for college-going efforts at the school. Unlike the academic departments and the clarity of their departmental expectations, counselors functioned as a team and reveled in this fact and what it signified for students:

> And, I think as a team, as a counseling team, we are the Dream Team and it's nice to be in a place where everybody has that same mindset and mind frame. So any student that comes here, they're being given the same message and like **School Actor 10** said, "it might not be you're going to a four year, you might not be going to Stanford, but there's a place for you somewhere. Let's figure out what that place is". And, I think we all have

> that same mentality so we don't have any one person who's kind of anti or some kids can go, some kids can't. There's no gatekeepers here… we all have that philosophy that all of our students have access and we practice that on a regular basis. (**School Actor 6**)

Fortunately, from counselors' perspective, educators at *MXHS* made progress on raising expectations for students, as documented in their comments.

To elaborate, when prompted to reflect on progress made in bolstering college expectations for students, schoolwide, one counselor looked to the "different PDs that staff members have been attending… different options that we're now offering students with the different CTE pathways, a lot of the other special programs that schools are offering now" (**School Actor 10**) when confirming the shift towards *Phase 3* on the scale of student expectations. Unfortunately, counselors noted that they, too, were unaware of any schoolwide plan to raise expectations for students at the school site, thus re-affirming earlier concerns. Consider the following remarks from multiple counselors:

> Regarding a schoolwide plan [to] address the beliefs…I'm not sure what the schoolwide plan is… If you're looking for something that's written down, I don't know. (**School Actor 10**)

Another counselor elaborated upon the lack of a written document when she stated the following:

> And I did struggle also with the schoolwide plan. So we will talk more about that but because it's not a formalized thing, but I think, you know, when you're in staff meetings, you hear it from the administration in terms of the expectation, "high expectations for all students and support for all students and going to college for all students". But as far as something articulated in a plan type of format, I don't know that that exists… (**School Actor 6**)

According to the aforementioned counselor, administrators discuss "high expectations for all students" and the need for support to assist students in reaching those expectations in staff meetings. Yet, those expectations have not been articulated to school actors through a formal plan that educators and counselors can collectively buy-in to. The lack of a schoolwide plan

allows for uncertainty to develop among school actors. One counselor alluded to as much when she noted the following:

> I think we need to define high expectations and I think that's what we have not done as a schoolwide. Um, we're in a PD have reviewed it and make sure that all teachers understand what we mean by high expectations because every teacher has different meaning of what a high expectation for a student is. (**School Actor 9**)

A schoolwide plan serves as a yard stick along which educators are able to measure and adjust their expectations. Developing a schoolwide plan that outlines what expectations mean and how to assist students in meeting them clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all school actors.

Differentiated Roles

Developing and sustaining a college-going culture is a task that requires the collective involvement of all institutional stakeholders. However, counselors are universally revered as the college-going experts on campus. This is especially true at *MXHX*, a reality that only complicates the development and sustainability of the school's college-going culture. To elaborate, when asked to reflect on where support in creating and sustaining this culture is coming from, counselors highlighted the presence and significance of external actors and programs (e.g., ETS, EAOP, etc.) while unconsciously downplaying the role educators play in this process: "I know a majority of the teachers are doing academic boot-camps…" (**School Actor 10**). When pressed further, two counselors suggested that among all the core departments, *ELA* teachers understood the college-going process best and were taking an active role in making sure students effectively completed it (e.g., completing PIQs for UC applications, submitting letters of recommendation, etc.).

Unfortunately, counselors at *MXHS* expressed a narrow conception of how educators can and should share in the responsibility of developing and sustaining this college-going culture. Consider the following statement:

> And to me I think that's the biggest thing they can do to support the college-going culture is to help those students pass those classes with C's or better. So I don't want them to try to be the college expert. I really don't want a teacher to sit down and try to do applications with the students. I don't want them because that's not their expertise. Your expertise is instruction in your subject area. SO help these students get C's in your classes or better…A's and B's so they can be…and know how important that is. (**School Actor 9**)

Educators' role in this process extends further than ensuring students earn a passing grade that satisfies A-G requirements for college. Such narrow conceptions of roles limit a college-going culture's long-term sustainability and the role these actors can play in the process. This was a realization one counselor came to upon further reflection and questioning throughout the interview. Consider the following remark:

> … as we're sitting here thinking about ways to get better, we probably could kind of as a staff, our staff, think about ways teachers could support us better and do some PD with them in terms of like at 9th grade and 10th grade, you know, like what we would want from the teachers because I never really thought about [it] until you said that. I'm glad that you said that. (**School Actor 9**)

While differentiated roles are necessary in large organizations, actors within those organizations need clear roles and responsibilities. Given the myriad responsibilities school counselors have (e.g., scheduling, college-going, socio-emotional, etc.), as well as ensuring students are engaging in all aspects of the college-going process, it is imperative that all school actors share in the responsibility and that their roles be clearly delineated. Contrary to the comments raised throughout, educators can and must be "the college expert" in a schooling context where a college-going culture is present given that sustaining a college-going culture is a task that requires the collective effort and input of all stakeholders.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

As the perceived "college-going experts" at *MXHS*, counselors are uniquely positioned to provide insight on perceptions of the schooling environment (e.g., expectations and college-

going culture). Candid in their remarks, counselors affirmed the importance of approaching students at *MXHS* from an asset-based framework and expecting nothing short of academic excellence. As noted throughout, the expectations educators have of students "translate into the interpersonal relationships, learning environments, and the opportunity structure that assist students to meet these standards" (Liou & Rojas, 2016, p.382). That is to say, educators structure learning environments according to the expectations that they set for students. One counselor (**School Actor 10**) confirmed this perspective when she stated the following:

> But I think you as an instructor or you as a teacher…if you are thinking with the expectation that every child in this class can be successful in my class, then I think that's when your level of instruction, you know, now becomes more effective and more relevant to the student…But when students can actually feel, they can see from your body language, the way you talk to them, the way you interact with them, when they actually see that you believe in them, then that's when they're gonna [sic] rise to the occasion.

Students rise to the occasion and meet the expectations set for them. However, students enter school at different skill levels and need differing levels of support to reach the expectations educators set for them, assuming they are high. At least from counselors' perspective, educators are responsible for ensuring that students receive the support they need in order to meet high expectations:

> And just I think the idea as you were talking about the idea of not accepting a student checking out. You know what I mean? Expecting them all to be there, present, ready to learn and finding ways to help them get there when they aren't...And realizing that they're all at different levels. But just because you know, one is at a lower level than the other doesn't mean that they should do less work. That you should help them out to make sure that they meet the level of the rest of the students. (**School Actor 7**)

Developing and sustaining a college-going culture means that *all* students are being prepared for college and being prepared to engage in the college-going process. In order for this to take place, educators and counselors must recognize students' diverse learning needs and ensure supports are in place to help them meet those expectations and to be prepared.

A number of additional supports have been implemented to do just this—for example, academic bootcamps. However, from comments shared throughout this chapter, it is clear that all educators do not have high expectations for students, a reality that threatens efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. When asked whether there was a college-going culture at *MXHS*, counselors were adamant that there was and that *internal* and *external* school actors contributed to ensuring students matriculate to college:

> I definitely would. What is it? 85 to 90 percent... 90ish percent of our students, our senior class every year, goes to college. Like that is their plan. They are... they know that that's the next step. We do a lot of things and publicize a lot of things throughout the year to help them with that process from workshops in the fall for four-year college applications to scholarships and 2-year application process. The many outside organizations that come and assist our students as well… And so if there's any desire to go to college, there are so many different ways to be supported in that process here. (**School Actor 7**)

According to multiple counselors, these opportunities are made available to all students, irrespective of "where you come from, your economic background, whether you're undocumented or not…Everybody has the same opportunity" (**School Actor 9**). However, the connection between what happens in theory as compared to what transpires in reality is mercurial. At *MXHS*, access to important resources, opportunities, and specialized learning environments has been reserved for a select group of students deemed worthy and capable of successfully engaging in these "rigorous" environments. A focus on the student experience at *MXHS* is warranted and in order.

Table 7
Summary of Findings by Academic Department

Department	*Phase*	*Themes*	*Perceptions of Schooling Environment*
English and Language Arts	2.5	Non-Compliance as a Threat to Progress Politics of Opportunity and Trade-Off Weight of External Pressures	* Culture as Welcoming *Culture as Knowing Students and their Stories *Culture as Family *College-Going Culture as Preparation/Readiness *College-Going Culture as Limited *Expectations as Multifaceted *Expectations as Encouragement
Mathematics	2.5	Meetings as a Norming Space Weight of External Pressures	*Culture as Connectedness *Culture as Evolving *College-Going Culture as College *College-Going Culture as Limited *Expectations as Multifaceted
Social Science	2.5	Politics of Opportunity	*Culture as Connectedness *Culture as Knowing Students and Their Stories *College-Going Culture as Limited *College-Going Culture as Multifaceted *Expectations as Preparation *Expectations as Advocacy
Science	2.5	Secret Life of Academic Academies	*Culture as Evolving *Culture as Welcoming *Culture as Nurturing *College-Going Culture as Limited *College-Going Culture as Non-Inclusive *Expectations as Multifaceted
Counselors	2.5	Differentiated Roles	* Expectations as Nurturing *College-Going Culture as Inclusive
Non-Core Academic Subjects	2.5		*Culture as Welcoming *Culture as Evolving *Culture as Community Perception *College-Going Culture as Self-Advocacy *Expectations as Multifaceted

Summary of Findings

School Actors

Throughout the data collection period at *MXHS*, the author sought to uncover how, if at all, school actors seemingly far removed from places and spaces of formal power worked

together to develop and sustain a college-going culture. Developing and sustaining a college-going culture is a task that requires the input and efforts of all institutional stakeholders, or school actors. This is especially true in large, comprehensive school settings, like *MXHS*. The term *school actor* has been used throughout, both as a pseudonym and as a broad term, to account for the experiences and contributions of all institutional stakeholders, not just educators. Considering the complexity of this reform effort and the centrality of school actors' ideologies, the author focused his research gaze upon school actors' *college expectations*, or their beliefs about students' post-secondary educational futures, using a host of data types (e.g., documents, survey data, field notes, interviews).

A focus on school actors' expectations is central in that students generally meet the expectations set for them (Rist,2000) and school actors structure the schooling environment in ways that align with their expectations (Liou & Rojas, 2016). Thus, by prompting school actors to articulate their expectations for students, one is able to investigate key factors that might otherwise remain unearthed, some of which include: how these institutional stakeholders enact their expectations for students, the influence of their expectations on students, if any, and how these expectations manifest within the overall structure of the schooling environment. Further, by prompting school actors from multiple departments to articulate, how, if at all, they negotiate expectations, one is better able to assess the degree to which these institutional stakeholders intentionally work across differences, where they arise, and departmental contexts to accomplish a common aim—in this case developing and sustaining a college-going culture.

As gleaned from the earlier introduced survey data, *most* school actors at *MXHS* reported notably high expectations for students in that they expect them to graduate from high school and matriculate to college. This finding was consistent across all data sources, those

being: interviews, documents, and surveys. However, what became apparent throughout the course of the data collection and analysis process was the myriad ways school actors conceptualized expectations for students. Though mostly 'high', school actors articulated plans and beliefs for students that were not always consistent with their peers or reflected in the options and opportunities available to *all* students at the school site. For instance, some school actors believed students should pursue traditional four-year college options, whereas others expressed an affinity for multiple pathways and options—whether technical and vocational, military, junior college, or four-year college and university. This dynamic brought forth challenges in that the schooling environment was not structured in ways that reflected school actors' expectations for students. As such, if and when school actors acted upon expectations not formalized within the school's structure, students potentially suffered. In addition, this lack of clarity led to discrepancies in conceptions of *college readiness*. And finally, the existence of these myriad expectations reinforced the importance of school actors negotiating these expectations to develop and sustain a college-going culture at *MXHS*.

Unfortunately, school actors at *MXHS* seldom negotiated their college expectations for students in formal ways or settings. Numerous impediments (e.g., lack of meeting time, external pressures) and choices (e.g., lack of desire) created the context and conditions where these core beliefs, though seemingly known by all and 'high', remained unaddressed and unchallenged. When left unaddressed and unchallenged, conditions within the school that re-inscribed inequity, thereby countering efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture, were left unchecked (e.g., politics of opportunity, etc.). For instance, although school actors lamented the fact that access to advanced courses, specialized learning environments, and pertinent college information was seemingly reserved for a select group of students such inequity went unchecked. This

connects to Malen's (1994) *second face of power*, or the ability to limit agendas and curb dissent. In addition, although some school actors perceived their peers as harboring 'low' expectations for students, lack of meeting time, the influence of external pressures, and a lack of desire thwarted efforts to address these 'low' expectations and their perceived impact in formalized ways.

Frequently mentioned throughout this section of the chapter was the absence of a formal "structured school wide approach and plan that clearly delineates a college going culture including a core belief that all students can achieve high academic standards" (MXHS, p.11). The effects of the plan's absence reverberated throughout the institution in significant ways. In some cases, school actors found themselves unable to engage in formal discussions about goals and ways to implement said goals without clear directives from leadership. In other cases, school actors were unaware of what 'high' expectations truly meant for students, thereby leaving them without a yardstick along which they could measure and normalize their expectations. The absence of a formalized plan that made explicit what 'high' expectations meant for all students and the institutional supports (e.g., programs, course offerings, etc.) in place to assist students in meeting those expectations made it challenging for school actors to galvanize around the task of developing and sustaining a college-going culture at *MXHS*, as was evidenced in the conflicting remarks about the school's culture and college-going culture. In short, school actors were left to operate from their personal perspectives rather than the leadership team's perspective and vision. In addition, the lack of a schoolwide plan made school actors more susceptible to external actors, influences, and pressures. In short, one contends that a schoolwide plan is necessary in efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture. However, in and of itself, such a plan is not

sufficient. Equally important in this effort is willingness from school actors to engage in the work and to make the requisite changes and adjustments that best serve students.

Central to any reform effort are the institutional actors, or "street level bureaucrats" and their motivations and intentions. By and large, the school actors at *MXHS* take pride in their craft and want to serve students well, not only in their journey to post-secondary opportunities—whether college or otherwise—but also in life. When sharing their understandings of culture and their assessment of the culture at *MXHS*, school actors discussed the sense of connectedness that unites students and school actors, one group with another. In addition, school actors articulated the importance of knowing students and their stories, as well as their understanding that in order to reach students in academic settings, they first had to connect to students' 'hearts'. For these actors, their primary role at *MXHS* was to ensure that students were ready for a host of post-secondary options, whether college or career. Their secondary role, and likely the most important, was to help prepare students to be productive members of society.

Though not the primary focus of this investigation, the relationship between space (e.g., urban school), race, and expectations was evident in school actors' comments (see Liou & Rojas, 2018; Watson, 2011). As has been mentioned throughout, school actors at *MXHS* frequently discussed how external perceptions of the school (violent, etc.) were unfounded but often reflected in some school actors' ideologies and expectations for students. To elaborate, school actors lamented their colleagues' colorblind racial ideologies that obscured and fostered deficit-based thinking. That is, school actors articulated that perceptions of students' ability and 'quality' were based on *who they are* (i.e.., racial and socioeconomically)*, how they* are (i.e., behaviorally and perceived abilities)*, and where they're from* (i.e. urban environment). These ideologies connected to lowered expectations for students and professional practices that

maintained inequitable college-going opportunities, presumably along racial lines. Unfortunately, school actors seldom articulated how they addressed these limiting expectations in formal ways, in and across departmental units. Such inaction is akin to Malen's (1994) *second face of power*, 'elitist' perspectives, used to limit dissent and agendas to safe issues.

Students

A singular focus on school actors, their expectations, their perceptions of the schooling environment, and the ways in which they contribute to the development and sustainability of the school's college-going culture does not account for the experiences of students—the intended beneficiaries of reform efforts. The study's methodological design afforded an opportunity to explore the student experience at *MXHS* and to compare and contrast these two accounts. In this section of **Chapter 5**, the author focuses in on the relationship between students' post-secondary educational aspirations/plans, school actors' college expectations, and the extent to which, if any, these two factors influence student progression in and through the college-going and choice processes.

Thereafter, the author transitions to a discussion of four students he observed, interviewed, and developed a rapport with during their high school careers. More specifically, he focuses on what transpires during their senior year as a way to delve deeper into the student experience at *MXHS* and the student experience in the college-going and choice processes. It must be noted that these four student accounts are not to be considered as an attempt to detail *the* student experience at *MXHS*, writ large, but rather to shine a light on what transpires in these critical processes and whether school actors play a prominent role therein. By focusing on the experiences of students in what many consider to be the 'rigorous' academic track, one is better able to assess the salience of school actors' expectations given concerns raised surrounding the

inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities for students in specialized programs, courses, and learning environments. Comparing and contrasting the experiences of these students to all students will bring forth discoveries that would have otherwise remained unearthed.

Table 8
Demographics of Student Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Grade at MXHS		
9th	239	24%
10th	286	29%
11th	283	29%
12th	176	18%
Not Reported	7	>1%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	134	14%
Hispanic/Latino	388	39%
Asian/Pacific Islander	220	22%
White	27	3%
Native American	5	<1%
Other	36	4%
Multiracial	173	18%
Not Reported	8	<1%
Sex		
Male	490	49%
Female	474	48%
Non-Conforming	24	2%
Not Reported	3	>1%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch		
No	262	26%
Yes	690	70%
Not Reported	39	4%
English as a Second Language		
No	517	52%
Yes	438	44%
Not Reported	36	4%

Note: N=991; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 9
Participation of Students

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken		
0	508	51%
1	242	24%
2	119	12%
3	43	4%
4 or more	70	7
Not Reported	9	>1%
Participate in an Academy		
No	475	48%
Yes	490	49%
Not Reported	26	3%
Participate in AVID		
No	904	91%
Yes	87	9%

Note: N=991; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

In general, respondents to the student survey were aware of the various institutional systems and supports at *MXHS* that were designed to prepare them for higher education. In addition, they knew how to access salient college resources present within and outside of the school. And, finally, respondents confirmed that adults at the site had high expectations of them and were preparing them for college (**Table 10)**. Fortunately, students' perceptions of the aforementioned aspects of the school did not vary notably across racial groups, across academy or AVID affiliations, or free and reduced-price lunch status (see **Appendix A**). Unfortunately, however, they did differ for students that took an increasing amount of AP and honors courses as compared to their peers who did not and for students in higher grades (see **Appendix A**). This equity related issue was reflected in school actors' comments concerning the politics of opportunity and the availability of resources for a select group of students. Survey results provided an additional opportunity to nuance these trends further.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale Name	Mean	Cronbach's α	Min-Max	# of Items
Systems and Structures	44.71 (9.93)	0.94	1-60	12
Student Know How	14.13 (4.14)	0.85	1-20	4
General School Expectations	11.76 (2.69)	0.83	1-15	3
Parental Expectations	9.06 (1.95)	0.92	1-10	2

Note: N=991; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Table 11
Completion of College Going Behaviors and Post-Secondary Aspirations/ Plans

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Completion of College-Going Behaviors		
Speaking with Counselor	27	3%
Collecting College Information	51	5%
Attending College Fairs	11	1%
Visiting a College Campus	149	15%
Multiple*	528	53%
None	225	23%
Immediate Post-Secondary Plans		
Four – Year College	395	40%
Two – Year College	75	8%
Job	54	5%
Military	43	4%
Undecided	155	16%
Multiple*	262	26%
None	7	<1%

Note: N=991; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. * indicates that multiple response options were selected.

To elaborate, respondents were asked to indicate what their post-secondary plans were (e.g., four-year college, two-year college, job, military, or undecided) and the extent to which they had actualized those plans by speaking with counselors about their college plans, attending college fairs, visiting college campuses, and/or collecting college information, as seen in **Table**

11. On average, a sizable contingent of respondents had aspirations to matriculate to college, whether four-year or two-year, and engaged in behaviors that would help them reach their goals. For some students though, their participation (or lack thereof) in key programs and courses, like AP/Honors, *seemingly* impacted their behaviors (**Table 12**). That is, students that had not taken an AP/Honors class (41%), as compared to their peers that had taken one (58%), two (63%), three (88%), or four or more (91%) of such courses were less likely to engage in multiple college-going behaviors.

Table 12
Crosstabulation of College-Going Behaviors and Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken

College-Going Behaviors	Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken					
	0	1	2	3	4 or more	X^2
None	161	44	14	0	2	120.653***
Speaking with a Counselor	21	3	2	1	0	
Collecting College Information	28	14	7	1	1	
Attending College Fairs	6	2	1	0	2	
Visiting College Campuses	84	39	20	3	1	
Multiple College-Going Behaviors	208	140	75	38	64	
Total	508	242	119	43	70	

Note: N=982; ***= p<.001; Df =20

Table 13
Crosstabulation of Post-Secondary Plans and Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken

Post-Secondary Plans	Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken					X^2
	0	1	2	3	4 or more	
None	3	0	0	0	1	125.595***
Four-Year College/University	140	108	69	22	55	
Two-Year College/University	54	15	3	1	1	
Job	38	12	3	1	0	
Military	26	12	2	1	1	
Undecided	110	24	14	3	3	
Multiple Behaviors	137	71	28	15	9	
Total	508	242	119	43	70	

Note: N=982; ***= p<.001; Df =24

For instance, as seen in **Table 13**, roughly 51% of respondents had *not* taken an AP or honors class and only 21% had taken two or more such classes. The difference between students that took no AP or Honors courses (28%) and those that took one (45%), two (58%), three (51%), and four or more (78%) were sizable when assessing their plans to enter a four-year university immediately after high school. As the number of courses increased, students' desire to immediately enroll in a two-year institution decreased. This pattern was reflected in the completion of multiple college-going behaviors as well: 0 courses (73%), 1 course (76%), 2 courses (75%), 3 courses (88%), and 4 or more courses (94%). In short, there is an association between the number of AP and honors courses that students take and college-going behaviors (**Table 12**). In addition, there is an association between participation in AVID and students' post-secondary plans where participants are more likely to aspire for 4-year (59%) than their peers (37%) and are generally less undecided about their plans than non-participants (3% and 17%, **Table 14**).Unfortunately, there is a statistically significant association between Academy affiliation, χ^2 (5, N=965) = 14.952, p<.05, AVID participation, χ^2 (5, N=991) = 26.218, p<.001,

gender identity, χ^2 (5, N=988) = 20.888, p<.05,free/reduced price lunch status, χ^2 (5, N=952) = 12.053, p<.05, and college-going behaviors. In addition, there is a statistically significant association between Academy participation, χ^2 (6, N=965) = 23.645, p<.05, gender identity, χ^2(12, N=988) = 24.982, p<.05, and post-secondary plans. These patterns are concerning in that they highlight the inequitable distribution of college resources and opportunities—a reality expressed through students' aspirations/plans and behaviors. Fortunately, however, there was not a statistically significant association between race/ethnicity, χ^2(35, N=991) = 38.389, p=.319, and college-going behaviors *or* between race/ethnic identity, χ^2(42, N=991) = 56.142, p=071, free/reduced price lunch status, χ^2(6, N=952) = 2.697, p=.846, and post-secondary aspirations/plans.

Table 14
Crosstabulation of Post-Secondary Plans and AVID Participation

Post-Secondary Plans	AVID Participation		
	No	Yes	X^2
None	6	1	26.717***
Four-Year College/University	343	52	
Two-Year College/University	73	2	
Job	52	2	
Military	42	1	
Undecided	152	3	
Multiple Behaviors	236	26	
Total	904	87	

Note: N=991; ***= p <.001; Df=6

As has been stated throughout, a sole focus on survey data obscures the narrative and very real experiences that students go through in actualizing their aspirations by engaging the college-going and college-choice processes. For many students, these processes begin long before they commence their senior year in high school. For some students, this process begins

with a simple comment from parents, family members, or loved ones that affirm the importance of continuing one's education beyond high school. For other students, this process hinges upon the totality of their experiences in high school and the perceived expectations that school actors have for them. Following a cohort of students throughout the majority of their high school career, in this case 3 years (AY 2015 – 2017), permitted the author to take note of change over time and the influence of myriad factors—whether school, family, community, or intrinsically related—on students' aspirations and their engagement in the aforementioned processes.

The author's particular focus is on what transpired through AY 2017 – 2018, the students' senior year of high school. His relationship with these four students hinged upon a sense of familiarity that allowed for candor. Considering the principle focus of this part of the investigation (i.e., the salience of school actors' expectations), it is integral to note that for each of the four students, expectations played a prominent role in their efforts to actualize their post-secondary educational aspirations. Unfortunately, it is not apparent that school actors' expectations played a prominent role for these students. In the paragraphs and pages that follow, the author provides a comprehensive account of the students and the salience of expectations in their academic journeys.

Tseng (Student 1)

Though undecided about his intended major in college, Tseng, an outgoing Asian male, is clear on two things. First, he is going to college. Second, Tseng will attend a large, prestigious university where he is free to explore his interests and chart a path forward. Throughout the data collection process, Tseng's drive to actualize his post-secondary educational aspirations—the source of which is as layered as the individual himself—shined bright. To elaborate, Tseng is outgoing, yet reserved; determined while still remaining open to suggestions; and, brilliant but

humble. Looking merely from the outside in, one's perspective of Tseng would be clouded by the success he has experienced throughout high school. His path towards success was not without obstacles, however.

Sources of Aspiration

A cursory review of Tseng's transcript record highlights his desire to challenge himself—all AP and Honors courses—and the success he has experienced in doing so, a 4.38 weighted GPA. Yet, what ultimately gets masked in such attempts are the contrasts in the individual and the spaces and places whence Tseng draws inspiration and motivation to aspire for college. When asked whether he wanted to go to college, Tseng calmly asserted, "yeah, I definitely plan to go to college…it has been ingrained into me". He went on to elaborate on how his journey as a refugee and an immigrant impacted his perspective on college:

> I was not born here, so I grew up basically in a low [income] community…my family situation, basically the financial status, it is just very low. And then that's just a drive for me to improve my status overall. And, as I grew up, looking at my parents struggling to survive and the welfare really helped with the food stamps and stuff. But then aside from that, other necessities we just did with what we can. So like that kind of urged me on to be like, "I should like improve. I don't want to live like this in the future". And then like as I slowly grow up, I just noticed that they do say that college is like a key to a lot of doors and then I want to see if I could like have a shot with that and like improve my status.

For Tseng, the opportunity to learn and study was not always available—"I was born in a place where there was school but then like I didn't really go to school". So, when given the opportunity to capitalize on rigorous course offerings, he took full advantage.

Throughout the data collection process, it became clear that college held a revered place in Tseng and his family's life; that is to say, matriculating to college was a way to escape the economic challenges they faced as immigrants to the United States. Messages surrounding

the importance of college were communicated early and often, long before Tseng began high school. The primary source of these messages was not *school actors* but rather Tseng's family…

> …then I came to the US in 2005. And then right as soon as we arrived, my dad, like even before…once we got accepted and we know that we're coming to the US, my dad is like, "Oh yes, you guys are finally going to come here to America. And then education is number one". They were like, "yes. You're going to go to college". So like before I even knew how to say the alphabets, the idea of education and college has already been installed into my mind. So they're like, "you're going to go to college… Just high expectation and threshold has already been put there for me when I was a kid.

Despite his family's low level of education and limited knowledge of the college-going process, their high expectations set the standard for Tseng. School actors often expect students' parents, or guardians, to engage in their children's education in normative ways, which overlooks family history, experience and dynamics. Families like Tseng's often engage in the schooling process in non-normative ways, as evidenced by his remarks which clearly communicate the significance placed upon education, in particular college, and the strong and consistent nature of his family's college expectations. So, for Tseng, school actors were not the principal agents in helping him develop post-secondary educational aspirations; it was his family. Nonetheless, school actors did play an important role in his development and path towards college.

Role of School

As mentioned throughout this chapter, school actors' college expectations for students vary by educator, by department, and by the courses, programs and specialized learning environments that students participate in throughout their high school experiences. With such contrasting accounts of expectations and the delivery thereof, a focus on the student experience becomes paramount. While Tseng did not credit school actors for the development of his college aspirations, he did clarify the ways in which school actors communicate expectations to students:

> They don't directly say that, but you can tell from the details and inferences. Like, they're [not] saying [it] directly 'cause no staff or teachers would be like, "yeah, you should just quit and do work". Like, you can tell by how active they are and supportive and how much they push you. If they don't really do that, then you know…

Here, Tseng articulates that educators do not explicitly say who should or should not go to college. But, rather, they communicate their expectations to students through what their actions, in particular how they challenge and support students. In the absence of these 'details and inferences', it becomes clear to students that educators' expectations for them are low. That is, what is not said becomes more important than what is said. Tseng's statement reaffirms Liou and Rojas's (2016) claim that educators' expectations "translate into the interpersonal relationships, learning environments, and the opportunity structure that assist students to meet these standards" (p.382).

For Tseng, it was clear what educators expected of him given their behaviors and classroom practices. When reflecting on his *English and Language Arts* teacher's grading practices, he noted that he took a class with "**School Actor 12** the first time [this year] and she grades our essays and stuff like college standards...". He later clarified that she has,

> … graded like writing tests and stuff for UCs…So from that viewpoint, I'm like, "okay. She's somebody that has done these gradings [sic] for other college students. So, if she's looking at it that way, then if I could write a really good essay from her standards, then that means my essay will be really good in college too".

Though difficult, Tseng perceived such actions as preparing him college. However, Tseng expressed deep concern with the level of rigor he was exposed to at *MXHS* and whether he could survive in a competitive post-secondary educational environment: "If I'm to be like super honest, I think it's going to be very difficult to survive at [chosen university] because as much as I feel like they prepared [me], the standards is just on a different level". Despite having taken and

successfully completed multiple AP and Honors courses, Tseng was deeply conflicted about the utility of such courses.

On one hand, he understood that these 'advanced' courses better equipped him to successfully engage in the college-going process because "it gives you 1) a higher GPA, 2) it 'looks' like you're taking more rigorous courses when colleges look at your application, and 3) because you've taken those classes". He recognized that having taken these courses would distinguish him from other applicants who took 'regular' classes throughout high school. On the other hand, Tseng lamented the unwavering focus on standardized tests that came with taking AP courses throughout high school, a reality that came at the expense of a depth of knowledge he perceived students in 'regular' classes having:

> …in actuality, sometimes I even think regular classes have like way more work than we do. 'Cause most of the time, for us, we focus so much on the test that we just focus on testing most of the time. So, its just the material for testing while they actually like read through the textbooks and like go through like small details and stuff because they don't have to worry about like a big AP exam at the end. So, they actually get to go through all the context.

To reconcile these two seemingly conflicting perspectives, one must consider Tseng's aim to matriculate to a prestigious college and recognize the calculated ways in which he has elected to engage in the schooling process. In fact, Tseng's comments and actions are an indictment of a system tasked with addressing inequity and how it ultimately re-inscribes it. Like Tseng, the role of his school, *MXHS*, and the actors therein are layered.

College-Going Process

One's approach to the college-going and college choice processes is dependent upon a number of factors, some of which include fit, prestige, finances, and location. As previously

mentioned, Tseng's approach hinged on prestige and school size—a fact he mentioned frequently throughout interviews that took place during the data collection process:

> I ranked my colleges on basically how I personally feel about them and in way how prestigious they are and like how big they are. So, because I don't know what I want to do, if I just go for the big college, I just have this way of thinking that if there is such a huge and prestigious college, they're going to have a lot of courses and then I could just take one of those courses. They're gonna [sic] have more courses than those small private…universities since they're so focused.

This rationale was further evidenced in Tseng's choice of universities, those being (in order of preference): Stanford University, Yale University, and University of California - Berkeley. Aside from their size, Tseng perceived these institutions as spaces and places where his 'outgoing' personality would be able to flourish and where he could "meet more people and make more connection[s]". Likewise, considering their perceived size and academic offerings, Tseng was confident he would ultimately find the course of study that best worked for him at a large university. Unfortunately, Tseng was not accepted to his top choices and ultimately had to decide between his third and fourth choices, UC Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Although the financial package at UCLA was slightly better, Tseng ultimately chose to attend UC Berkeley based largely on a belief he would be in a position to challenge himself and grow more as a person there:

> I feel like if I go to Berkeley, I'm going to be more focused because I don't feel like I have any like super close friends that's going to Berkeley. And I've heard a lot of stories about how like it's basically survival of the fittest and I feel like that's what's going to spur me on and make me grow the most.

Tseng's story has been one of challenge, perseverance, and resilience. So, it comes as no surprise that he would ultimately base his choice on perceived rigor and challenge.

While to some Tseng's selection of schools might seem shallow, his approach to the college-going process demonstrated a high level of navigational acumen and the role of

educators' expectations in the aforementioned processes. In selecting recommenders for his college applications, Tseng relied on relationships developed with key individuals in his secondary schooling experience—principally teachers. This behavior signaled that Tseng was aware this process started long before his senior year in high school. Tseng's behavior serves as a reminder that these key relationships were developed over the course of 3 and 4 years. According to Tseng, students at *MXHS* generally "don't start thinking about college until, at the earliest, their sophomore year and the latest their junior". This late start to the process adversely impacts students; that is, it severely limits their post-secondary educational options. In addition, Tseng's experience in the college-going and choice processes speaks to the expectations these key individuals had for him. As previously stated, educators generally do not communicate their college expectations in explicit ways but through 'details and inferences'. Had these 'details and inferences' been absent, Tseng's ability to navigate these aspects of the college-going and choice processes successfully would be low. In conclusion, although school actors were not key influences in the development of Tseng's college aspirations, they, their expectations, and the enactment thereof were influential in the college-going and choice processes.

Tamir (Student 2)

Mild mannered. Pensive. Family oriented. Thoughtful. Focused. These adjectives describe Tamir, an African American male primed for graduation at the time focus group interviews began in August 2017. Tamir, like Tseng, was driven by his desire to matriculate to college and credited his family for having instilled in him the importance of higher education long before he began high school. He challenged himself by taking 'rigorous' courses throughout high school in preparation for college. Though similar to Tseng in the academic track he

navigated throughout high school, Tamir's decision-making process was motivated by a different set of factors.

Source of Aspirations

For Tamir, matriculating to college was a forgone conclusion. At the time of data collection, Tamir was chiefly concerned with where he would ultimately be accepted to college, not whether he would go: "My biggest thing this year is getting accepted to the school I want to go to". Tamir's selection of schools—UC Berkeley, University of Alabama, and Stanford University—was motivated by prestige and location. In particular, Tamir selected the University of Alabama as one of his top choices because "my family's from there. So, like most of my family is over there and I always wanted to be there". Like Tseng, the source of Tamir's aspiration to go to college was not school actors, but his family.

Dissimilar to Tseng, Tamir's family's messaging was subtle but clear. When reflecting on his childhood and family trips, Tamir noted the following:

> College, honestly, it was just how I was raised. I would always go to football games, college games. Like whenever me and my family went out of town…they would take me and my siblings to the university to just go and eat lunch. So it kind of felt normal. Like at first it was like, "wow, I'm really at Berkeley eating lunch". And, then after the 10th time, it was like, "oh, I belong here". It felt I was supposed to go there.

For Tamir, these trips normalized what it meant to be present on a college or university campus but comments from his parents' made explicit what these trips did not:

> Like my dad would tell me... he said "like, I know about college, so me not going isn't like the smartest choice". He said, "but, some people honestly just don't know. Like they don't have people to tell them, 'go to college, it's going to help you in life". He said like some people who don't have their parents there or their parents didn't go to college. He said, "they're probably not telling them that college can help you… they're probably just like a diploma this, diploma that and they don't know what college could get for them".

Here, one finds that Tamir's family helped clarify the purpose of matriculating to higher education and how it could enhance one's life. This early messaging reinforced by frequent trips to various colleges and universities helped Tamir recognize the importance of higher education and helped him imagine himself as a college student.

Role of School

Unfortunately, school actors did not feature prominently or always glowingly in Tamir's comments regarding the *role of school* in the development of his college aspirations and his engagement in the college-going and choice processes. Two chief issues were gleaned from conversations that took place during the data collection period, those being: equity in messaging and uncertainty in preparation. First, when asked whether he thought school actors at *MXHS* expected all students to go to college, Tamir noted the following:

> I mean they push it here, but I feel like they push it for the people that they think will be successful. I don't feel like they give everybody equal opportunity. I think they say, "oh he's good at school. You should go to college". And, if they see somebody who's not that good in high school and say, "Oh you should go to get a job or something.

In comparison to Tseng's comment, Tamir notes that school actors are much more explicit in communicating their expectations to students they perceive as not being "good at school". Such remarks stand in contrast to the aim of developing a college-going culture but support remarks educators shared throughout the data collection period, particularly around the idea of students having ample post-secondary options, whether vocational, military, or college. Developing and implementing a schoolwide plan should clarify goals and create a pathway to greater equity in the messaging students receive around post-secondary options and opportunities.

Positive messaging alone, however, is not enough to ensure students will be ready for college. As previously mentioned, Tamir challenged himself by taking 'rigorous' courses

throughout high school, chiefly AP and honors courses. However, as he approached graduation and reflected on his level of preparation for college, Tamir did not feel ready for college. Though he placed some of the blame with *MXHS*, he was honest and cited the part he played in his preparation for college:

> Honestly, no. Well, I don't feel like it was *MXHS's* fault completely. Some of it was mine because I should have developed a better work ethic, in my opinion. Like one thing that everybody's telling me is that 'you're going to have to read' and like the reading assignments, I would use shortcuts and stuff. And, it's like cheating myself at the end of the day. I don't necessarily think *MXHS* was cheating me out. I think I was cheating myself out at the end of the day.

At no point throughout the data collection process did Tamir divulge *MXHS's* shortcomings in his preparation for college.

College-Going Process

For Tamir, the college-going and choice processes did not unfold in the manner he expected. Throughout the data collection period, Tamir never acknowledged the extent to which school actors at *MXHS* assisted him in navigating the college-going and choice processes. It was not clear as to whether school actors and their expectations played a prominent role in these processes. In assessing Tamir's experience, however, what became clear were the myriad factors that ultimately weigh in decisions on where one should attend college. Fortunately, he was successful in actualizing his aspirations and gained acceptance to one of his top choices, the University of Alabama. Unfortunately, he declined the offer of admission and instead elected to attend California State University, Fresno—an institution that he never mentioned during the data collection process. His decision was ultimately based on finances:

> So, I chose Fresno because money was a main factor for me. I got into my dream school of the University of Alabama but then…[***INTERIEWER***: Money wasn't right..] Yeah, it wasn't right. So far I won enough scholarship money to where my first year at Fresno is

> paid off. And, it was either between Fresno or Sac State. I ended up choosing Fresno, one because Fresno was much cheaper.

Tamir's choice and experience throughout these processes draw us away from the confines of *MXHS* and the actors therein and deeper into the finances needed to fund a college education. Tamir's decision, while rational, underscores the complexity of these processes and the factors and inputs students manage when deciding on where to further their education.

Vincent (Student 3)

A students' background (e.g., family, school, or community) can function as a motivating or delimiting factor in their efforts to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities. Vincent, like Tseng, is from an Asian family that fled conflict in their native country and immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. His family's experience reinforced the importance of cultural values; values that Vincent perceives as conservative and struggles to adopt given his experience as a second-generation immigrant. Vincent, like Tseng and Tamir, has taken many of the rigorous courses offered at *MXHS* and was an active leader in the Criminal Justice (CJ) Academy. Throughout the data collection process, the author found Vincent to be compassionate, resourceful, artistic, and approachable. His experience and story are a testament to his perseverance.

Source of Aspirations

Similar to his aforementioned peers, Vincent's aspirations to matriculate to college were motivated by family dynamics and history, as well as an internal desire to improve his socioeconomic positioning. When reflecting on the his family and the greater Hmong community, Vincent confirmed, "there's a really strong sense of community. Just like we help each other a lot. So, I think like as a little kid, my parents would always talk about college and

talk about being a doctor…". These messages to become a doctor were not self-serving but rather focused on giving back to the community and caring for elders—messages Vincent struggled with as one of the youngest in his family.

He elaborates on the impact of these messages when he notes the following:

> I'm the youngest in my family and I have a pretty big family. I feel like my parents are … going to be okay because I feel like my family's already kind of tak[ing] care of them. So, I feel like now college is more of a option as to me freshman year, [whereas before] college was more of a "I have to go".

The above-cited quote suggests that for Vincent, as he moved through high school, matriculating to college became less of an obligation to his family and more of a personal choice. As the influence of messaging from his family waned, Vincent's internal desire to improve his socioeconomic positioning took over. He noted the following when elaborating on his preparation for college:

> I feel like my time here...I feel like it really helped me, helped me know where I come from, like being at *MXHS*, being in this community, like what type of struggles we go through and what type of person I want to be. Because I don't want to struggle like this. Also it was really fun, but then I feel like for the most part like it's been so ingrained in me to like go to college, that it hasn't been really a lot of fun. I'm just like so focused on doing homework and studying that I don't really take the time to be a normal kid.

Vincent's aspirations seemingly came at a cost, that being: missing out on fun and the prospects of being a 'normal' kid. This sentiment was shared, in part, by all four students. Actualizing their aspirations came at a cost that they were all willing to pay in the pursuit of matriculating to college.

Role of School and College-Going Process

Like his counterparts, Vincent's story and experience highlight the absence of school actors in the development and influence of his aspirations to matriculate to college. Frequently throughout the course of the data collection process, however, Vincent did highlight the

significance of school actors and the expectations they had for him. He noted how one educator prepared him to engage in the college-going process by structuring writing assignments around the personal statement questions for the University of California system's application. In addition, he referred to relationships he developed with educators and how conversations he had with them challenged him to be "a better person just to push forward our community". These experiences, along with his involvement in the CJ Academy, helped Vincent prepare for and engage in the college-going process. Unfortunately, as has been noted throughout, many of these opportunities were reserved for a select group of students.

Vincent navigated the college-going process with relative ease despite starting later than he originally anticipated. He ultimately chose to accept an admission's offer from University of California, Santa Cruz once he learned he was not accepted at his top choices, UCLA and UC Berkeley. Throughout the college-going process, he relied heavily on external help, particularly from family and friends that were successful in the process. Having access to family and friends who were successful in the process simplified it and likely increased his overall odds of being successful. Vincent's experience highlights that while resources and personnel were available at *MXHS* to assist students in the college-going process, 1) they were often reserved for a select group of students and 2) he elected not to use some of the support from school actors due in part to support he received from family and friends.

Rebecca (Student 4)

Rebecca, a young African American female, has demonstrated resilience in the face of extreme family circumstances, excellence where mediocrity reigns, and a formidable spirit. Following the death of her father in her sophomore year at *MXHS*, Rebecca took charge of her education to put herself in a position to be competitive in the college-going and choice processes.

Active in the Criminal Justice Academy at *MXHS*, as well, Rebecca set herself apart from others with her ability to navigate diverse situations and contexts, with her excellence in all situations, and with her formidable and accomplished demeanor. Like her peers, Rebecca took 'rigorous' courses during her time at *MXHS* but was courageous enough to move away from such courses when she perceived them as hampering her learning experience. Her story, like those of her peers, reflects the complexity of the aforementioned processes and the salience of factors that include but are not limited to school actors.

Source of Aspirations

Though their short-term goals were similar, Rebecca's long-term goals differed quite significantly from her peers. That is, when asked to elaborate on her post-secondary plans, Rebecca noted the following, "…not only do I plan on going to college…it's that I also plan on going into the military right after high school". As previously noted, throughout high school, Rebecca was involved in the Academy at *MXHS*. It is probable that her time in this academy helped her envision the military as an additional pathway to college. Ultimately, however, Rebecca wanted to become a surgeon. Rebecca's pathway to college was not easy. She navigated low expectations from extended family, the death of her father, and the challenges of high school. Nevertheless, she persisted.

Graduating from high school and matriculating to college was so much more than a 'rite of passage' for Rebecca. For her, it was disproving the low expectations placed upon her by extended family members at a young age. Consider the following statement,

> … there's been a bet since we were born because my mom, she was a teen mom and my sister, she graduated like a year ago and then my brother graduated so there's been a bet on—I know my bet is pretty high—which one of us is going to be a teen parent before we cross the stage… I think that is like a big deal when cross the stage because they have

> such low expectations for us because our parents weren't really in a good place. So I think that's like… it's going to be a big thing for me when I cross the stage.

To combat these low expectations, Rebecca turned both towards her inner ambition to pursue college and the counsel of her father.

From a young age, Rebecca expressed a profound appreciation for college, so much so that her mother took note and began to actively support her in achieving her goals whereas before her mother's focus was on graduating high school. In addition, Rebecca received messages from her father that reinforced the importance of college, "don't take your life for granted. Don't do anything stupid. You go to college and you get yourself a good job". These messages were underscored by some of the life choices her father made, "because my dad for most of his life, he was a drug dealer. And, he's been in jail…". Tragically, her father passed away during her time in high school. The tragic loss of her father was devastating and led Rebecca to struggle with her studies. Nevertheless, she persisted and held onto the messages her father imparted. Managing these expectations came at the expense of her social life in high school, a trade-off that had both positive and negative consequences and one she was willing to make in the pursuit of her goals.

Role of School

Throughout the course of the data collection period, Rebecca eloquently highlighted the stratification in messages that were communicated to students in the courses perceived as 'rigorous' compared to those that were not. Though not a direct factor in the development of her aspirations, these implicit expectations did impact students in negative ways, according to her. When asked whether she thought students in non-AP courses viewed college as a viable pathway, Rebecca noted the following,

> I think when you're in AP class there's kinda like this fake stigma that you're like better than everybody else at the *bottom*. 'Cause I have a lot of friends here who don't take AP class and they're like "oh, I'm not smart enough to be in AP class". And now they're starting to say, "*well yeah I'm going to college but it's going to be a community college*". And I'll be like, "why aren't you like applying"? He's like, "oh I don't think I can get into a CSU or UC". And, I feel like when you're in an AP class, I guess people see you as like the best of the best when you're really just not. We're equal, we struggle the same ways but we just decide to take on more work. And, I feel like they think…they know college is in their reach but they don't know that they can go anywhere they wanted to because even with regular classes they can have great grades and still go to a UC or a great university. (emphasis added)

Three out of the four students introduced in this chapter referred to this 'fake stigma' attached to AP and non-AP courses, as well as the stratification of expectations between the two academic tracks. From Rebecca's comments, one observes that this 'fake stigma' ultimately manifests in the decisions students make about where to apply to college.

She further elaborated on the stratification of expectations at *MXHS* when she noted the following,

> The baseline is everybody is going to college. But, which college? That's where it varies…which level of college. 'Cause I know like in AP class, I forgot which… I forgot what class I was in… I think I was in government. It was AP government, I think it was like a couple of weeks ago and she was talking about our colleges. And, someone was like, "Oh yes, I'm going to community college". And everybody just looked at them and gasped. It's like…it's not like a bad thing, but it was shocking because even the teacher looked at him like, "what"? Because, you know, when you're in AP class, everybody just automatically assumes okay, "CSU, UC, Stanford, private school, whatever". And then when you're in a regular class, that's when they just assume okay, "maybe a CSU, community college". So yeah, the baseline [expectation] is we are all going to school, no matter what. But the level…

From the accounts shared in the preceding paragraphs, one finds that school actors' expectations get communicated to students in myriad ways, whether through 'details and inferences', according to Tseng, through tailored messaging, according to Tamir, or through untenable perceptions and 'fake stigmas', according to Rebecca.

For Rebecca, however, the stigma that separated these two academic tracks was not always justified. To elaborate, Rebecca willingly dropped an AP course that she believed was not effectively preparing her for college and elected to take 'regular' classes when she felt it necessary. She cited the mentality of some of the educators for these courses as being narrowly focused on the tests and rote memorization rather than the task of "actually teaching the material instead of trying to get you to memorize the material". She later remarked that taking ownership of her education and focusing more on being taught the material came from forgoing an honors English course for a 'regular' English class, where she "learned way more because there wasn't a test to worry about", which also helped her to become a better writer. These remarks from each of the students confirm how, despite school actors' best efforts to create an equitable schooling environment, school actors' expectations function in ways that re-inscribe inequity, rather than eliminate it, and complicate efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture.

College-Going Process

Excitement. Fear. Pressures. Discovery. Courage. These terms describe Rebecca's journey through the college-going and choice processes. Applying for college brought about feelings of *fear* and *excitement* for Rebecca. Given some of the challenges she faced in high school, her fear was associated with the possibility of being rejected from the various colleges she applied for, whereas the excitement she felt lied in the fact that she overcame countless obstacles and reached this critical juncture in her journey. Unlike her peers, her application process was not limited geographically. Although she originally wanted to attend UC Davis, Rebecca made a deliberate choice to forgo California universities after being exposed to other opportunities and some time for personal reflection. She applied to colleges in Colorado, Rhode Island, Alabama, and Wisconsin to name a few states. While sharing details on her experience

attending a fair for historically black colleges and universities, Rebecca noted that California schools are “bougie” and that they focus incessantly on competition and competing. Her selection of colleges was structured around being somewhere she felt was open, somewhere she could learn without having to worry about her grades in comparison to those of her peers. As she neared the midway point towards graduation, Rebecca ultimately set her sights on Alabama State University as her top choice.

Unfortunately, Rebecca felted *pressured* to limit her search to schools in California by school actors. When describing her senior year experience, she noted that school actors at *MXHS* “give us a lot of opportunities but I don't think they... look at the broader picture. Like ever since I've started looking out-of- state, I realize how much they want us to stay in state”. School actors went as far as mandating that students submit college admission test scores to California schools—“I had to send in score[s] on schools I didn’t even want to go to…Yeah, in our class, they said it was mandatory…”. This is an instance where the enactment of school actors’ college expectations comes into conflict with what students want for themselves and for their future. In addition, such actions come with financial implications for students that have search processes that are not limited geographically, like Rebecca’s.

And, finally, along the pathway to college Rebecca *discovered* institutions and opportunities that were too good to pass up. Although she received an admission’s offer to attend Alabama State University and wanted to accept it, she ultimately declined and decided to attend Northland College after meeting a recruiter at a college fair. Rebecca noted the following concerning their encounter,

> He was just like wondering around like looking at other colleges like this. I don't know why. And he like gave me his card and he asked for my transcripts and then he was like, "you have to like... If you're coming you're going for Biology, it needs to be in a good biology program. And they have like the top 10 % STEM laboratories in the state,

> I mean the country". So I was like, "oh that's cool". So I applied. He paid for like everything, like I didn't have to do... My SAT scores, he paid for that. He paid for the application. I didn't have to do anything. So when it came down to it I was like, I do love ASU but Northland has a better program and plus it's cheaper. They're paying for everything.

By demonstrating *courage* in her search process, Rebecca found an opportunity to attend a college that best suited her interests and long-term career goals of becoming a surgeon. In addition, this offer came with the promise of full financial aid package and a reprieve from some of the other financial burdens associated with applying for college (e.g., application fee, test scores, etc.). For Rebecca, while school actors' college expectations did influence her engagement in the college-going process, their actions did not closely align with her goal of attending a college outside of California.

Table 15
Summary of Findings by Students

Name	*Source of Aspirations*	*The Role of School*	*College-Going Process*
Tseng	Family	Implicit School Actor Expectations as 'Details & Inferences' Perceptions of Rigor	Input from School Actors Prestige and Location
Tamir	Family	Explicit School Actor Expectations as 'Selective Communication'	Location and Finances
Vincent	Family	--	External Support
Rebecca	Family	Explicit School Actor Expectations as 'Tiered' Perceptions of Rigor	Military Out of State Schools

Summary of Findings

Students

A singular focus on school actors, their college expectations, and their efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture would fail to account for the ways in which students are impacted within these schooling environments. That is, focusing on the experiences of students at *MXHS*, in general, and these four students, in particular, provided an opportunity to assess and map the influence of school actors' college expectations on the development of students' college aspirations and their decisions and behaviors in the college-going and choice processes. In so doing, one moves from a focus on processes ('how') to a focus on effects and outcomes ('what'). The analysis of the earlier introduced data sources yielded findings that contextualized and contradicted remarks from school actors. In addition, these findings underscore the significance of contextual factors that extend beyond the confines of the schooling environment, namely family. It became evident that school actors' college expectations played an insignificant role in the development of students' college aspirations. That is not to say, however, that students did not perceive these expectations, as evidenced through survey data, or that they were not important as students navigated their schools and the college-going and choice processes.

To elaborate, the development of students' college aspirations occurred long before the start of their high school careers. In all cases, students credited members of their family as the principle agents behind the development of their college aspirations. For some students, this took place through explicit messaging whereas for others it was a way of life. These early messages set the tone and standard for how students should perceive post-secondary educational opportunities. That is, students perceived college as a tool for social mobility, as a way to support family, and as a way to give back to the community. This theme further complicates the

discourse surrounding parental involvement/engagement in underserved communities. Students families play a supportive role in their schooling experiences but were often unable to participate in formalized ways due to language barriers, gaps in education, and other factors. Nonetheless, they were involved and play a significant role in helping students develop college aspirations.

As previously stated, students were perceptive to school actors' college expectations and were able to articulate some of the ways in which these expectations impacted themselves and their peers. Students confirmed that expectations were communicated through 'details and inferences', that they were communicated 'selectively' based upon perceived ability, and that they were 'tiered' depending upon academic track. According to the four students introduced in the preceding pages, school actors' college expectations were structured along ability status. As such, it stands to reason that school actors' expectations create the context where issues like the politics of opportunity and trade-offs, as well as the secret life of academic academies, become a reality and delimiting factors in the pursuit of equity. The analysis of the student survey supported this reality by highlighting the relationship between participation in specialized courses and programs and college-going behaviors and post-secondary plans. Unfortunately, the academic tracks school actors structured expectations around were not always as rigorous as described, according to the students under investigation and teacher survey respondents.

And, finally, the college-going and choice processes varied for students in the study. Some made use of the resources and relationships available at the school and with school actors, respectively, whereas others relied more heavily upon external resources—namely extended family members. Frequently, however, students noted that school actors structured key course assignments in ways that satisfied college application materials (e.g., personal statements, college essays, etc.). Not only did this help students navigate the process, but it also signaled that

school actors expected them to matriculate to college. Such practices might help account for the difference in the completion of college-going behaviors for students that take no AP and Honors courses, as compared to their peers that take multiple.

CHAPTER SIX

SOUTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Large, comprehensive public secondary schools were not designed to prepare *all* students to matriculate to higher education. Rather, these educational institutions were designed to prepare students for the primary occupational pathways in society (e.g., higher education, career/technical, military, vocational, etc.). Over time, as the need for a more highly educated workforce increased, so to have calls to improve pathways to and preparedness for higher education. Public secondary school actors are now being called upon to restructure institutional systems and structures in ways that bolster access to and readiness for all students, not a select few. The extent to which school actors meet this standard has become one of the benchmarks along which school actors are held accountable by federal and state measures (see CDE, 2018; ESSA, 2015). Yet, as has been discussed throughout, the mere introduction of new policies and accountability benchmarks does not guarantee that school actors will implement these mandates with fidelity. Southside High School (hereinafter *SHS*), and the District within which the school finds itself, is an anomaly in that despite its size and legacy, systems have been put in place to ensure "all" students are college and career ready upon graduating. That is to say that while *SHS* fits the demographic and 'performance' profile of schools on the margin (see **Chapter 4**), school actors have taken great strides to support current students in becoming college and career ready.

What has transpired at *SHS* is a reflection of notable changes taking place within the larger unified school district. District actors, in collaboration with local colleges and universities, government agencies, and businesses, structured a system, known as the *Pledge*, that promises to "provide all students with an intentional comprehensive support system that integrates their families and is designed to ensure access to opportunities and services that prepares them to

successfully complete their college and career goals" ("Pledge", p.1). The *Pledge* outlines how these various stakeholders promise to scaffold instruction, internships, workshops, and other targeted opportunities over a six-year period (i.e., 7th-12th grade) to help students and their families reach and complete their post-secondary goals. The planning outlined in the *Pledge* is structured around the following four domains:

1) *Academic Planning* (e.g., 6 year planning, capstone, etc.)
2) *College and Career Planning* (e.g., college fairs, PSAT, transcript evaluation, etc.)
3) *Parent Engagement* (e.g., review 6-year plan, admissions process, learning walks, etc.)
4) Professional Learning (e.g., First Best Instruction, academic alignment with higher education).

As an example of *college and career planning*, local community colleges and four-year universities have strengthened articulation agreements for students that complete an agreed upon pathway seeking to matriculate into one of the local California State University and University of California campuses.

All stakeholders, including school actors, share in the responsibility of upholding the *Pledge*. Specifically, school actors are called upon to create 21st Century Learner Centered Classrooms ("Universal Design for Learning", p.1), where standards are taught through activities that prompt the development of the 5 C's, those being: critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, character, and communication. School actors use *performance task assessments* (or, PTAs), formative and summative assessments, and exhibitions to assess these skills. As is the case for *all* high school students throughout the District, students at *SHS* are required to complete a *Capstone Portfolio*, which "serves as evidence that the student has met core competencies for college and career readiness and has also prepared to meet personal goals for future levels of learning" ("SHS, p.1). In effect, the *Capstone Portfolio* is a repository of the myriad assessments and projects that students complete throughout their time at *SHS*.

Like *MXHS*, school actors at *SHS* periodically submitted self-assessments that documented their progress in developing a college-going culture. In Winter 2014, school actors at SHS outlined their principal goals for the grant, chief among which was to develop multiple PTAs for the *Capstone* that assessed the degree to which students acquired "CCSS, [*SHS*]'s SLCs, Habits of Mind, 21st Century Learning Skills…" (Annual Report, 2014, p. 4). Reflecting on progress made in the four years since the beginning of the grant project, in June 2018, school actors at *SHS* remarked that the *Capstone* "has shaped much of our work at *SHS*, providing structures to support classroom instruction, staff professional development, and [the development of] a college-going culture among all stakeholders" (Annual Report, 2018, p.2). In short, the *Capstone* clarified school actors' roles within the institution. Now, "all teachers in all departments…develop challenging curriculum that builds on students' academic knowledge and skills as well as non-cognitive skills and dispositions necessary for success after high school" (Annual Report, 2018, p.2). Counselors and college partners maintain "support systems for students, parents, and teachers" whereas administrators refine "structures for all parties to be successful" (Annual Report, 2018, p.2). These remarks indicate that significant progress has been made in developing systems that support students being college and career ready. The introduction of the *Pledge* and *Capstone* have focused school actors' efforts, interests, and practices in subtle, yet significant ways. In short, these projects comprise *SHS's* schoolwide plan.

Notably the degree to which all stakeholders at *SHS* have bought into the schoolwide plan, however, remains unclear. For instance, in Winter 2014, school actors noted that they were in *Phase 3* on the *student expectation* scale, where:

> Most staff views all students as capable of learning rigorous content and high-level thinking; school-wide plan focuses on raising expectations for all students.

In June 2018, school actors remarked that progress had *not* been made in moving from Phase 3 to Phase 4, where:

> All students viewed as potential high achievers; school-wide plan reflects shared mission among all stakeholders to sustain high expectations for all students.

While the District and *SHS* have experienced success in developing articulated agreements and pathways for students and structured activities to ensure student readiness for higher education, fidelity among school actors remains a point of concern. Consider the following remark from school actors at *SHS*,

> Teachers use professional development release days and late-start time to examine student work and develop rigorous curriculum based on the Common Core Standards; however, our discussion revealed some inconsistencies across departments (Annual Report, 2018, p.3).

In addition to unpacking how school actors negotiate expectations in an effort to develop and sustain a college-going culture, exploring these 'inconsistencies' became a focal point of this investigation.

Table 16
Educators' Departmental Affiliation

Department	Sample Size (n)	% of total
AVID	1	2%
English & Language Arts	11	18%
Language	7	12%
Mathematics	9	15%
Physical Education	2	3%
Science	7	12%
Social Studies	5	8%
Other	18	30%

Note: N=60; Sample size represents educators that responded to the 2017 Teacher Survey

Table 17
Demographics of Educator Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Years Teaching at MXHS		
0-5	14	23%
6-10	7	12%
11-15	15	25%
16-20	13	22%
20+	10	17%
Not Reported	1	2%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	--	--
Hispanic/Latino	13	22%
Asia/Pacific Islander	7	12%
White	30	50%
Other	6	10%
Multiracial	4	7%
Sex		
Male	28	47%
Female	32	53%
Non-Conforming	--	--

Note: N=60; Sample size represents educators that responded to the 2017 Teacher Survey
--denotes no respondents from group

Table 16 and **Table 17** present demographics of teacher survey respondents from Southside High School. School actors' responses to the teacher survey underscore some of these inconsistencies while also bringing to light new ones. For instance, although respondents had high expectations for students and felt those expectations were reflected in the schooling environment, they were generally less engaged in helping students navigate the college-going process (see **Table 18**). After disaggregating the data by respondents' departmental affiliation, educators from the science department stood out as having the lowest personal expectations, engaging in the least amount of college related activities with students, and having the lowest perceptions of students' families (see **Table 20**). Such inconsistencies across departments threaten efforts to streamline pathways to higher education for all students—a reality further compromised by additional inconsistencies that emerged from the survey data.

Table 18
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale Name	Mean	Cronbach's α	Min-Max	# of Items
General School Expectations	12.88 (1.72)	0.81	1-15	3
Ethos of College-Going	13.33 (1.84)	0.82	1-15	3
Personal Expectations	12.51 (2.22)	0.70	1-15	3
Personal Actions	57.71 (11.64)	0.91	1-80	16
Perceptions of Students	22.58 (4.38)	0.80	1-30	6
Perceptions of Families	13.76 (3.13)	0.77	1-20	4

Note: N=60; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Table 19
Perceptions of Quality in Preparation for College in Core Academic Subjects and Skills

Subject Area/Skill	Mean
English	3.03 (1.84)
Math	2.25 (1.72)
Science	2.61 (1.92)
Social Studies	2.76 (2.06)
Ability to work in teams	3.68 (1.21)
Problem solving skills	3.18 (1.27)

Note: N=60; Corresponding scale is 0=I don't know; 1=F; 2=D; 3=C; 4=B; 5=A; Standard deviations appear in parentheses

Despite notable efforts to create a college and career ready culture, respondents were not confident in the quality of education students received while at *SHS*. On average, respondents ascribed grades of C (or, 3) or lower (D, or 2) to each of the core subject areas and to important skills students would need for college and/or career opportunities (e.g., ability to work in teams and problem solving; see **Table 19**). In addition, across departments, respondents ascribed a grade of F or D to the math department (see **Table 21**). While a great deal has taken place at *SHS* and in the District to make pathways to higher education accessible for all students, these trends highlight that a considerable amount of work remains.

Table 20
Responses to Scales disaggregated by Departmental Affiliation

	AVID	English & Language Arts	Language	Math	Physical Education	Science	Social Studies	Other
Scale Name	Mean							
General School Expectations	13.00 (--)	12.91 (1.70)	13.14 (1.06)	13.00 (1.41)	10.50 (6.36)	12.00 (1.82)	13.40 (1.14)	13.17 (1.46)
Ethos of College-Going	10.00 (--)	13.72 (1.61)	12.57 (1.13)	13.33 (1.41)	10.50 (6.36)	13.00 (2.08)	14.00 (1.00)	13.83 (1.50)
Personal Expectations	14.00 (--)	13.55 (1.12)	13.58 (1.98)	12.66 (2.50)	14.50 (0.70)	11.35 (2.03)	13.80 (0.83)	11.15 (2.33)
Personal Actions	75.00 (--)	63.19 (7.64)	59.09 (11.30)	59.33 (11.26)	68.00 (11.31)	49.22 (6.94)	58.20 (8.98)	54.05 (13.78)
Perceptions of Families	14.00 (--)	13.64 (4.38)	15.84 (2.70)	14.11 (1.96)	15.86 (5.16)	12.28 (2.56)	15.20 (2.58)	12.78 (2.71)
Perceptions of Students	20.00 (--)	22.91 (6.53)	24.92 (3.92)	22.66 (4.06)	25.55 (6.28)	20.95 (3.79)	25.00 (2.00)	22.21 (3.25)

Note: N=60; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses

In this chapter, the author shares findings from data collected at *SHS* that responds to the two research questions re-introduced in **Chapter 4**. Relevant findings are organized by *group* (i.e., educators, counselors, and students) and *subgroup* (i.e., Math, English, etc.), where applicable. By employing this organizational approach, the author is better able to nuance the ways in which school actors within and across departments have engaged in the process of negotiating expectations, both through explicit and implicit ways. Where relevant, the author details factors that impinge upon school actors' ability to negotiate college expectations, as well as their ability to develop and sustain a college-going culture. Finally, the author details how school actors' expectations influence students' college aspirations and behaviors in the college-going and -choice processes using multiple data sources. Following each section (i.e., school

actors and students), the author briefly summarizes major themes ahead of a more detailed discussion in **Chapter 7**.

Table 21
Perception of Quality in Core Subject Areas by Departmental Affiliation

	AVID	English & Language Arts	Language	Math	Physical Education	Science	Social Studies	Other
Perception Name	Mean							
English	0.00 (--)	4.27 (1.00)	2.71 (1.97)	3.00 (1.80)	2.00 (2.83)	3.00 (2.16)	3.00 (1.73)	2.72 (1.90)
Mathematics	2.00 (--)	2.27 (1.95)	1.57 (1.62)	3.67 (1.00)	1.00 (1.41)	2.00 (1.73)	1.80 (1.30)	2.17 (1.89)
Science	0.00 (--)	3.09 (2.07)	2.14 (2.04)	2.50 (2.20)	2.00 (2.83)	3.14 (1.57)	3.00 (1.73)	2.44 (1.91)
Social Studies	4.00 (--)	3.00 (2.15)	2.29 (2.22)	2.75 (2.38)	2.50 (3.54)	2.86 (2.04)	4.20 (0.45)	2.29 (2.09)

Note: N=60; Corresponding scale is 0=I don't know; 1=F; 2=D; 3=C; 4=B; 5=A

Educators

Math Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

For educators in the math department, perspectives on progress made in raising expectations schoolwide varied considerably, from *Phase 3* to *Phase 4,* and by the mindsets of school actors. For some educators in the math department, progress was hindered by perceptions of and attitudes towards students' ability and skills. Consider the following remark from **School Actor 12**,

> I would say for Math [department], it would be a [Phase] 3. I think a lot of times where there's like two camps...Like 'I'm just going to complain because the students don't have the basic math skills' and there's teachers that are "regardless of wherever they're at, how

> far can I take them?" So, I think of the word mindset. Does that teacher have like a growth mindset? Like, "this is what you give me, let's do this. Do as much as I can". Or, like, "this is all you gave me" and I'm just going to complain about it. So, I would say Phase 3.

In the face of perceived gaps in students' skills and knowledge base, some educators in the math department have and operate from a defeatist mindset whereas others have and operate from growth mindsets. Educators with growth mindsets were more likely to suggest progression to *Phase 4* on the earlier introduced expectations' scale, as compared to their peers. For instance, **School Actor 37** opined that "we're at Phase Four, because at least in the math department…we're very focused on getting every student to where they need to be. Not just, "oh, well, these students understand, these students don't". Unfortunately, this perspective was not the dominant one within the department and was further complicated by external pressures.

As accountability standards have increased in recent years, school actors in the Math department have felt increasing pressure from local educational agencies to ensure students pass courses and meet proficiency benchmarks on standardized tests (i.e., SBAC). **School Actor 7** felt as though "most of the staff views all students as capable of learning rigorous content" but lamented the increasing pressure that that staff in the math department feel in balancing rigor while ensuring that students succeed. He noted the following:

> So, we have this constant pressure... Like this is going on for the last six, seven years. Constant pressure of making sure we don't have D's or F's. So how do you balance that with the rigorous learning that students have to do? Because if something is rigorous, then you don't expect students to get A's all the time. Right? Um, and then we also have pressure of doing well on SBAC. So, like today in the morning, they projected the scores for...last three years scores for SBAC for English and Math and Math was the lowest one. And, they were pointing out, and rightly so, that the math is the lowest one.

Absent from math educators' discussion of progress made in raising expectations was a clear articulation of the schoolwide plan and how it factors into the instructional plan and teaching efforts. This is somewhat concerning considering the focus of the school site's schoolwide plan

and the broader efforts within the District. This lack of clarity on how the schoolwide plan is used within the math department has contributed, in part, to the lack of clarity surrounding departmental expectations.

Unclear Departmental Expectations

Despite increased efforts to create, refine, and implement a well-defined schoolwide plan (i.e., the *Pledge* and *Capstone*) that reaches all students, it is not entirely clear that educators in the math department are on the same page regarding their college expectations for students. This apparent lack of clarity is worth examining considering educators' mindsets and approaches to perceived gaps in students' skills and knowledge base and since non-compliance within one department threatens progress at the entire site. At *SHS*, structures are in place that enable all educators to meet regularly in departmental meetings. In these meetings, math educators, in particular, are able to "work on common assessments, look at each other's student work, and find strategies on how to improve [their] teaching" (**School Actor 7).** More specifically, educators have used these meetings as an opportunity to discuss "what are the non-negotiables, the things that students absolutely need to know going into the next class"? (**School Actor 28**). However, even after educators have "done this and said 'this is what we have to focus on'…those skills are still lacking" (**School Actor** 28).

Addressing these perceived gaps in skills becomes more of a challenge when allocated meeting time is cut short by updates and announcements. According to **School Actor 7**…

> We only meet as a department maybe once a month or even less than that….even when we meet once a month, like [the] first half hour, it goes in announcement, whatever the announcements are and like we get like 15, 20 minutes at the end to talk about whatever we want to in our respective groups. But, we need way more time going forward….

School Actor 7 went on to detail how pullout days for his department had dwindled from two per semester to none. This creates the context where disparate practices, mindsets, and

expectations are ultimately left unexamined and unaddressed. Lack of sufficient meeting time prevents educators from engaging in robust discussions about how best to address perceived skill gaps and delimits efforts to clarify and normalize departmental expectations.

As gleaned from past comments, educators in the math department at *SHS* approach perceived gaps in students' skills and knowledge base from two distinct perspectives, those being: a growth mindset, where, irrespective of what students know or enter the school with, progress is possible; and, a defeatist mindset, where perceived gaps in students' skills and knowledge base are regarded as insurmountable. Educators' operating from defeatist mindsets communicate a low-level of expectations for students and threaten the normalization process, as compared to their peers. Fortunately, however, those with such mindsets do not appear to be a sizable contingent of the math department.

When asked to confirm whether his colleagues approach teaching in ways that scaffold instruction to address perceived skill gaps, **School Actor 43** suggested that, "some do. Some do, but I mean we always bitch and complain about the lack of skills. And, it comes down to…you gotta [sic] figure out a way to overcome the frustration…do something different. Because the traditional approach just isn't working". Multiple educators detailed some of their classroom practices and how they 'do something different' to address perceived gaps. Some described how they

> …take a little bit slower approach to teaching some of the concepts. So, we do lots of review. We make sure to make ourselves available after school, during lunch. I know there's after-school math tutoring at least in one classroom every single day after school. So, we make ourselves very available for students to ask questions and things like that. (**School Actor 37)**

On the other hand, others scaffold instruction and do their best to

> …layer this stuff. So, especially the hands-on things, you find some that anybody could do. Like anybody could make a square… But, they should at least make the square or

> make the template. And, then they get to the point, they could cut them out. Maybe they could finish the project, maybe they can reflect on it, but within that there's layers. So, there's something that anybody in the class can do. And, then the better students could take it a step further. And they could change it, make a new one, vary the size, whatever. So, we try to layer the...at least I've been trying to layer it so that everything we do. **(School Actor 43)**

Without sufficient meeting time to discuss issues and to develop and implement potential remedies as a collective, educators with growth mindsets are simply operating as individual actors and not as a collective unit, thereby leaving those with defeatist mindsets free to "bitch and complain about the lack of skills" without ever actively working to support students' acquisition of skills they might lack. The departmental consensus on expectations remains unclear, allowing for disparate practices and mindsets that threaten progress and the successful implementation of the broader schoolwide plan, that is the *Pledge* and *Capstone*. In response to the principal research question, one notes that educators in the math department have not engaged in the process of negotiating expectations. While the structure to do so is in place, volition and temporal constraints prevent these school actors from doing so.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

The present investigation afforded math educators an opportunity to share their thoughts, perceptions, and understandings of the schooling environment, namely the school's culture, college-going culture, and expectations. When asked to reflect on and share their *personal expectations* for students, math educators consistently noted that they wanted all students to "have the opportunity to go to college" (**School Actor 28**), whether a two-year or a four-year institution. They opined that college might not be the path for all students and that students should be able to pursue "trade school" or go "to the military" as alternatives to normative higher education pathways. In short, these actors' expectations for students were multifaceted in nature and came through in practical ways, like educators talking about job skills to help better prepare

students for the workforce. Despite similarity in math educators' *personal expectations*, as a department, these educators failed to normalize these expectations.

Perceptions of the school's culture were far less consistent than were *personal expectations*. That is, some educators spoke of how the school's culture evolved over time, whereas others elaborated on how students' attitudes regarding learning shifted to focus more on outcomes (grades) as opposed to the learning processes. Some math educators acknowledged the presence of 'pockets' of success where "really, really neat stuff [goes] on here" (**School Actor 43**) but beyond the top 10 percent, students struggle academically. And, other math educators detailed how a school's culture is defined by institutional norms and policies and the behaviors of students and educators. These varying perceptions helped illuminate aspects of the schooling environment that warranted additional attention and investigation, namely pockets of success where some students thrive and others struggle. However, one questions the extent to which these aspects can and will be changed considering math educators' inability to meet regularly and their inability to engage in purposeful discussions about negotiating and normalizing expectations.

Similarly, discussions surrounding the school's college-going culture illuminated contrasting accounts of school actors' perceptions, some being positive and others highlighting spaces where change was needed. For example, educators noted that the push for college was definitely felt and that collectively, "we definitely push it. We definitely keep on saying this" (**School Actor 28**). This 'push' consisted of college trips, college signing days, college t-shirt days, weekly college announcements, and other activities that relayed to students the institution's expectations for them. Unfortunately, educators in the math department did express concern

regarding the overall level of student preparation for college, the cost for college, and the push for all students to pursue higher education. Consider the following comment,

> As a school? Yeah. I think we've given them a ton of information [about college]. They've taken field trips. There's been all kinds of information being passed out about the opportunities and stuff. But it's still...If you're lacking that academic rigor part, that's where I think some of them are going to be...They may realize it's going to be tougher. I mean we do that... There's a college class that comes in here, twice a week. So there's several students who have taken these classes. So, they're exposed to it. (**School Actor 43**)

For this educator, readiness for college included both information about college and academic preparedness. Concerning information, students need to be presented with multiple pathways and need to have a clear understanding of the costs associated with higher education, in particular. Some math educators expressed concern about the pathways students were exposed to and felt some higher education options were more emphasized than others, which was antithetical to the broader schoolwide plan and schoolwide expectations for students.

Affordability was a major point of contention and concern given the increased push for college at *SHS* and across the District. Some math educators were concerned that with the increased push to go to college, some students, who do not fully understand the cost associated with doing so, might not be able to afford it and might become over-encumbered with debt:

> …I'm kind of concerned when we're sending all these kids to community college. I think the door has to be open. Okay. And, you want to encourage that because a lot of my students, they're the first ones that are going to college, first ones graduating from high school. So, you got to keep that door open. But, at the same time, I think we have to paint a realistic picture, because the cost of education is not ch---. I mean California is always the greatest. It was great because ... Cal States used to be cheap. And the community colleges, they used to be even cheaper. But, now the price is rising. And, I have a big concern if you've got kids going into college, student debt is outrageous... And see we're not talking about that that much. I think that needs to be part of the discussion. (School Actor #)

While the *Pledge* removes some of the debt burden for students that elect to enroll in junior colleges, it does not guarantee that students have an adequate understanding of the financial

investment college entails. These comments suggest that some math educators might disagree with the plan because of its perceived impact upon students and may choose not to implement it with fidelity because of the aforementioned implications.

English and Language Arts (ELA) Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

For educators in the *ELA* Department, their actions, pedagogical practices, and expectations aligned with the larger schoolwide plan that emphasized mastery of various student-learning capacities (or, SLCs) over content knowledge and preparation for numerous higher education pathways. More importantly, school actors felt as though the plan helped create a college-going culture. Consider the following remark from **School Actor 24**,

> I think, like I said, having our College Mondays, the College Signing Day, the College and Career Center, you know, talking to them about the Capstone Portfolio and all of the Student Learning Capacities that they're expected to master before they graduate and making sure that they know what those mean for them after graduation. I think all of that kind of creates a college-going culture, bringing up college all the time to them. I think that's important.

The success of this elaborate plan hinges upon its execution and buy-in from all school actors. **School Actor 21** detailed some of these efforts when she articulated how the curriculum aligns vertically within the *ELA* department:

> Probably starting with the 9th grade and the vertical alignment we have from 9th grade to 12th grade. So, our 9th graders do their four-year plan and that's within the Capstone. And that's all set up on their E-portfolio. And the counselors come in. And then in 10th grade, they do another activity that's related to the college and then 11th and 12th grade, their portfolio has to have letters of their colleges they've applied to you and have been accepted to, or the career plan or trade school they've applied to and been accepted to, or military. So we have that. Plus we have the *Pledge*. So, the *Pledge* across our district, which allows the students, as long as their A-G, to go to the UCs. Or, to go, I believe the first year free, at some of the community colleges. Well, the kids really know about that because of the *Pledge* and we did a whole activity based on that. And every student got a booklet and they had to go through a lesson where we talked about it and they understand it.

These multiple programs, projects, and resources all tie back to the *Pledge* and *Capstone*, which comprise *SHS's* schoolwide plan to support students in the development and mastery of the SLCs.

Unfortunately, *ELA* educators expressed concern about buy-in from their colleagues. Many *ELA* educators felt as though progress had been made in raising expectations for students schoolwide. Some educators noted that more conversations were taking place across the curriculum, especially in the AP and honors courses, about bolstering academic rigor. Other educators reveled at the increased efforts to include external actors, like parents, in college-going efforts and programs that make school more accessible for all students. However, *ELA* educators qualified their remarks and suggested that progress from *Phase 3* to *Phase 4* had been adversely impacted by discrepancies in staff expectations and fidelity in implementing the schoolwide plan.

For instance, **School Actor 24** remarked that she did not "know if we're at Phase 4 'cause Phase 4 says 'all students are viewed as potential high achievers', and I think that there's probably still some staff members who do not necessarily see it that way". Recall the description of *Phase 3* and its distinction from *Phase 4*, that being "most" as compared to "all staff". For some educators, like **School Actor 11**, this distinction comes down to semantics, which largely "depends on how you define most", and one's vantage point,

> I think being a [leader] sometimes you see things... You see things that other people don't, you know. And so, um, you know, maybe if I was just a teacher I would maybe say 'yes' all from just from my limited... in what I do. But, I would say we're, and just being honest, you know, I mean I think about we have 13 English teachers. Are all 13 of those teachers, you know, viewing students as capable of doing rigor? Maybe they believe it. I don't know that they're actually doing it themselves, but I would say my guestimation [sic] would be 70 to 80 percent of the staff.

From the comment above, 20 to 30 percent of the school staff do not view students as capable of doing rigorous academic work. In practice, that translates to a number of educators failing to develop, implement, and have students complete their Performance Task Assessments (or, PTAs), a sentiment **School Actor 10** and **School Actor 11** raised in the course of conversation. These PTAs are to be used to measure students understanding, knowledge, and proficiency with concepts covered in their respective courses. As such, while ELA educators were clear to suggest that progress had been made in raising expectations, concerns abound, which suggests a complete transition to *Phase 4* had not yet been realized.

Systematizing the Negotiation of Expectations

Robust, well-defined systems within schools make plain how various school actors, policies, practices, programs, and resources function together for the achievement of a definable aim. As has been articulated throughout, the *Pledge* and *Capstone* function as a system in that they bring together multiple stakeholders, both internal and external to schools, and make plain their shared responsibility in helping to ensure students are ready for a host of post-secondary college and career opportunities. For *ELA* educators at *SHS*, this system has served as the primary channel along which the negotiation of expectations takes place within the department. Consider the following remark from **School Actor 24** when she noted,

> So everybody is expected to do the *Capstone* portfolio with all of their students, all of their English classes, no matter what grade level. Each grade level, the expectations for the portfolio change a little bit. But, we're all expected to have them complete it. We're all expected to have our seniors go through the interview process and all of that.

The expectations for educators in the *ELA* department are clear, but what remained less clear was how *ELA* educators internalized such expectations. Fortunately, **School Actor 38** shared her thoughts when she opined that the *Capstone* functions like a

> unifying force between all the periods and all the classes that [students] have, 'cause a lot of time teaching is very isolated…you're over in the English department, you don't really care what's going on in the math department, but we're all trying to teach them towards five specific areas in which they need to grow.

To elaborate, *ELA* educators use common performance task assessments (PTAs) as tools but also as ways to explore what students have or have not been exposed to in previous courses. Such practices allow for targeted instruction that fills gaps in knowledge and builds upon existing knowledge bases. But, more importantly, the *Capstone* presents educators with a unique opportunity to reflect on and "reevaluate what we're teaching in our classrooms and how we're teaching it…It helps me evaluate my teaching that way and reflect on it and do better". Regrettably, not all *ELA* educators engage in such processes, nor do all comply with the stated expectations.

As noted earlier, between 20 and 30 percent of educators at *SHS* comply with the stated practices, a reality that compromises the long-term sustainability of a college and career ready culture. **School Actor 11** reflected on this issue when he posited that, "…not everybody is doing a PTA. I talked to other [school leaders] who have members that aren't doing a PTA. Not a hundred percent. But, we're close. I mean, we're close". Fortunately, the system at *SHS* has built-in checks and balances that account for those school actors that fail to comply with the standard expectations, those being articulated PTAs. Consider the following remark from **School Actor 21** when she discusses the intentionality behind the construction of a vertically aligned curriculum in the *ELA* department

> So, I would say as a whole, you may have pockets of maybe some stuff that's not completely covered, but I'm not worried about it because they get it every year. So, maybe they get a teacher in 9th grade that doesn't hit all the PTAs because it's hard or whatever. I know in 10th grade they're going to get it. And, if maybe there's something missing there, I know in 11th grade they're going to get it. So, I'm not worried because we have it set up so that if this child misses it or if … that unit didn't go well, they're

> going to get it again. Now, 12th grade, oh sorry you missed it. You're going to college now…

While *ELA* educators use systems as channels to negotiate expectations and checks and balances to counteract non-compliant actors, more explicit processes are needed for those that fail to comply.

One idea that surfaced throughout the data collection period was presenting and using data to encourage those actors that do not connect high expectations to their practice in the classroom. The following comment from **School Actor 11** reflects both the need for a more formalized system and the benefits that lie therein:

> The WASC recommendations and just even just our self-study revealed, at least for my department, that we're only looking at summative [assessments] when we should be looking at formative [assessments] and again, you know, as leaders we have to set up the systems in which when we meet that, you know, everybody brings student work…So I think, um, you know, that is what for me is the number one area of growth for our department. And, I think that that's just gonna [sic] change. You know, that brings everybody in and then we're working as a collective rather than, you know, "well, I'm almost there. I'm almost done". Some people are done, some people need two more weeks. And, so I think that we could do a better job of creating systems where people are able… to work together on the same page… So just building systems, and I think that that's how we bring people along that aren't wanting to come along. But, then when it is focused around student data, no one can argue, you know, "well, I don't believe this. I don't believe that". But, I think everyone can see that data speaks…will speak for itself rather than philosophically like, "well, I want to spend more time on this because I really love this or"...So I feel like I'm really excited about [that]. I think that's how we can bring everybody along.

Though a robust system is in place that enables school actors, in particular *ELA* educators, to negotiate expectations, the system must be improved in ways that "bring everybody along", as alluded to in the aforementioned comment. As such, in response to the first research question, *ELA* educators use the *Capstone* as a benchmark along which they normalize expectations, but do not explicitly engage in the act of negotiating expectations.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

When presented with the opportunity, *ELA* educators spoke candidly about the culture at *SHS*, their perceptions of the school's college-going culture, and their expectations for students. Overall, their comments reified the importance of systems and the ways in which the school culture and college-going culture reflect their expectations for students and the opportunities made available through the schoolwide plan. When asked to share perceptions of the school's culture, **School Actor 24** remarked that an integral component of a school's culture is ensuring educators' "expectations are clearly communicated to students. We want to make sure that we're showing students the right things to do…we want to teach them to have pride in what they do, pride in their school, pride of their academics". Evident in the comments and remarks shared throughout the preceding pages of this chapter are how school actors' expectations for students are communicated through systems that stem from the schoolwide plan. In addition, there are supports in place that both enable and encourage students to engage in co-curricular activities and clubs that enrich their schooling experiences, as noted by **School Actor 6**. But, more importantly, *ELA* educators perceived *SHS's* school culture as evolving, yet a supportive and accepting environment full of traditions. *ELA* educators did, however, cite clear discrepancies in enthusiasm for learning and engagement between students in the advanced and non-advanced courses and felt a pressing need to devise ways to "move more of our students, move our staff…into that culture".

High expectations were a common theme in *ELA* educators' comments about the school's college-going culture. **School Actor 24** opined**…**

> I think having high expectations in the classroom as far as, you know, having projects and assignments with these expectations that maybe they're just out of reach of the students right now, but I'm going to help them reach that so that way they can be successful later. You know, I can't just shy away from an assignment because it's difficult because these are the sorts of things that they're going to see when they go to college.

For **School Actor 24**, ensuring students' readiness for higher education meant maintaining a standard of high expectations given that students would be held to such standards in college. Moreover, some educators used conversations as the vehicle through which they communicated their expectations to and for students. And, other educators detailed how "slowing things down, taking things step-by-step…doing a little more individualized attention to each student" (**School Actor 38**) helped communicate expectations to students.

ELA educators' expectations aligned with their perceptions of the school's culture and college-going culture, primarily notions of preparing students for higher education. This level of connectivity suggests that the system and school actors' expectations overlap. This was evidenced by frequent comments that underscored the need for multiple post-secondary pathways, both college and career. **School Actor 24** recognized that students' pathways to four-year colleges and universities might include a stop at a community college. Even so, her expectations remained the same and manifested in curricular projects that students would use at some point in time. During an individual interview, she noted the following:

> "…I want to make sure that you guys are going to be successful after you leave here". You know, my juniors have to all do the personal insight questions for the UCs. So, we go over that and we talk about how even if they're not going to a UC, this is good practice for them because eventually when they want to transfer, they're still going to have stuff that they have to write an answer for whatever, you know, college they're going to transfer to.

School Actor 21 elaborated on her efforts to prepare students for college while also leaving room for students that are undecided about their post-secondary futures when she noted the following,

> …A-Gs are covered with a C or higher. So, I'm always looking at/through, especially the 9th graders, all their grades. So, the 11th graders AP, they pretty much have gotten Cs. They're pretty much in. So, just constantly aligning with the counselors and when the counselors coming in and making sure that I'm with them looking at their transcripts and making sure that they're A-G ready to go. So, that if they decide, if they say "I don't want

> to go to college", that's fine. But, if they change their mind, they can always go because they're A-G ready to go…

Overall, these perceptions of the schooling environment bring to the fore the intentionality behind *ELA* educators' actions and their desire to support students in being college and career ready. For *ELA* educators, systems afford a level of consistency that assists in the negotiation of expectations. Without such systems, the level of buy-in among educators would be notably lower—a reality that surfaced in discussions with educators from other departments at *SHS*.

Social Science Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Educators in the social science department at *SHS* opined that progress had been made in raising expectations. Yet, perspectives on the amount of progress (e.g., *Phase 3* or *Phase 4*) differed along semantical lines. While educators in the social science department acknowledged the existence of a schoolwide plan, their perspectives differed as to whether 'all staff' viewed 'all students' as potential high achievers. **School Actor 29** remarked that 'most staff views most students' as potential high achievers, whereas **School Actor 39** confirmed that staff in his departmental unit enter the year thinking that 'all students' can achieve at high levels. In this case, semantics matter because the difference between 'all' and 'most' equate to real people, both students and educators, and their potentials and perspectives. Fortunately, the schoolwide plan that is in place functions as a yardstick that ensures a baseline for staff and for students as it pertains to expectations and students' potential, respectively.

Like *ELA* educators, educators in the social science department articulated how the schoolwide plan connects to and through key aspects and elements of the curriculum and

professional development opportunities available to staff in the department. **School Actor 30** indicated this point when he stated…

> …as far as the schoolwide plan goes, it is definitely embedded in both our schoolwide professional development, specifically in our departmental professional development, to really make sure we are pushing our students to think more critically, ask better questions...But in all our classes, to make sure that we're giving them the supports that pushes them to go further.

These professional development opportunities enable educators in the department to focus keenly on ensuring students develop capacities in the SLCs, that rigor is emphasized in the curriculum, particularly in the areas of reading and writing, and that universal PTAs and the *Capstone* are connected. **School Actor 34** elaborated upon this point when he remarked that…

> … there has been a huge focus on rigorous curriculum. We don't want kids just doing word searches. We want them doing real authentic stuff. Here in the history department, that includes guided reading strategies, reading annotations, primary sources... We've had a district-wide focus on writing the last several years…we have our Performance Task Assessments that we have all students do in every subject that are universal. So, as a world history teacher, my fellow world history teachers, we all give the same universal Performance Task Assessment every quarter…So, that I would say, between the reading, the writing and the Performance Tasks, because, of course, the performance tasks are also part of our *Capstone*. So, the students do a *Capstone* interview at the end of the senior year and after the Performance Tasks, they do a reflection on that to think about, you know, how well they'd do, where could they improve? And, so that is universal for every grade level throughout the campus, as well is. You know, whatever Performance Task for that subject... for that grade level, all those building into your *Capstone* portfolio interview at the end of your senior year.

At *SHS*, the benefit of a schoolwide plan is evident in that a majority of school actors across departments are able to expound upon the ways in which the curriculum and curricular projects connect to larger initiatives like the *Capstone* and how such projects involve all members of the schooling community, who share the responsibility of supporting students and addressing challenges that surface. This shared responsibility was evidenced by **School Actor 30** when he discussed the myriad professional focus teams at *SHS* and their focus on all aspects of the school, whether technology, school culture, college-going culture, and school spirit. Contrary to the

experiences and perspectives of math educators, educators in the social science department detailed how time was allocated to engage in these processes within and across departments—a point of emphasis expounded upon in the forthcoming section.

Strategic Scheduling as a System

Although educators in the social science department understand the schoolwide plan and recognize the ways in which it permeates throughout the school and other departments, these school actors do not negotiate their college expectations with one another in an explicit fashion. This is particularly concerning given the aforementioned discrepancies in expectations ('all staff' vs 'most staff') and the level at which educators in the department have bought into the schoolwide plan. To elaborate, **School Actor 16** discussed the variability in fidelity of implementing the schoolwide plan when he presented the following scenario:

> If we look at just the *Capstone* itself and the reflections that were having our students do, then one teacher may receive the *Capstone* reflection and give 'credit: no credit' whereas another teacher may read through that capstone reflection and grade it and see varying levels. They're giving assessment to that. And, so that fidelity isn't *all* teachers, because not *all* teachers are assessing the reflection as much as some teachers are taking it as a 'credit - no credit' and that's the end all that the reflection itself is just another... it's just another task as opposed to a genuine reflection. (emphasis added)

Ensuring that 'all' school actors buy-in to the schoolwide plan and execute it with fidelity is a tall order considering the lack of fidelity might be associated with discrepant expectations. In some cases, exposure might prompt changes of heart and practice and compel educators that were trepid to commit fully to the schoolwide plan. Short of such changes however, one questions what supports are in place to shift the focus from 'most' to 'all'?

Fortunately, educators within the department have laid the foundation upon which these integral conversations can take place by strategically organizing the master schedule for the department. To elaborate, educators in the social science department have experimented with the

use of sub-departmental units that function as separate, independent teams. This dynamic has created the context and space where educators in the department can standardize practices and expectations within a smaller group in hopes that these changes manifest across the department. Consider the following comment from **School Actor 16:**

> I think in the social science department, we've been blessed to be able to structure it this way, is that we've been strategic in our master scheduling and our teacher assignments to where we're in a system where we have a group of teachers that just teach sophomores...that just teach juniors... That just teach seniors. And, so in our department meetings we're able to put sophomore teachers together with the same content, World History junior teachers with US history, etc. So, we have a structure, to some extent, where we have many or sub department chairs for their content area. And so if, say [**School Actor 13**] was in the US History portion of our department and wasn't on board with what we're doing, you know, there's kind of that critical mass that [**School Actor 14**] is talking about because the two other teachers already are. And so they can provide the support for him and/or the pressure for him to get on board with what we're attempting to accomplish.

Strategic scheduling can function as a system and a check for those school actors that struggle to implement the schoolwide plan with fidelity. In addition, it can serve as an opportunity for educators to support the development of new and junior colleagues. **School Actor 30** provided evidence of this point when he described his interactions with a student teacher and his efforts to ensure compliance with the schoolwide plan:

> We happen to be on the Civic Engagement Professional Development Team and through that has really been pushing us to develop lessons that really start with the Five C's. That really start with, "how are our students going to master one of those Five C's?" And so I think the very first day I started working with [**School Actor 32**] I told her, I was like, "no matter what lesson planning, I'm starting with a C. And, so regardless of the product that comes from, you know, whatever that day's assignment is, is I really want to know how much did our students work towards that C that we were hoping for today? Was it communication, was it collaboration? You name it.

As evidenced in the aforementioned comment, while strategic scheduling does not ensure the explicit negotiation of expectations, it does create the environment where school actors can engage in important practices, like supporting the development of junior colleagues and ensuring

adherence to the schoolwide plan—actions that increase the likelihood of long-term sustainability. However, educators in the department have to begin to use focus team meetings and sub-departmental meetings as spaces where they engage in the explicit act of negotiating expectations. These conversations must be intentional.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

For educators in the social science department, perceptions of the school's culture, college-going culture, and expectations largely revolve around conceptions of academic and personal preparation for myriad post-secondary options and student agency. On one hand, the close relationship between social science educators' expectations for students, which were largely multifaceted (e.g., college, military, trade, etc.), and present offerings at the school site became more apparent as the author analyzed data from school actors in this department. On the other hand, so to did educators' beliefs about student agency. Educators spoke at length about efforts to prepare students for various higher education opportunities but were mindful about ensuring all students have multiple post-secondary pathways from which to choose as they determine what to do after high school. For instance, **School Actor 29** opined the following,

> I do think that a focus that a lot of staff members do want to see is the recognition that although we want to give every student the opportunity to go to college, that there is other career education and there are other pathways. So, all of 'em hopefully are college eligible, if they do choose to pursue another avenue that that is available to them as well.

Educators in the social science department were both reflective and candid about their roles and strategies they have found useful in supporting students in reaching their goals and in creating an environment, or a school culture, where those varying goals were accepted. Unfortunately, other educators are not as optimistic about students' ability and potential to actualize their post-secondary goals, as will be seen in forthcoming sections.

Science Department

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Dissimilar from colleagues in other departments, some science educators felt as though a regression towards *Phase 2* had taken place, whereas others felt progress lied between *Phase 3* and *Phase 4*. Notably, however, science educators qualified their remarks because of perceived gaps in students' skillsets and disparate expectations among staff in the department. That is, those who felt progress had been made were far more likely to express deficit-based perspectives about students (e.g., their perceived lack of skills and motivation). In comparison, science educators that felt progress had not been made were more likely to situate blame with educators for having failed to establish a baseline of high expectations for all students. For instance, **School Actor 33** fell into the latter group and felt strongly that school actors regressed in their expectations for students:

> Believe it or not, I would think we're at [*Phase*] Two or [*Phase*] Three… So, in meetings or what not, hearing people not necessarily saying, "oh yeah, the kids can do that", but it's like, "oh, maybe the honors kids could do it or maybe these guys could do it", but not necessarily everybody. And I know I'm a firm believer that you push everybody. Push 'em all. And, 'cause kids are gonna meet whatever expectation you have of them, right? You set a bar...

Unfortunately, not all science educators set the bar high for students and would often place blame with the students during interviews.

Consider the following remark from **School Actor 22** when he shares his account on progress made in raising expectations:

> I would say that we're probably still at *Phase 3*... Like kind of trying to move towards *Phase 4* is probably where I would see us at. I at least try in my classes and I know some of the other science teachers try as best as they can to attempt to sort of move that way and trying to push them into being high achievers and all that sort of stuff. I think some of the kids kind of pull themselves down and they don't want to get to that point is what's happening.

Other educators, like **School Actor 13,** felt as though the "staff is *Phase 4*", where all students are viewed as high achievers. Yet, his perspective changed when discussing students' agency, motivation, and skillsets:

> Yeah, I think *all* teachers believe that students have potential to be high achievers. I mean, I do. But, I know that there's also a lot of discussion a lot of times just about that we have students that don't put forward their best effort... So I don't think we have an issue with the faculty—that the staff doesn't view *all* of our students as having the potential to be high achievers. We're dealing a lot with the struggle of motivating them to reach that level. You know, I mean...so it's a motivational issue in my opinion, from what I've seen, especially what I see in my classroom…

For some science educators, students lacked the motivation needed to actualize their 'potential' of being high achievers, whereas other educators, like **School Actor 27,** were unsure of their ability to assist students in closing skill gaps in order to realize higher education goals:

> I think *all* teachers see kids as they have the potential to do whatever they want to do. But, I think we struggle with their skill levels that are coming in. They are very low. Extremely low. I mean... I'm not exaggerating. I have kids who count five plus three on their hands. It's that low...for Chemistry. So that part, like I don't know how they're going to get to college, coming in at that skill level, that's what scares me. But there's definitely a push for everyone say, "Hey, you know, look at all the opportunities that you know you can have by going to college". So that's a definite push on there. But it's just the skill levels coming in that I feel like we're so far behind and trying to get them caught up that I don't know if some of them are going to make it to college, that's my fear.

Educators in the science department frequently shared deficit-based perspectives. Such sentiments seemingly had a negative effect on the department as a collective. From data collected throughout the investigation, it was not apparent that educators in the science department engaged in the process of negotiating expectations. In addition, it was not clear that educators in the science department had a uniform set of expectations amongst themselves—a reality many educators expressed during interviews.

Unclear Departmental Expectations

While the *Capstone* functioned as s system and as a significant element of the schoolwide plan for educators in the *ELA* and social science department, it was largely regarded as a teaching tool by science educators and not collectively viewed as a framework that unified school actors and their individual and departmental practices. At least three of the six educators from the science department at *SHS* that were interviewed viewed the *Capstone* as a tool that enabled them to enforce writing, reflection, and collaboration with multiple institutional stakeholders. While these are important attributes of the *Capstone*, missing from these educators' remarks was a sense of how the *Capstone* functioned as a system for the science department, rather than a mere teaching tool. These discrepant interpretations and understandings of the *Capstone* and its utility certainly do not help normalize departmental expectations, but they may be a contributing factor to the lack of clarity.

Science educators' perceptions of their department's expectations varied greatly. Educators, like **School Actor 22**, were of the mind that "in general, all of us try to push them [students] as hard as they possibly can to achieve at the highest level possible"—the highest level being higher education. **School Actor 23** shared similar remarks that were tempered by the belief that some students fail to uphold their responsibilities, thereby delimiting their choices:

> I think most of us, most of us try. Unfortunately, in science I think we're a little grounded in reality. And, we know that if you don't do certain things, it's not going to happen for you. But, we try with all of our kids…And so, but you know, it's difficult because we do know that there are kids that they're just not going to. And, it's usually... a lot of it is their choice. It's not that they can't go to college. It's that they choose not to.

Not all science educators agreed that the fault lies entirely with students, however. Some educators felt their colleagues failed to help students actualize their potential by communicating low expectations.

When asked whether *all* educators in the science department have high expectations for students, **School Actor 33** shared the following remark…

> I would say... about half, maybe a little more than half do think that way. And, the others, there's only one or two that I can think of that aren't necessarily really positive all the time. And, then the others I don't see as much because they're in, you know, like just a different subject area in science and we don't cross paths as much unless it's like a science meeting. But, as far as like the Bio[logy] aspect of it or whatnot, most of us are like, "yup, we can push 'em and they can do it". There's some that don't necessarily think that. But, I think for the most part were there.

School Actor 25 corroborated **School Actor 33's** comment when he suggested that educators in 'rigorous' courses, like Chemistry and Physics, have higher expectations for their students, as compared to their peers in some of the lower tracked courses, like Biology. Consider the following comment:

> I would say yes for the Chemistry and Physics teachers and like the AP Bio teachers and the AP Chemistry teachers. And I've taught AP Physics for several years…Probably not so much with some of the other, like the Biology with the 9th graders. I would say they expect the students, or they anticipate the students are going to be, but they get kind of frustrated that they're not on that track.

This frustration leads to lowered expectations which, in turn, threaten progress and the development of high expectations for students. Unfortunately, this reality is compounded by the presence of external actors and the pressure they impose upon educators in the science department.

The Differential Impact of External Pressures

District actors exert profound pressure upon educators, which functions as a form of power where district actors are able to make decisions that prompt educators at sites that fall under their purview to change their actions and practices. As has been noted throughout, the District has shifted to focus more on ensuring students' readiness for college and career post-secondary opportunities. Science educators at *SHS* have experienced and interpreted this use of

power in both positive and negative ways. On the positive end, **School Actor 25** remarked that the shift to focus on college and career ready has “been a major push” and that as a schooling community, “we just either took the direction or the initiative from the District and that was just going to be the direction we went. We were going to become a college and career ready campus”. While many educators experience and interpret this shift as positive and beneficial for students, some educators struggle with the change in focus.

For instance, **School Actor 27** lamented the change because it removed resources that helped support struggling students:

> Yeah, I don’t only think it’s this grant either. I think it was our District who’s pushing that that there’s no more remedial math classes. Everyone jumps into Algebra whether you’re ready or not. And, I’m like, “whoa, wait a minute. That’s not good”. And, so it’s just, I think it’s killing them and that’s why our math scores are so low.

School Actor 27 viewed the shift to college and career ready as counterproductive in that it led to the loss of remedial math courses and low test scores. Remedial math courses were not the only lower track courses slatted to be removed at *SHS*; that is, Integrated Science was scheduled to be removed, as well. **School Actor 27** opined that removing these support courses disturbed the established balance in the curriculum and led her to feel as though…

> we’re losing both end, you know, we’re focusing on the AP kids. And then we’re saying, "okay, these low end kids...we need to get in here, but that's not fair to them. I mean, they don't have a chance. And, so I just see them struggle and give up and they just shut down like, "school's not for me". I'm like, "it is for you. You know, we need to reteach you not, let you learn some new skills and get through it". So that's the part I see that's frustrating.

External actors and the ways in which they use power to influence the focus and direction of what takes place within schools can cause educators to feel defeated and helpless when confronted with perceived gaps in skills. Providing all educators with a space and opportunity to share these perspectives might help identify remedies that better support educators in reaching externally imposed goals.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Science educators' perceptions of the schooling environment were largely in line with the sentiments and comments raised from educators in preceding pages and paragraphs of this chapter. What distinguished this group of educators from their colleagues was the frequent expression of expectations that were seemingly in line with the *Pledge* and *Capstone* (i.e., college and career ready) but that were couched in deficit-based sentiments. For example, **School Actor 23** explained that she makes "the assumption when the kids walk in the door that they're in here to go to college". However, she qualified her remark by noting:

> I know that that's not true…I'm not deluding myself that there are kids that are not going to go…At some point, I kind of have to look at it and say, 'yeah, well that expectation for those couple of kids, probably not true.

Here, **School Actor 23** is referring to 9th grade students that struggle to adjust to demands of high school. In fairness, **School Actor 23** did further qualify her remarks and note that students could turn things around and still go to college. The larger concern, however, is that her expectations for students waivered and were not genuine. **School Actor 22** expressed similar feelings when he opined,

> I think part of it is too that maybe that some of the kids... just their apathy when it comes to doing homework and when it comes to like wanting to show improvement. I mean in my honors classes, yes, it's great. Like most of the kids, [if] I assign a homework assignment, by and large, most of the class is going to get it done. But, in some of my regular Chemistry and my regular Biology classes, if I assign a homework assignment, even as something as simple as like a word search or something like that, there's the apathy of like "I'm just not going to do it". And so, I feel like there's instances where kids are just trying to get by more than they're trying to really push themselves to be successful is what I think is happening.

Such deficit-based perspectives threaten efforts to develop and sustain college-going cultures that better prepare students for myriad post-secondary educational opportunities. Bringing these

perspectives to the fore, as well as conditions that lead educators to espouse such beliefs, presents school actors with an opportunity to address them openly.

Counselors and Administrators

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

For the present investigation, it was integral to speak with school actors from the counseling and administrative teams in order to ascertain their perceptions of progress made since 2014 and their efforts to support that progress. The data collection process illuminated the cohesiveness of the counseling and administrative team at *SHS*. *First*, counselors and administrators unequivocally agreed that there is a defined mission at *SHS* that outlines the belief that "all students" are and should be viewed as "potential high achievers" by school actors. And, *second*, they were resolute in their belief that the defined school mission and vision both align with the schoolwide plan and internal systems, which were designed to support efforts to prepare *all* students for college and career post-secondary opportunities. **School Actor 2** confirmed as much when she stated that, "I think we have a plan that does reflect a shared vision…I mean our mission statement, our plan…I think it's all there. I think we're actually ahead of the game when it comes to a schoolwide plan". Together, according to counselors and administrators, these aspects of the school function together as a much needed check and balance system at *SHS*.

Counselors and administrators corroborated accounts shared throughout by noting that not all institutional stakeholders are on board with the stated mission, nor do all institutional stakeholders execute the schoolwide plan with fidelity. This lack of complete buy-in from all school actors has stifled progress to *Phase Four* on the student expectations scale, where universally all counselors and administrators interviewed confirmed that progress had been made to Phase 3.5 on the student expectations scale: "we're not quite at *Phase Four* yet. And, just what

you said and I think that it's just a matter of everybody being on the same page as far as, you know, offering equity and access to students" (**School Actor 2**). In a separate discussion, **School Actor 14** corroborated the aforementioned remark when she noted,

> I do think that we have a school-wide mission. I do think we have schoolwide goals and a plan. I'm not entirely... I have a macro view of the school. And, I'm not entirely confident that all stakeholders share that mission, believe that that plan has validity, and carry through with that plan with fidelity. I'm not entirely confident... I think we're still at a [*Phase*] *Three*.

Fortunately, since the inception of the grant back in 2014, school actors at *SHS* have concretized the school's mission and schoolwide plan in ways that function as a system of checks and balances for those school actors that fail to adopt the mission and execute the plan with fidelity. As **School Actor 1** remarked, "there are too many things that we have here where someone, or a group, will say, 'no, I think we can do that now. The kids can do that. We need to do...' Like, it's not allowing…people to kind of sit in that negative space." Presumably, this 'negative space' is where school actors make statements like, "yeah, that's not going to happen" or express low expectations for students, "like, they can't do that" (**School Actor 1**). The comprehensiveness of the schoolwide plan, has, in essence, set the standard for the high expectations and supporting practices for all institutional stakeholders. In particular, those school actors that fail to adopt the mission and execute the plan with fidelity are pressured by the presence of increased opportunities, conversations, and supports for students that aid them in preparing for college and career opportunities.

Schoolwide Plan as a Normalizing Agent

According to counselors and administrators, everything that transpires at *SHS* is structured around the earlier introduced student learning capacities (or, *SLCs*), the larger district-wide initiative, the *Pledge*, and the *Capstone*. Like educators in the *ELA* and social science

department, counselors and administrators do not engage in the explicit act of negotiating expectations. Rather, they implicitly engage in this process by using the *Pledge,* the *Capstone,* and SLCs as guiding pillars for the department. More specifically, the aforementioned school actors have effectively used the SLCs as tools to *streamline* the schoolwide plan. Streamlining the schoolwide plan makes plain the level at which school actors should situate their expectations for students and how best to actualize their expectations for students through concrete actions. Consider the following comment from **School Actor 2,**

> So everything that we're doing and how we're functioning as a department is in line with our Pledge, which is in line with our *Capstone*, which is in line with, you know, our plans for all the four different domains. So, I see it kind of has come kind of full circle. We're still streamlining… And that's why, because I think that we're... it's a living and breathing thing here. It's in everything we do is centered around that…

As **School Actor 2** later went on to express, the *Pledge* outlines everything that all school actors at *SHS* should be doing whereas projects like the *Capstone* and programs like 'Culture of Care' are reflective of the goals and benchmarks outlined in the *Pledge*. Counselors and administrators expressed high expectations for students and were also adamant that they would be able to sustain the schoolwide plan long term.

Two perspectives emerged around the long-term sustainability of the schoolwide plan, those being: gaining support from external actors to ensure the continuation of programs and activities and focusing on 21st century skill development. *First*, counselors and administrators recognized that at a certain point in time discretionary funds that came with different grant projects would no longer be available and that any efforts entirely reliant upon such funds would cease once funds ended. As such, these school actors explored ways of ensuring the long-term sustainability of these grant funded projects beyond their temporary designations. For instance, **School Actor 2** mentioned the following,

> The point is to be able to build something that you can sustain. And, you know, recognizing that in the beginning and having a team of people who are willing to do that because it could easily fall apart if it's not built into the culture of the school like what we're talking about. It could easily once the CAPP grant is over… But, we're finding other ways. And, the CAPP grant brought a lot of things to light, and things that we... You know...processes that we want to continue now in all the schools in the district. And, so now bringing in our partners, it's kind of our support system now whereas the CAPP grant is phasing out... Now we have our partners to lean on. So, it's just developing those opportunities and having people who, who are willing to look for that.

A few points are worth focusing on here. Counselors and administrators found that folding in programmatic efforts attached to temporary grants into the culture of the school made it more likely these efforts would sustain over time when grant projects were no longer present. In addition, these school actors suggested that finding and 'leaning' on other partners would help support the systems built when grants were no longer available.

Second, counselors and administrators felt as though they could sustain their work over time given that the focus of the different SLCs was geared towards skills students throughout the country would need moving further into the 21st century. This realization empowered these school actors and validated much of the work they had done to introduce these capacities at the school site and, subsequently, throughout the entire school district. **School Actor 14** expounded upon this point at length when she stated that,

> I think we're set up because of our SLCs. I think we're set up for what is the future. I think that as we move along this continuum of education, I do genuinely believe that the work that we've started... I do think we are still little four year college focused, which I understand is appropriate for this particular grant. However, as we continue to work on those 21st century skills, which we call our SLCs, if we continue to look at the pathways to post-secondary options and support those pathways, we are on the forefront. I think we're above many of the other schools that are really just looking at A-G completion rates. Looking at one measure of postsecondary success. There Is very little data that shows that a high SAT score, that a high SBAC score translates to success in your post secondary options. Most data shows that it is those 21st century skills. So I think we're so close. And, getting pushback from other entities because other entities are still focused on, while we say we have multiple measures, we're still focused on a single measure. So, we're still getting slapped for lower scores than other schools in those measurable outcomes

Here, **School Actor 14** notes that strength of the schoolwide plan is also its weakness in that governing bodies do not yet recognize or have a plan in place to account for and measure the 21st century skills school actors at *SHS* work to ensure students develop before graduation. Unfortunately, performance on standardized test scores remain a focal point of accountability measures. **School Actor 14** was confident that a shift towards skills like the SLCs would take place at some point and that when this occurred *SHS* would be ahead of other school sites given their early adoption of the SLCs. Normalizing all projects around the schoolwide plan, which was focused on the development of 21st century skills, would ensure that projects, programs, and systems built up over time would sustain long-term—a strategy that would help concretize the standard of high expectations for all students.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Counselors' and administrators' perceptions of the schooling environment, particularly culture and college-going culture, were based on feelings, beliefs, and pathways to and preparation for higher education, respectively. For some, like **School Actor 3**, it was important that in a large school like *SHS*, students were able to keep and express their individuality. For others, like **School Actor 1** and **School Actor 2**, students', parents', teachers', and staffs' thoughts and beliefs about the school comprised its culture. When discussing their perceptions of the school's college going culture, counselors and administrators discussed how, while maintain a standard of high expectations, they planned for deviations from the primary objective of going to college:

> But, I think we ideally set students up to be successful, to go to college. That is our goal. And, if we, you know, students don't always reach that goal right away. And, so then we can come up with other options. But, I think ideally that's, like first and foremost, that's

> what we want to set them up for. Whether or not they choose that to be their end goal too is another thing. (**School Actor 1**)

In addition, these school actors detailed how supports were in place to help students prepare for and reach this primary objective, college. Sometimes counseling a student to do more than the minimum was necessary to help students reach this object:

> I just had a student come and talk to me about dropping the second part of math because they don't need it. They passed it last year, and I'm like, "but what about when you go to college next year? You know, like you're going to take a semester off of math, and you're going to be like... So, just take it. You already know you don't need the credits, but take it as an opportunity to learn whatever you didn't learn last year when you got a D. (**School Actor 3)**

The remarks shared throughout this section further highlight the systematic nature of planning and systems building that school actors have engaged in at *SHS*. Focusing on counselors and administrators provides an opportunity to examine the central topic of this investigation from a slightly different vantage point, given their role in organizing and leading staff and preparing and counseling students.

Non-Core Academic Subjects

Progress Report on Raising Expectations Schoolwide

Although school actors from non-core departmental areas (e.g., foreign language, art, health, special education) did not always express how and/or whether they negotiated their college expectations with colleagues, the present investigation did afford these school actors an opportunity to share remarks and concerns that both confirmed and contested themes and statements discussed in preceding pages of this chapter. Some school actors lamented the perceived gap in students' skills and knowledge base and how this complicated their efforts to deliver content. This was comparable to the experiences of school actors in the math and science

department. Notably, school actors in these non-core departmental areas were aware of the schoolwide plan, namely ensuring college and career readiness. However, some did not agree with the plan, others felt excluded from the decision-making process, and a few expressed discontent with the actions of external district actors and their impact on the school and the actors therein. Given this reality, the author intentionally frames the forthcoming discussion on progress made in raising expectations schoolwide through the lens of the schoolwide plan and perceptions of external actors and pressures.

When asked to reflect on progress made in raising expectations schoolwide, school actors from these varying departmental units shared differing accounts, namely sentiments of regression, stagnation, and progression. Here, the author will focus specifically on regression and progress. School actors that believed progress stagnated (**School Actor 5** and **School Actor 20**) were compelled to do so because of the lack of buy-in surrounding the belief that "all students" are high achievers. On the contrary, **School Actor 36** was adamant that school actors at *SHS* regressed in their efforts to raise expectations. He was keenly aware of the larger school-wide plan. In 2015, he was a part of the team that helped identify and define the various post-secondary educational pathways school actors would help students navigate, those being: military, vocational school, UC, CSU, and community college. The work to develop the plan was collaborative in nature in that it "was discussed as a group. There must have been 15 or 16 of us in that group" (**School Actor 36**) that worked on the plan. Unfortunately, **School Actor 36** felt as though many of these options took on positions of secondary importance to traditional four-year college pathways, a shift that occurred at the behest of external district actors: "However, what is being communicated from the district down to us over here is not those five options. The

emphasis has not been those five options". It was for this reason that **School Actor 36** opined that school actors at *SHS* regressed on the student expectations scale.

This regression was endemic of a much larger issue at *SHS* that was seemingly being ignored by District actors. **School Actor 36** felt strongly that dissenting opinions were silenced rather than brought to the table:

> And, unfortunately, you know, they don't allow a lot of other opinions around here sometimes. They don't. There are valuable resources on this campus…Teachers, but it's only the same few anyway.

The aforementioned comment elucidates how power can be used to suppress dissenting opinions. The act of suppressing dissenting opinions is an exertion of power that leaves school actors with differing opinions, like **School Actor 36**, on the periphery when they should be included in discussions. More importantly, such actions leave unaddressed dialectical beliefs and genuine concerns about students and the quality of education they receive. For instance, **School Actor 41** disapproved of the District's curtailment of support courses:

> Creativity is not being emphasized in this district. They're doing some bizarre things. Because they want to emphasize technology and academics. But if our students don't have the background, why are we not giving them the background? All you did was just change the math. But, if they can't add, subtract, multiply and divide, then why are we not teaching them this ?

The over emphasis on traditional, four-year college pathways and the completion of A-G requirements at *SHS* leaves unaddressed "perceived" gaps in students' skills because support courses that do not meet the A-G requirements are no longer offered at the school site.

Like his colleagues mentioned above, **School Actor 41** was aware of the schoolwide plan and also believed strongly that traditional four-year college pathways were overemphasized at the expense of pathways that met students' needs, like community college. Unlike **School Actor 36**, however, **School Actor 41** now felt that school actors had "started to come to the realization

that A-G isn't for everybody and community college is a good option and a viable option". For this reason, **School Actor 41** felt actors at *SHS* progressed in their efforts to raise expectations through diversification. Yet, actions from external district actors left **School Actor 41** in place of frustration. Consider the following remark he made when discussing the push for all AP students to test:

> But, yet there's this push, push, push for everybody to test and why? So we can have data that makes us feel good about ourselves. And, that's just reflective of everything we do here, everything we do in the district under this new leadership. Moving in the wrong direction. And until they make the academics fit the needs of our students, we're gonna [sic] flounder, I think. They don't like having their name printed in the newspaper as an underperforming school. Seriously. Yeah.

Here, **School Actor 41** contends that by changing the metrics and what gets measured, District actors better control the narrative of performance and achievement, a trend he referred towards as a "charade" at one point in the exchange. He later went on to remark that…

> There's a leadership in place at this district who wants to present the image that everything is fine and cozy. They're not really interested in what's best for the kids, if you ask me. They may be interested in the best interest of a small percentage of kids, but they're not interested in the best interest of the majority of the kids. We have nine high schools here and, like I said, three of them…are okay and the rest of them, I think they need to start addressing the realization that college is not for everyone.

According to **School Actor 41**, this manufactured image of the site and District stand in stark contrast to the unmet needs of students and the existence of pathways that do not serve all students well.

As has been noted throughout, divergent opinions exist and some school actors, like **School Actor 42** and **School Actor 9**, see the relationship between the District and *SHS* as a point of pride. Widely viewed as one of the strongest departments at *SHS*, the foreign language department boasts the highest passing rate of AP tests takers (~95%) and bridges rigor and relevance in ways that make learning meaningful for students. The majority of interviewed

school actors from the foreign language department did feel like progress had been made and were clear that as a department, expectations for students were high. Dissimilar to **School Actors 36** and **41,** the relationship with the District was a point of pride, not contention, for actors in this department. For instance, **School Actor 42** remarked that one person should be credited for bringing the school together, that being Mr. Smith:

> Way back when Mr. Smith was here, we started the SLT, the school's leadership team. And, I think that really started bringing all the departments and just pretty much talking about what was going on in our isolated departments. And, we became one whole school together trying to say, you know what, "I've been having issues with this"...

The unification of departments created a space where school actors could collaborate on efforts like the *Capstone* and implement them schoolwide and, subsequently, District wide. **School Actor 26** spoke about this possibility when reflecting on the origins of the work:

> …so, I think maybe it's both from *SHS* and support from the District. But, I'm not quite sure. I'm just happy that it happened and that it's spreading to other schools hopefully. Or, the college going culture, at least, here is getting stronger and then hopefully, you know, leads to more schools in the District and to also promote it, so that we're pretty strong.

For **School Actor 42** and **26**, success at *SHS* meant that other schools in the District would be tasked with and supported in developing college and career ready cultures, as well. Alternatively, **School Actor 9** credited the relationship with the District as having helped change the conversation and norm around what many believed and expected that students with special needs could attain at the post-secondary level.

Perceptions of the Schooling Environment

Non-core departmental actors' perceptions of the schooling environment were not radically different from perceptions shard in previous sections of this chapter. In general, school actors felt as though the culture of *SHS* was evidenced through a strong sense of pride and spirt and that *SHS* was permissive for students. However, some school actors questioned the rigor

present within the curriculum and whether students would be able to cope academically in a 'sink or swim' post-secondary college environment. Similarly, school actors from these non-core academic departments expressed college expectations that were multifaceted in nature, a reality many felt was not always be reflected in the schooling environment. Additionally, these expectations extended to groups of students typically excluded from such discussions, those being students with special needs. And, finally, these school actors' perceptions of the school's college-going culture were reflective of what was not present at the site rather than what was—that being, well-articulated pathways to multiple post-secondary options. Overall, school actors from these varying departments were concerned about student development and readiness for post-secondary options. The sentiments and perspectives shared throughout underscore the significance of power dynamics within the school site and between the site and the District. For many of these school actors, neither their perceptions nor their opinions have been taken into consideration in decisions that impact them and the students they serve. In this investigation, the author endeavored to include these actors and their perspectives in the discussion on how negotiations take place and how culture is sustained over time.

Table 22
Summary of Findings by Academic Department

Department	*Phase*	*Themes*	*Perceptions of Schooling Environment*
English and Language Arts	3.25	Systematizing the Negotiation of Expectations	* Culture as Expectations/Pride *Culture as Evolving *Culture as Mindset *Culture as Fractured *College-Going Culture as High Expectations *Expectations as Multifaceted *Expectations as Preparation *Expectations as Knowing Students' Stories
Mathematics	3.5	Unclear Departmental Expectations	*Culture as Perception *Culture as Evolving *Culture as Fractured *College-Going Culture as

			Preparation *College-Going Culture as Limited *Expectations as Multifaceted *Expectations as Differential
Social Science	3.5	Strategic Scheduling as a System	*Culture as Evolving *College-Going Culture as Improvement *College-Going Culture as Rigor/Preparation *Expectations as Preparation *Expectations as Multifaceted *Expectations as Standard & High
Science	3.0	Unclear Departmental Expectations The Differential Impact of External Pressures	*Culture as Evolving *Culture as Fractured *College-Going Culture as Multifaceted *Expectations as Deficit-Based
Counselors and Administrators	3.5	Schoolwide Plan as a Normalizing Agent	*Culture as Thoughts and Beliefs *Expectations as Multifaceted *Expectations as Preparation *College-Going Culture as Preparation
Non-Core Academic Subjects	3.0		*Culture as Spirit/Pride *College-Going Culture as Multifaceted *Expectations as Multifaceted

Summary of Findings

School Actors

Here, the author addressed whether school actors at *SHS* negotiate their college expectations, and if, by doing so, they participate in the act of developing and sustaining the school's college-going culture. When interviewed, school actors at *SHS* quickly clarified that their goal was not to develop a college-going culture but rather a college and career ready culture. For these school actors, the baseline expectation was that all students would be ready for a host of college and career opportunities. This expectation extended to students with special

learning needs and disabilities. Throughout the investigation, it quickly became apparent that school actors from varying departments at *SHS* relied heavily upon, and used, institutional systems to pressure school actors with divergent expectations to conform to the baseline. In short, these actors used systems to negotiate college expectations. By so doing, school actors were adhering to the defined schoolwide plan and were attempting to ensure colleagues did the same. The schoolwide plan was central in and to school actors' efforts to develop and sustain a robust college and career ready culture.

To elaborate, the data collection and analysis process highlighted further how everything at *SHS*, from programs to instructional projects to classroom practices and learning objectives, revolves around the schoolwide plan, which is comprised of the *Pledge* and *Capstone*. As a recent adoption in the District, the *Pledge* builds upon a strong foundation laid at *SHS* over multiple years and changes in leadership. Prior to the adoption of the *Pledge* and *Capstone*, school actors expressed to the author that they were in a state of crisis in that they were not serving students well. Rather than maintain the status quo, a small contingent of school actors made a deliberate shift to focus on using the curriculum as a way to ensure students mastered core content knowledge, which would be measured on standardized tests, and that they mastered critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, character, and communication skills—skills many felt were vital to success in the 21st century. Back in the early 2010s, school actors at *SHS*, particularly in the English department, started the *Capstone*, which quickly grew horizontally and vertically throughout all departments. Now, school actors at *SHS* use the *Pledge* and the *Capstone* as tools to set the baseline expectation schoolwide. School actors that fail to participate in the *Capstone* or that do not prepare PTAs stand in stark contrast to the norm and are, in turn, pressured to comply. In this way, the schoolwide plan makes plain what every actor should do

and clarifies roles. In short, the schoolwide plan functions as a negotiating tool of immeasurable value.

According to Malen's (1994) 'third face of power', radical, power relations help define interests through indoctrination, often unbeknownst to those impacted. At *SHS*, the broader schoolwide plan has focused school actors' efforts, interests, and practices, often unbeknownst to them. Now, the majority of school actors operate from this baseline expectation without questioning its validity or its existence. That being said, some school actors do not comply with the plan and exercise their autonomy in ways that jeopardize the broader effort to promote college and career readiness, as indicated from both quantitative and qualitative data sources cited throughout preceding pages of this chapter. Those school actors that fail to comply fell into three major camps.

First, despite the narrative that multiple pathways to post-secondary college and career opportunities are available to students at *SHS*, some school actors believe that there is an overemphasis on traditional four-year pathways. This overemphasis, they feel, has curtailed resources that would otherwise help support students with notable gaps in skills (e.g., remedial courses) and has overly narrowed post-secondary pathways. For these reasons, they reject the schoolwide plan. *Second*, some school actors fail to comply with the schoolwide plan because of its ideological implication; that being, the recognition that all students can learn and improve irrespective of where they might have started (i.e., a growth mindset). Some school actors operate from a defeatist mindset where perceived gaps in skills and knowledge are viewed as insurmountable. While not expressly stated, one contends that these mindsets were, in part, reflective of low, racialized expectations of students (see Liou & Rojas, 2018; Watson, 2011). And, *third*, as it pertains to the *Pledge* and broader efforts to support college and career

readiness, some school actors perceive the input and influence of District actors as self-serving rather than altruistic and reject the schoolwide plan accordingly. Each of these groups are dialectically opposed to the schoolwide plan.

Unfortunately, through observations and interviews, the author found that members from each of these groups have been removed from the decision-making process at *SHS*, a reality that has suppressed these dissenting opinions, akin to Malen's (1994) 'second face of power'. As political organizations, schools and the actors therein must balance and include opinions that fail to conform to the stated schoolwide plan. Failing to include such perspectives threatens to the long-term health of the organization and potentially leaves these perspectives unaddressed and in the background. As noted throughout, *SHS*'s culture is ever evolving and while the trend is positive, it may not remain so should school actors decide to leave these divergent opinions unaddressed or if the contingent of school actors that do not adhere to the schoolwide plan grows in size. Further, many of the school actors with divergent opinions, particularly those with defeatist mindsets, espoused colorblind racial ideologies that were couched in deficit-based thinking about students, their skills and ability, and their families. Addressing these beliefs is integral to efforts to ensure equity for all students. Failing to do so would likely delimit students' readiness for college and career opportunities

Students

The preceding sections of this chapter were devoted to the experiences and perspectives of school actors at Southside High School (hereinafter, *SHS*). In the remaining pages of this chapter, the author transitions to a discussion of the student experience at *SHS* and focuses on the relationship between contexts and outcomes, as compared to processes. This is an opportunity to assess the impact of school actors' efforts to bolster post-secondary pathways on students at all

levels and to assess the relationship between students' aspirations and behaviors and school actors' college expectations.

To accomplish this objective, the author pulls from three principal data sources, those being: a general student survey, a focus group interview, and a senior survey. *First*, the general student survey presents valuable information about what the majority of students at *SHS* plan to do after high school and how they engage in the college-going process. Moreover, using this survey data presents an occasion to assess how these students respond to key survey constructs, in particular perceptions of school actors' expectations, perceptions of institutional systems and structures that support students' progress towards higher education, and students' knowledge of the myriad resources present within and beyond the school that help with preparation for higher education. By disaggregating students' responses to these measures by affinity group (e.g., racial, academic, gender, etc.), the author is able to compare and contrast who gets presented with opportunities and who does not. *Second*, in an effort to move from the macro (i.e., general student experience) to the micro (i.e., a focus on a few students), the author details the experiences of four students, focusing particularly on the ways in which they engaged in the college-going and choice processes and how/whether they were impacted by school actors' expectations. It should be stated that these students were not in AVID and had not taken AP or honors courses. By focusing on the experiences of students not in honors and AP courses at *SHS*, one is also able to explore the full reach of school actors' expectations. And, *third*, the senior survey and the resultant findings help better explain the strength, direction, and magnitude of the relationship, if any, between students' behaviors in the college-going process and school actors' college expectations. Collectively, these data sources help the author paint a thick description of the student experience at *SHS*.

Table 23
Demographics of Students

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Grade at MXHS		
9th	352	25%
10th	329	23%
11th	401	29%
12th	325	23%
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	28	2%
Hispanic/Latino	913	65%
Asia/Pacific Islander	156	11%
White	81	6%
Native American	5	<1%
Other	37	3%
Multiracial	182	13%
Not Reported	5	<1%
Sex		
Male	733	52%
Female	652	46%
Non-Conforming	18	1%
Not Reported	4	<1%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch		
No	415	30%
Yes	972	69%
Not Reported	20	1%
English as a Second Language		
No	737	52%
Yes	652	46%
Not Reported	18	1%

Note: N=1407; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 24
Participation of Students

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken		
0	845	60%
1	188	13%
2	169	12%
3	128	9%
4 or more	69	5%
Not Reported	8	<1%
Participate in an Academy		
No	1158	82%
Yes	158	11%
Not Reported	91	7%
Participate in AVID		
No	1168	83%
Yes	239	17%

Note: N=1407; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

Tables 23-26 present the demographic, participation, and perceptional profile of general student survey respondents from *SHS*. Responses to the *general student survey* revealed that students at *SHS* were aware of the presence of systems and institutional supports designed to help them in the college-going process (μ - 46.69 (9.97)); they knew how to access these resources and those outside of school (μ - 14.58 (3.96)); and, they recognized that school actors expected them to graduate and were preparing them for college (μ - 12.19 (2.53)). Fortunately, when disaggregating students' responses on these key measures by affinity group status (e.g., race/ethnic identity, number of AP/Honors classes taken, grade classification, Academy participation, AVID participation, and free/reduced price lunch status), no notable differences were found (see **Appendix A**). This is a positive finding and indicates that, on average, the

student experience—when measured on these three constructs—is equitable. However, the student experience varied considerably when college-going behaviors and college aspirations, or plans, were disaggregated by affinity group status.

Table 25
Completion of Key Behaviors

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Completion of College-Going Behaviors		
Speaking with Counselor	54	4%
Collecting College Information	44	3%
Attending College Fairs	16	1%
Visiting a College Campus	258	18%
Multiple*	844	60%
Not Reported	191	14%
Immediate Post-Secondary Plans		
Four – Year College	551	39%
Two – Year College	182	13%
Job	58	4%
Military	44	3%
Undecided	189	13%
Multiple*	377	27%
Not Reported	6	<1%

Note: N=1407; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. * indicates that multiple response options were selected.

To elaborate, there is a statistically significant relationship between students' participation in specialized curricular programs and their post-secondary aspirations. Students in an academic *academy*, $\chi^2(6, N=1316) = 33.09$, $p<.001$, that take 1 or more *AP or honors class*, $\chi^2(24, N=1399) = 218.47$, $p<.001$, and that participate in *AVID,* $\chi^2(6, N=1407) = 104.17$, $p<.001$, are all more likely to aspire for a four-year college or university than their non-participant peers. In some cases, differences between participants and non-participants are as high as 45 percentage points: AVID, 34 percentage points; AP/honors classes, 20-47 percentage points depending on the number of courses taken; and, Academy, 15 percentage points. Similarly, participants in

these programs were less likely to aspire for a 2-year college than non-participants. In addition, there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between grade classification and post-secondary plans, $\chi^2(18, N=1407) = 123.11$, $p<.001$, where students in higher grades are less likely to aspire for a 4-year school and are more likely to aspire for a 2-year college as compared to their peers in lower grades. In short, somewhere in their schooling experiences at *SHS*, a sizable contingent of students come to realize that matriculating to a 4-year college is beyond reach or no longer an option for them. Additionally, there is a statistically significant association between race/ethnic identity and post-secondary plans, $\chi^2(42, N=1407) = 72.57$, $p<.05$, as well as gender and post-secondary plans, $\chi^2(12, N=1403) = 70.04$, $p<.001$. In short, students that self-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (56%) were more likely to aspire for a four-year university as compared to their peers (e.g., African American, 43%; Hispanic/Latino, 38%; Native American, 20%; White, 32%; Other, 35%; and, Multiracial, 34%) and less likely to aspire for two-year colleges. Further, students that identified as female (47%) were more likely to aspire for a four-year institution than were students that identified as male (32%) or gender non-conforming (33%). And, finally, there was not a statistically significant association between free/reduced price lunch status and post-secondary plans, χ^2 (6, N=1387) =5.761, p=451. This pattern of aspirations is further complicated by the manner in which students at *SHS* engage in the college-going process.

Table 26
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale Name	Mean	Cronbach's α	Min-Max	# of Items
Systems and Structures	46.69 (9.97)	0.95	1-60	12
Student Know How	14.58 (3.96)	0.85	1-20	4
General School Expectations	12.19 (2.52)	0.82	1-15	3
Parental Expectations	9.21 (1.85)	0.91	1-10	2

Note: N=1407; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses

For instance, students that take more than 1 AP or honors class engage in multiple college-going behaviors at greater rates than their peers (32 percentage points; χ^2 (20, N=1399) =170.78, p<.001). Likewise, AVID participation, χ^2(5, N=1407) =108.97, p<.001, and grade classification, χ^2(15, N=1407) =145.30, p<.001, were associated with college-going behaviors. Students that participated in AVID (90%;) and students in the 11th (61%) and 12th grade (74%) engage in multiple college-going behaviors at a higher rate than their peers (i.e., 51%, 9th; 55%, 10th; and, 54%, non-AVID). Further, female identifying students (69%) engage in multiple college-going behaviors at a greater rate than their male (53%) and gender non-conforming (27%) identified peers, χ^2(10, N=1403) =58.39, p<.001. Fortunately, race/ethnic identity status, academy participation, and free/reduced price lunch status were not associated with college-going behaviors. These patterns of college-going behaviors obscure the influences behind students' aspirations and their behaviors and whether schools' and school actors are responsible for these patterns.

For the four students interviewed during the data collection process, matriculating to college was a necessary step in their educational and career trajectories. For some, college was a pathway to professional careers, whereas others saw it as an opportunity to pursue a career they were passionate about and that could help them earn a living wage. Students' progression through the college-going and choice processes was not haphazard but deliberate and well-thought out. For the majority of students (75%, n=3), they planned to matriculate to a community college immediately after graduation. One student planned to enlist in the armed forces and to use built-in structures within the military to continue his education at the post-secondary level. For the other students, however, matriculating to a 2-year institution was a strategic choice rather than an issue of inequity. Notably, all three students opted to attend the same local community

college, which participates in the earlier mentioned *Pledge* agreement. By and large, students viewed attending a community college as a stepping stone and pathway towards attending a four-year university. The *Pledge* agreement would help them in more ways than one. That is, Jorge, like his peers, viewed community college as a space where he could get "my general ed[ucation courses] out of the way" and then transfer to his dream school, San Luis Obispo, where he intended "to pursue an architecture career". Collectively, these students were clear that the choice to enroll in a community college was theirs and not a bi-product of obscured post-secondary pathways present at *SHS*. Rather, these students were adamant that considerable resources were present at *SHS* to assist students, irrespective of participation in specialized learning programs, in navigating the college-going process. Juan alluded to as much when he remarked that,

> …the support and the information for colleges was always there, but it's just like from freshman to our senior year now that we've seen the changes that have been made to actually engage us more and getting us more help. Actually spending more time with us, you know, to help us with the applications, the FAFSA, and all that stuff.

The focus and support to engage in the college-going process becomes more defined and targeted as students' progress through grade levels. This might explain why engagement in multiple college-going behaviors increases as students' progress through grades. That is, as students near the end of their academic journey at *SHS*, they find that school actors build in key college-going behaviors into the curriculum and instructional time whereas earlier discussions may have been more conceptual in nature than applied in practice.

In addition, one student, Matt, remarked that counselors made frequent visits to the classroom to ensure students had completed their FAFSA application. According to Juan, school actors in the social science department "had these college students come over and they actually helped us apply for any community college or universities or anything". These college mentors

helped students navigate online applications and explained the process to them. And, finally, Camille was able to take advantage of a dual-enrollment course offered at the school site, which pre-enrolled her into the local community college and helped demystify what college would be like, "I thought it'd be way harder but the workload seemed manageable…and I had a really good professor that taught really well". These opportunities were intentional, connected to the larger schoolwide plan, and helped students actualize their college aspirations. Moreover, this communicated to students the schools', as well as school actors', expectations, albeit in implicit ways. Yet, less clear is the extent of this relationship for all students at *SHS*, in particular seniors.

Table 27
Demographics of Senior Survey Respondents

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	8	3%
Hispanic/Latino	204	63%
Asia/Pacific Islander	40	12%
White	22	7%
Native American	2	<1%
Other	5	2%
Multiracial	37	12%
Not Reported	4	1%
Sex		
Male	176	55%
Female	145	45%
Non-Conforming	1	<1%
Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Lunch		
No	87	27%
Yes	225	70%
Not Reported	10	3%
English as a Second Language		
No	184	57%
Yes	130	40%
Not Reported	8	3%

Note: N=322; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2018 Senior Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 28
Completion of College-Going Behaviors for Senior Survey Student Respondents

Characteristics	Sample Size (n)	% of total
Completion of College-Going Behaviors		
Speaking with Counselor	15	5%
Collecting College Information	13	4%
Attending College Fairs	3	<1%
Visiting a College Campus	17	5%
Multiple*	235	73%
None	39	12%
*Applied to College**		
No	98	30%
Yes	224	70%
Applied to Which Types of Colleges		
Community College	166	52%
Four-Year Private	4	1%
Four-Year Public	37	12%
Online	1	<1%
Multiple	65	20%
Did not Apply	49	15%
Participate in Puente Program		
No	300	93%
Yes	22	7%
Participate in AVID		
No	271	84%
Yes	51	16%

Note: N=322; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2018 Senior Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. *Values associated with *Applied to College* do not match with the Types of Colleges students applied to. Possible that students changed responses.

Table 27 presents the demographic profile of *senior survey* respondents, whereas **Table 28** presents completion of college-going behaviors for senior survey respondents. The majority of seniors at *SHS* engaged in some college-going behavior, whether speaking to a counselor, attending a college fair, etc. Fortunately, these behaviors translated into a sizable contingent of the group applying to college and to a wide array of colleges and universities. Over half of the

seniors at *SHS* applied only to a community college, as seen in **Table 28.** While slightly more than a third of students applied to multiple types of institutions, it became apparent that the relationship between participation in specialized curricular programs and post-secondary plans bore out in reality. In short, students that fit particular demographic and participation profiles applied to college at a higher rate and applied to a more diverse selection of institutions than their peers. That said, there is a statistically significant association between AVID participation, $\chi^2(1, N=322) = 17.25$, $p < .001$, PUENTE participation, $\chi^2 (1, N=322) = 5.08$, $p < .05$, and whether students apply to college. Students in AVID (94%) and PUENTE (90%) applied to college at a higher rate than their peers (65% and 68%, respectively). Further, there is a statistically significant association between AVID participation and the selection of colleges students applied to, $\chi^2(5, N=322) = 104.43$, $p < .001$. That is, students in AVID applied to a more diverse selection of institutions (61%) than their peers (13%) and more frequently applied to four-year colleges and universities only (33%) than their peers (9 %). Non – participants largely applied to community colleges. As a note, race/ethnic identity was not associated with whether students applied to college or whether they applied to a diverse host of institutions, and neither gender identity nor PUENTE participation were associated with the types of colleges students applied to.

Table 29
Descriptive Statistics for Scales

Scale Name	Mean	Cronbach's α	Min-Max	# of Items
Systems and Structures	39.26 (7.58)	0.94	1-50	10
General School Expectations	11.70 (2.50)	0.83	1-15	3
Parental Expectations	12.18 (2.76)	0.90	1-15	3

Note: N=322; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2018 Senior Survey; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations appear in parentheses.

Finally, using data from the aforementioned *senior survey,* the author specified a logistic regression model where whether a student applied to college was the dichotomous outcome of interest and where students' perceptions of educators' expectations served as one of the primary predictors. The resulting regression equation is presented below (subscripts are suppressed):

$$logit[P\ (y=1)] = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Hispanic + \beta_2 Female + \beta_3 ESL + \beta_4 FRL + \beta_5 AVID + \beta_6 PUENTE + \beta_7 CollegeBehaviors + \beta_8 FamExpectations + \beta_9 GenExpectations + \beta_{10} Systems$$

The stated null and alternative hypothesis are presented below:

H_0: $\beta_1 = \ldots = \beta_k = 0$

H_A: Not all $\beta_I = 0$

β_1 is a dummy code that captures the difference in predicted values of Y for Hispanic/Latino(a) students, as compared to their Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, White, Other, Multiracial, and Native American peers. β_2 is a dummy code that measures the difference in predicted values of Y for female identifying students, as compared to their male and gender non-conforming identifying peers. $\beta_{3\text{-}6}$ are also dummy codes that highlight the difference in predicted values of Y for ESL, free/reduced priced lunch, AVID, and PUENTE participants, respectively, as compared to their non-participating/identifying peers. β_7 measures the extent to which students have engaged in the college-going process. This measure is situated on a scale of increasing increments, where 0 suggests students have not completed a behavior, 1 indicates students have met with their counselor, 2 indicates students have collected college information, 3 indicates students have attended a college fair, 4 indicates that students have visited a college campus, and 5 indicates students have engaged in multiple college-going behaviors. $\beta_{8\text{-}10}$ are perceptional measures of the extent to which students perceive their family as expecting them to matriculate

to higher education, the extent to which students perceive school actors as expecting them to succeed in high school and later matriculate to higher education, and the extent to which students perceive the presence of resources, programs, and activities within their schools that support them in engaging in the college-going process, respectively. To note, these measures are situated on quasi-interval scales (see **Table 29** for scale ranges and **Appendix A** for interitem correlation matrix).

Table 30
Logistic Regression Analysis of Whether Students Applied to College
By Demographic, Participatory, and Perceptional Measures

Predictor	β	SE β	*Wald's* χ^2	*df*	*p*	e^{β} (odds ratio)
Constant	-2.778	.963	8.330	1	.004	.062
Hispanic/Latino(a)	0.058	0.343	0.029	1	.865	1.06
Female	0.351	0.327	1.154	1	.283	1.421
English as Sec. Language	0.019	0.331	0.0036	1	.955	1.019
Free/Red. Priced Lunch	-0.125	0.349	0.1286	1	.720	0.882
AVID	2.142	0.787	7.403	1	.007	8.516
PUENTE	1.032	0.839	1.514	1	.218	2.807
College-Going Behaviors	0.027	0.004	42.490	1	.000	1.027
Family Expectations	0.157	0.065	5.832	1	.016	1.17
General School Expectations	-0.077	0.096	0.682	1	.419	0.926
Systems & Structures	0.024	0.033	0.547	1	.465	1.025
Test			χ^2	*df*	*p*	
Overall model evaluation						
Likelihood ratio test			259.977			
Goodness-of-fit test						
Hosmer & Lemeshow			3.174	8	.911	

Note: N=322; All parameter estimates are pooled from 5 iterations of imputed data, not including categorical variables; Cox & Snell R^2 = 0.268; Nagelkerke R^2= 0.388; Overall Percentage Correct: 78.7; Dependent Variable: Applied to College, where Yes (1) and No (0)

Table 30 presents the results of the logistic regression analysis. With regards to *goodness-of-fit*, one observes that the Hosmer-Lemeshow, χ^2 (8)=3.174, p=.911, test was not statistically significant (p > .05), which suggests that the model fit to the data well. The model

correctly predicted 78% of the outcome of interest. In assessing the individual regression coefficients, one rejects the null hypothesis that $\beta_1 = \ldots = \beta_k = 0$ and assumes the alternative hypothesis as three measures—those being, AVID, College-Going Behaviors, and Family Expectations—are statistically significant ($p < .05$). One finds that students in AVID, students that engage in the college-going process, and students that perceive their family as expecting them to matriculate to higher education are 8.516, 1.027, and 1.170 times more likely to apply to college than students that do not participate in AVID, students that engage in less college-going behaviors, and students with lowered perceptions of their family's expectations, respectively, and holding all other variables constant. Of note, students' knowledge of varying institutional systems and structures and school actors' expectations were not positive predictors of whether students would apply for college, nor were demographic characteristics predictive of whether students would apply to college at higher rates as compared to their peers in the reference group. With regards to the aforementioned perceptional measures, one does not suggest that school actors' expectations or institutional systems and structures do not play a prominent role in students' experiences and the ways in which/whether they engage in the college-going process but that this relationship was not observed in the aforementioned model. Moreover, that student demographics were not statistically significant predictors should ease concerns regarding inequities along these lines.

Summary of Findings

At *SHS*, the schoolwide plan and efforts to ensure all students are prepared for college and career options have largely been successful. In general, students aspire to matriculate to college, engage in college-going behaviors, apply to college, and select a variety of institutions to apply to. Irrespective of background, students recognize that school actors have high

expectations of them; their aware of the myriad institutional resources in place to help them navigate the college-going process; and, they know how to access these resources. Anecdotally, students have a keen understanding of the pathways that matriculating to college can open for them, both personally and professionally. Unfortunately, however, participation in specialized curricular programs (e.g., AVID, AP/Honors) plays a significant role in the ways in which and the extent to which students engage in the college-going process, as has been articulated throughout.

Unfortunately, students in AVID and that take multiple AP and Honors courses are far more likely to aspire for a four-year college or university and to apply to a host of post-secondary educational institutions than their non-participant peers. Although, statistically, school actors' expectations were not predictive of whether students applied to college, students in these specialized programs and courses are likely receiving messages and opportunities that communicate expectations in a different manner than is the case for non-participants. Qualitative evidence suggests that expectations are communicated implicitly through the schoolwide plan and opportunities made available to students, like dual enrollment and college tailored programs. While necessary, this is not sufficient and leaves to chance whether students both perceive these expectations and act upon them.

Fortunately, differences on key measures by race and ethnicity—and other salient background characteristics—were not statistically significant. While participation in AVID was balanced across racial and ethnic groups, participation in AP and Honors courses was not and students that self-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander enrolled in such courses as a higher rate than their peers even though they accounted for a small proportion of the overall student population. Increasing access for all students to these courses is integral and must be a point of

emphasis considering the observed patterns of behaviors for course takers and non-course takers. But, more importantly, the same level and quality of instruction and opportunities afforded to these students must be made available to all students at the site.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CROSS CASE SYNTHESIS

In the preceding chapters, the author presented the background and impetus for this investigation (**Chapter 1**), literature that frames what is known as compared to what remains unknown, or understudied (**Chapter 2**), a theoretical framework that foregrounds process, as well as contexts (**Chapter 3**), a research methodology and design suited to capture experiences and perspectives of participants (**Chapter 4**), and findings to the study's principal research questions (**Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6**, respectively). More specifically, in **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6**, the author detailed how/whether school actors at *MXHS* and *SHS,* respectively, negotiated expectations and the significance of school actors' expectations on students' aspirations and behaviors in the college-going and -choice processes. In each of the aforementioned chapters, the experiences, perspectives, and accounts of school actors and students were examined in isolation. Here, in **Chapter 7**, the author synthesizes the prominent themes that emerged from embedded units at each site, which were as follows: 1) the significance of a schoolwide plan; 2) the influence of external actors; 3) power and its many faces; 4) college-going culture…for some; and, 5) the (implicit) role of school actors' expectations. The first three themes address the principal research question (i.e., ways in which school actors' negotiate expectations), whereas the remaining two themes address the second research question (i.e., influence of school actors' expectations on students' aspirations and behaviors). In the pages that follow, the author expounds upon each of these themes. **Table 31**, presented at the end of this chapter, provides a summary of points raised throughout the pages that follow.

The Significance of a Schoolwide Plan

Research shows that school actors structure the schooling environment in ways that align with the expectations they have for students (Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rist, 2000). At each site, school actors reported "high" college expectations for students. However, "high" college expectations did not mean the same thing for all school actors. Some school actors believed students should pursue traditional four-year college options whereas others expressed an affinity for technical and vocational, military, and junior college pathways. Additionally, some school actors had colorblind racial ideologies that fostered deficit-based thinking, the product of which was lowered expectations (Liou & Rojas, 2018; Watson, 2011). These differing expectations for and perceptions of students brought forth challenges in that the schooling environment at each site was not structured in ways that reflected some school actors' expectations for students. As such, if and when these school actors acted upon expectations not formalized within the school's structure, students suffered. These contrasting accounts and perspectives of "high" college expectations became points of contention within each of the schooling communities under investigation.

Fortunately, school actors mitigated conflict of this sort by negotiating expectations through implicit processes. Unfortunately, in some cases, school actors avoided negotiating expectations altogether. Malen and Vincent (2014) explained the processes that undergird the formation of professional learning communities and reasons why core beliefs remain unaddressed in these groups when they stated the following:

> When groups of teachers initially come together to form a professional community, they tend to "play community" (Grossman et al., 2001); in other words, members behave as if everyone holds the same beliefs and agrees on all issues…Conversations typically focus on supporting rather than altering current practice (Mangin, 2005), on accepting rather than inspecting the assumptions that undergird how teachers carry out their

> responsibilities and how schools structure educational opportunities (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006; Gitlin, 1999; Lipman, 1997). (p.22)

According to Malen and Vincent (2014), school actors act as though everyone within professional learning communities agrees on all the same issues, they simply accept *what is,* or avoid conversations that focus on beliefs, which could potentially disrupt the equilibrium. School actors in the present investigation engaged in such processes when it came to unpacking "high" college expectations. In some contexts, however, school actors recognized that a schoolwide plan could do what they were not able or willing to do through explicit practices.

To elaborate, the schoolwide plan could make plain how various actors, policies, practices, programs, and resources function together for the achievement of a definable aim. The significance of a schoolwide plan resides in its existence, the extent to which school actors buy into the plan, its scope, and how school actors use the plan to supplement their practices and complement their expectations. A schoolwide plan is necessary but not sufficient in efforts to build and sustain a robust, college-going culture that serves all students. It must exist, but it also must be followed and used for doing so provides a number of affordances, whereas failing to do so (or not having one) presents a number of challenges, as has been documented for each of the sites under investigation.

To elaborate, at *MXHS*, according to numerous school actors, there was no formalized schoolwide plan. The challenges and limitations that resulted from the plan's absence were numerous. *First*, the absence of this plan left school actors unable to engage in formal discussions of goals without direction from leadership. Formal discussions would have helped school actors negotiate and normalize expectations. *Second*, school actors were unclear about what "high" college expectations meant for all students as there was no established baseline. For some, "high" college expectations meant all students would go to college while other school

actors perceived some students being more likely to go to college than others. And, *third*, the absence of a schoolwide plan at *MXHS* hindered efforts to develop and sustain a robust college-going culture. As a result, not all students had access to the high-quality instruction and college-going opportunities afforded to those in specialized learning programs and courses.

Alternatively, at *SHS*, there was a formalized schoolwide plan and it was widely known. The affordances provided by the schoolwide plan were manifold. *First*, school actors were able to align the curriculum vertically and horizontally by using the schoolwide plan as a guide. This practice helped school actors ensure core content was covered multiple times to account for instances where it may not have been by covered by a particular educator or was not fully grasped by students. In this way, the schoolwide plan functioned as a check and balance. *Second*, school actors used the schoolwide plan as tool to normalize expectations. The schoolwide plan set the standard and provided school actors with a yardstick along which they could measure themselves and colleagues. And, *third*, when school actors failed to buy-in to the schoolwide plan, their colleagues that had bought into the plan were able to use it to compel them. In this way, the plan became a system of compliance.

In addition, a schoolwide plan can be useful in efforts to articulate what being college ready means within local school contexts. At *SHS*, school actors employed a broad conception of college readiness (see Conley, 2008), where students' content knowledge, college knowledge, and skill development were measured through the *Capstone Project* and *Portfolio*. Broad conceptions of college readiness are widely known as being difficult to measure in practice, yet school actors at *SHS* developed a horizontally and vertically aligned curricular project that effectively measured students' readiness for college. Conversely, at *MXHS*, school actors have largely defined readiness as completion of standardized tests (e.g., Advanced Placement Exams,

etc.) and completion of the A-G requirements and high school coursework (see Maruyama, 2012). While easier to measure in practice, such conceptions of college readiness are narrow in focus and leave unaddressed the skills and attributes students will need in the 21st century. To conclude, having a schoolwide plan is an important step in the process to develop and sustain a robust, college-going culture that truly serves *all* students (see Knight-Manuel et al., 2018). The schoolwide plan serves as a guide; it sets the standard across the schooling environment concerning "high" expectations; and, it makes plain how all parts of the system function together as a whole. The existence of the plan while necessary, however, is not sufficient in this effort as school actors have to buy-in or be compelled to comply.

The Influence of External Actors

As noted in **Chapter 3**, the relationship between schools and external actors is a core component of educational micropolitics (i.e., policy micropolitics; Hoyle, 1999; Lindle, 1999) and ecological systems theory (i.e., exosystems; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). To summarize, exosystems are simply structures—or in this case, local educational agencies—that influence, delimit, or determine what transpires in settings where the developing person (i.e., student) spends time, or in this case schools. This layer of the ecological model helps focus the research lens on the relationship between schools and local educational agencies but does not provide details on how these agencies influence, delimit, or determine what transpires within schools. Policy micropolitics, on the other hand, helps uncover the ways in which external actors, particularly those within local educational agencies, use their power to influence, delimit, or determine what transpires within schools.

These tenets of the study's theoretical framework proved useful throughout the investigation, especially when unpacking the influence of external actors on schools and the

actors within them. School actors at both sites remarked that external actors—largely district actors—altered the direction of the schools through the use of power, which influenced, delimited, and determined what took place within the schools. In some cases, changes were limited to particular subject areas (e.g., social science department at *MXHS*) and were infrequent (e.g., special education inclusion at *MXHS*). In other cases, changes were far-reaching, frequent, and felt by all school actors (e.g., the adoption of the *Pledge* agreement at *SHS*). Across both sites, however, these demonstrations of power were unevenly experienced by school actors in that they were either opposed or accepted.

Characteristic of school actors that approved of these demonstrations of power from external actors was an unyielding belief in the schoolwide plan and what it signified. For instance, at *SHS*, core elements of the schoolwide plan, like the *Capstone Project*, were reflected in the *Pledge* agreement adopted across the District. The *Capstone Project* started as a curricular assignment in the *ELA* department at *SHS* and quickly grew to become an invaluable tool, both for school actors and students, that helped scaffold learning and instruction across the curriculum. Further, the *Capstone Project* provided students with an opportunity to document both their mastery of core content and their development of 21st century skills. The success of the *Capstone Project* at *SHS* ultimately led to its creator assuming an administrative position at the District where he worked to introduce the *Capstone* district-wide. In this case, external actors' demonstrations of power were not widely perceived as intrusive because these actions reflected what was present within *SHS's* schoolwide plan and developments that originated from the site. The changes resulting from these external actors' demonstrations of power were viewed as complimentary, rather than antithetical, to efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture at *SHS*.

Conversely, characteristic of school actors that disapproved of external actors' demonstrations of power was the absence of a schoolwide plan at their school site, as was the case at *MXHS*, or a wavering affinity for the schoolwide plan. School actors at *MXHS* lamented their relationship with external actors at the local District. Many school actors felt as though District actors made decisions that were not in the best interest of students at *MXHS*—whether the decision to fully integrate special education students into mainstream classrooms without professional development for teachers or the decision to impose a rigid testing schedule without advance notice. Such decisions and practices led school actors to question District actors' authority and role as decision-makers. Unfortunately, these sentiments did not stop District actors from using their power to change how things were done at *MXHS*. These demonstrations of power were destabilizing for school actors and created working environments that sapped creativity and productivity and significantly impacted morale. Without a defined baseline or anchor, in the form of a schoolwide plan, school actors at *MXHS* were cast about with each new demonstration of power from external actors. That is to say, the District set the goals and objectives—often to school actors' chagrin.

Alternatively, some school actors at *SHS* disapproved of the schoolwide plan because it was narrowly focused. As such, District actors' efforts (e.g., removing remedial courses) to enhance the plan were viewed negatively. Some school actors event went as far to suggest that the 'push' for college and standardized testing was an attempt to control the narrative of what constituted an 'underperforming school'. By controlling the narrative, the District could, on one hand, present the image that schools under its purview were exemplars for college and career readiness, while also failing to address "perceived" gaps in students' knowledge and skills. This is similar to Armstrong, Tuters, and Carrier's (2014) finding where "surface demonstrations were

manipulated to enhance individual career prospects and build school and district profiles, while masking and maintaining hidden hegemonic practices and power structures, which reproduced systemic inequities" (p. 132). In short, for some, school and external actors used their power to scratch the surface of equity issues, thereby leaving inequities largely unaddressed and intact. Unfortunately, a sizable contingent of school actors at *SHS* felt this way and expressed these sentiments throughout the investigation. These contrasting experiences highlight the profound influence of external actors and the diverse ways in which school actors respond to demonstrations of power from those external to the schooling community.

Power and Its Many Faces

Uncovering and highlighting the myriad ways in which school and external actors demonstrated power is an important discovery in this investigation. At each of these sites, power was a clear form of political currency that helped shape a number of processes, whether defining an agenda, allocating resources, or silencing dissenters. In short, one found that power had many faces. In her seminal work, Malen (1994) opined that power manifests in three ways, those being: 1) *pluralistic* patterns of power, where the focus is on how and who makes decisions; 2) *elitist* patterns of power, where dissenters are silenced and safe issues are addressed rather than those that disturb the established equilibrium; and, 3) *radical* patterns of power, where subtle processes of socialization shape actors' interests and aspirations. In this investigation, the author found instances where each face of power was represented. Here, the author adapts Malen's (1994) language to reflect the reality of what transpired in each of these schooling contexts: 1) *Pluralistic* patters as 'Power to Decide'; 2) *Elitist* patterns as 'Power to Silence'; and, 3) *Radical* patterns as 'Power to Sway/Indoctrinate'. These accounts of power are detailed in the space below.

First, school actors demonstrating *pluralistic* patterns of power had the ability to decide staffing models and the ability to decide which students would ultimately have access to invaluable resources, information, and opportunities. As a point of reference, demonstrations of power that fit within the first face of power were discussed in the findings section on 'politics of opportunities and trade offs', for *MXHS*, in **Chapter 5.** In that section, school actors both lamented the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities and decisions they were tasked with making regarding staffing models. Furthermore, they lamented how decisions they made resulted in the reproduction of inequity rather than its dismantlement. *Second*, school actors reported instances where they had been silenced due to their dissenting opinions about the schoolwide plan and the involvement of District actors. Such uses of power are representative of *elitist* patterns of power, which were discussed in **Chapter 6**. By silencing dissenters, school actors were effectively concealing concerns that might threaten efforts to develop a college and career ready culture at *SHS*. Unfortunately, however, these efforts, according to dissenters, were unevenly focused on traditional four-year pathways, rather than a multitude of post-secondary options as was expressed in the plan and by external actors. Dissenters were perceived as threats to the status quo; therefore, by silencing them, school actors maintained the status quo.

And, *third*, school actors at *SHS* detailed how they used the schoolwide plan to compel and sway school actors that were reluctant to adopt and adhere to the plan—behavior representative of radical patterns of power. Examples of this pattern of power were discussed in **Chapter 6**. To summarize, however, some school actors expressed how using student data could be effective in 'brining people along', as it would be difficult to argue against practices that resulted in gains on student learning outcomes. In other instances, school actors articulated how they were originally reluctant to engage in activities connected with the schoolwide plan but how

after having done so, they saw its merits and value. These remarks reaffirm the importance of a robust, schoolwide plan and the reality that when the plan works well, it compels and can be used to compel.

College-Going Culture…For Some

The strength of a college-going culture is largely predicated upon the extent to which students are encouraged to develop college aspirations (see Cooper, 2009; Roderick, Coca, & Nagoaka, 2011) and encouraged to engage in the college-going process (see Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009). In order to help students develop college aspirations and engage in the college-going process, school actors must have and communicate high expectations to students (McClafferty, McDonough, & Núñez, 2002). In addition, school sites must have supports in place to help students navigate the complex college-going process (Perry, 2013). It is worth noting that each of the sites under investigation had a college-going culture. On average, students at each site 1) were aware of systems and institutional supports in place designed to help them matriculate to higher education, 2) knew how to access these invaluable resources, and 3) recognized that school actors expected them to graduate and were preparing them for college. Moreover, a sizable contingent of students expressed high aspirations and engaged in the college-going process. The presence of the college-going culture at each site was evident and not questioned. However, as gleaned from evidence presented throughout, the college-going cultures at each site worked better for some students than it did for others.

Generally, students that participated in specialized learning communities—whether AVID, Academies, or AP/honors classes—were far more likely to aspire for a particular type of institution and to engage in greater numbers of college-going behaviors (e.g., talking to counselors, visiting campuses, etc.). In particular, students in an academic academy, those that

took 1 or more AP and honors class, those in AVID were far more likely to aspire for a 4-year college and university and less likely to aspire for a 2-year institution than their non-participant peers. Further, students that were in 11th and 12th grade typically engaged in more college-going behaviors than their 9th and 10th grade peers. Yet, 11th and 12th graders were less likely to aspire for a 4-year college or university. This would suggest that somewhere in their schooling experiences, students came to realize that matriculating to a 4-year institution was no longer a viable option and beyond their reach. Fortunately, differences by race and ethnicity and gender in aspirations and behaviors were negligible.

Regrettably, these observed patterns of behavior bore out in practice for seniors at *SHS,* in particular those that responded to the senior survey. Seniors in AVID and Puente applied to college at a higher rate and to a more diverse selection of institutions than their non-participant peers. Participation in AVID and completion of college-going behaviors were statistically significant predictors of whether students would apply to college. These discrepant experiences suggest that the student experience in the college-going process is, in part, dependent upon students' participation in specialized learning programs. While school actors recognize some of these patterns of behaviors, other patterns are more obscure and, as a result, are less likely to be addressed and changed. The continued growth of each of these sites' college-going cultures will hinge upon the development, refinement, and adoption of schoolwide plans, how/whether school actors engage in the act of negotiating expectations, how they address power, how they manage external actors and the influence they have upon the school sites, and how they address uneven patterns of behaviors like those detailed above and throughout the preceding pages of this document.

The (Implicit) Role of School Actors' Expectations

As has been noted throughout, school actors' expectations play a profound role in shaping the opportunity structure within schools (Liou & Rojas, 2016), in shaping how students perform academically (Rist, 2000), and in shaping later postsecondary educational matriculation (Gregory & Huang, 2013). In a college-going culture, school actors' expectations help shape college aspirations and guide practice and the development and implementation of strategic plans, vision and mission statements, and institutional policies (McClafferty, McDonough, & Núñez, 2002; Roderick, Coca, & Nagoaka, 2009). These aspects of the school structure further support students in actualizing their aspirations through tangible behaviors. In this investigation, school actors described expectations from two vantage points, their personal expectations and those reflected in the larger schooling environment. Personally, school actors espoused "high" college expectations throughout the data collection process. Unfortunately, school actors' conceptions of "high" expectations were not always uniform upon closer inspection. Externally, school actors remarked that each of the sites under investigation started at a different *Phase* on the student expectations' scale, those being *Phase 2* or *Phase 3*. By the end of the multi-year grant, school actors at each site generally felt as though progress had been made in raising expectations schoolwide. For some school actors, progress reflected a complete transition to the next *Phase*, whether *Phase 3* or *Phase 4*. For other school actors, change was marginal and did not reflect a complete transition to the subsequent *Phase*. Though school actors were largely clear on the status of expectations at the respective school sites, what remains less clear, however, is the collective significance and role of school actors' expectations on students as they engage in the college-going process, broadly defined.

In this investigation, students articulated that school actors had "high" college expectations and that they largely perceived them through the things school actors did (i.e.,

implicit), not what was said (i.e., explicit). Notably, for many students, school actors' expectations did not play a significant role in the development of their college aspirations or whether they engaged in the college-going process. Students' aspirations and behaviors were significantly and positively influenced by external factors, like their families, by internal motivations (e.g., a desire for a better future), and by participation in specialized learning programs and environments, whether AVID or AP and honors classes.

Research is clear that underserved student groups' families play a positive and prominent role in the college-going process and that students are "exposed to college going messages from the media, those in their neighborhood, churches, community centers, and especially from their most immediate source of knowledge, their family" (Carey, 2016, p. 719). Social and cultural capital play a profound role in shaping how students develop and often renegotiate aspirations to reflect and meet the needs of their families (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006; Martinez, 2013; Valadez, 2008; Yosso, 2005). It is often the case that students have been exposed to college-going messages long before school actors have an opportunity to share such messages and, as a result, have developed college aspirations before they enroll in high school—thereby minimizing the cumulative effect of school actors' expectations on the *development* of students' aspirations. This was the case in the present investigation, evidenced by the non-statistically significant relationship between expectations and behaviors, as seen in **Table 30**. In addition, students in the present investigation called on these networks to assist them in navigating the college-going process, whether visiting campuses, completing college applications, or completing scholarship applications. The (implicit) role of school actors' expectations cannot be overstated, however. Students meet the expectations that school actors' set for them, whether positive or negative. In spite of the work families do to encourage students, negative, or low, expectations from school

actors can thwart the influence of students' families and their cultural capital (see Cooper, 2009; Howard, 2003).

Second, many students perceived college as an opportunity to ascend the socio-economic ladder in ways that their parents and/or extended family members had not been able to before. Such behaviors are in line with research on students' decision-making processes in the college-going process (see Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Perna, 2000). Ascending the socio-economic ladder by going to—and hopefully graduating from—college would help students escape challenging family circumstances and live the quality of life they desired. For these reasons, going to college was a given. Yet, for some students, deciding on where they would ultimately attend college was function of costs, proximity to home, and other factors. Though a direct relationship was not found within the data, one contends that school actors' expectations may have shaped the types of institutions students applied to and ultimately attended. To elaborate, *third*, participating in specialized learning programs and environments shaped how and whether students applied to college (see Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). Built into many of these specialized programs are opportunities for students to visit different colleges and universities and structured assignments that align with aspects of the college application process (e.g., essays). Accordingly, students in these programs are often more likely to internalize these structured opportunities as representative of school actors' "high" expectations and to act on them by completing applications to college. Many of these programs were geared towards preparing students for four-year colleges and universities, which was exemplified in the students' application patterns.

The (implicit) role of school actors' expectations and the preeminence of family expectations in this investigation must be approached with and interpreted from a position of

care and caution. What transpires within school matters greatly to students' future educational trajectories. As such, readers should not take the (implicit) role of school actors', as it has been articulated here, to imply that school actors' expectations are negligible and can/should be ignored. A cursory review of the literature highlights how school actors' expectations operate from a promotive (i.e., to support development of), protective (i.e., to guard against), and counteractive perspective. For instance, despite high personal and family expectations, Gregory and Huang (2013) found school actors' expectations to be the strongest predictors of later postsecondary educational matriculation. For surveyed students, school actors' expectations were protective against 'risk' factors that curtail students from underserved backgrounds participation in higher education (Gregory & Huang, 2013). Conversely, however, Howard (2003) and Cooper (2009) found that negative expectations from school actors counteracted the support and encouragement students received from their families. Mapping the ways in which varying sources of expectations—whether student, parent, teacher—interact with one another and impact students has not yet been disentangled, nor has the hierarchy that exists among these sources (Gregory & Huang, 2013). Accordingly, there is a need to explore further the hierarchy that exist between these sources of expectations and the ways in which they intersect with one another and how they impact students.

Table 31
Cross Case Synthesis of Themes Emergent from Cases and Sites

The Significance of a Schoolwide Plan	***Presence*** Clarifies goals and expectations; illustrates how the various pieces of the organization work together; compels compliance *"…as far as the schoolwide plan goes, it is definitely embedded in both our schoolwide professional development, specifically in our departmental professional development, to really make sure we are pushing our students to think more critically, ask better questions...But in all our classes, to make sure that we're giving them the supports that pushes them to go further.* *--SHS Actor*	***Absence*** Complicates discussions of goals and expectations; Challenges the development and sustainability of a college-going culture *"I think we need to define high expectations and I think that's what we have not done as a schoolwide…every teacher has [a] different meaning of what a high expectation for a student is".* *--MXHS School Actor*	
Influence of External Actors	***Positive*** Actions align with schoolwide plan and efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture *"…so, I think maybe it's both from SHS and support from the District. But, I'm not quite sure. I'm just happy that it happened and that it's spreading to other schools hopefully. Or, the college going culture, at least, here is getting stronger and then hopefully, you know, leads to more schools in the District and to also promote it, so that we're pretty strong."* *– SHS Actor*	***Negative*** Actions appear intrusive as no schoolwide plan present to set goals and objectives; Actions appear intrusive as actors do not agree with the existing schoolwide and external actors' efforts to further said plan *"I think it was our District who's pushing that that there's no more remedial math classes. Everyone jumps into Algebra whether you're ready or not. And, I'm like, "whoa, wait a minute. That's not good". And, so it's just, I think it's killing them and that's why our math scores are so low".* *– SHS Actor*	
Power and its Many Faces	***Power to Decide*** Used to decide who gets what and why; can reify inequity *"But you know when you're leveraging, "where can you minimize damage? That is a terrible thing to realize that I'm sitting here trying to figure this out based on who's going to harm kids the least in which roles. That is a terrible place to be. That should not be an issue." – MXHS Actor*	***Power to Silence*** Used to decide who's voice is heard, or not; permits conflict avoidance *"And, unfortunately, you know, they don't allow a lot of other opinions around here sometimes. They don't. There are valuable resources on this campus…Teachers, but it's only the same few anyway." – SHS =Actor*	***Power to Sway*** Used to compel non-compliant actors; promotes buyin and sustainability *"And, so I think that we could do a better job of creating systems where people are able… to work together on the same page… So just building systems, and I think that that's how we bring people along that aren't wanting to come along."* – SHS Actor

College-Going Culture…For Some	***Specialized Programs (e.g., AVID, Academy, AP/Honors. etc.)*** Participating students more likely to engage in behaviors attributed to the college-going process at a higher rate; participating students aspire for four-year colleges and universities more than non-participant peers; participating students more likely to apply to college and to a diverse host of institutions "*If you're in an academy, you probably have a higher chance of having a college visit during your time in high school. If you're in certain groups, AP classes or other things, there's probably a higher chance that you're going to visit, but that's leaving out are our least likely kids the entire time that they're in high school, they're not going to have those, those visits*".– *MXHS Actor*	
The (Implicit) Role of School Actors' Expectations	***Implicit*** Expressed through actions, not words; portrayed through activities that pertain to college and the college-going process *"…the support and the information for colleges was always there, but it's just like from freshman to our senior year now that we've seen the changes that have been made to actually engage us more and getting us more help. Actually spending more time with us, you know, to help us with the applications, the FAFSA, and all that stuff."* – *SHS Student*	***Minimal Impact on Aspirations*** Exposure to high expectations from family played a significant role in students' aspirations and in their application behaviors *"College, honestly, it was just how I was raised. I would always go to football games, college games. Like whenever me and my family went out of town…they would take me and my siblings to the university to just go and eat lunch. So it kind of felt normal."* *– MXHS Student*

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was two-fold. *First*, the author endeavored to explore the ways in which, if any, school actors—particularly secondary school administrators, counselors, educators, and staff—negotiated college expectations in an effort to develop and sustain a college-going culture. *Second*, the author endeavored to explore the ways in which, if any, school actors' college expectations influenced students' aspirations to attend college and their behaviors in the college-going process, broadly defined. In short, this investigation was one of processes and contexts. The sample for this study was comprised of school actors and students from two, large comprehensive secondary schools in urban California communities that participated in a four-year grant initiative. The grant was designed to help underperforming California high schools who were interested in "enhancing their transition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with specific activities and strategies, as supported by research, to increase the college-going culture of their school" (CAPP, 2014b, p.1). The sites under study and the actors within them represented critical cases given their experience within the larger grant and the ways in which they engaged in this school reform effort.

In this study, the author employed a fully mixed concurrent equal status multisite multiple embedded case study design where qualitative data (e.g., documents, interviews, observations, field notes) and quantitative data (e.g., student, senior, and teacher surveys) were collected from study participants. Cases were bound at the process level for school actors, whereas embedded units were 1) the departmental units school actors operated within and 2) students. These data sources helped the author unearth school actors' expectations and

perceptions of the schooling environment and students' aspirations, behaviors in the college-going process, and their perceptions of school actors' expectations and of the schooling environment. The author analyzed these data using a host of qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures, which included the constant comparison method, document analysis, descriptive statistics, frequencies, mean comparisons, contingency tables with Pearson's χ^2 test statistic, and multiple logistic regression. Once analyzed, the author presented findings for each site and for the embedded units therein in a thick description. Following each of these singular presentations of findings, the author synthesized dominant findings across cases and sites.

Summary of Results

In an attempt to address the two-fold purpose of this study, the author sought to address the following research questions:

1. How, if at all, do school actors negotiate college expectations in order to develop and sustain a college-going culture?
2. How, if at all, do expectations regarding college influence, or relate to, students' college aspirations and their behaviors in the college-choice and college-going processes?

With regards to the first research question, the author found that school actors at each site either negotiated expectations in an implicit fashion or they avoided doing so, altogether. In cases where school actors negotiated expectations in implicit ways, they often used the schoolwide plan—that set the standard and made clear what "high" expectations was for students—to compel those with low or divergent expectations. Conversely, when school actors avoided or did not negotiate expectations, it resulted in divergent expectations that ultimately re-inscribed inequity and the status quo. College-going cultures were present at each site but varied in their overall strength and reach. With regards to the second research question, the author found that

school actors' college expectations did not play a profound role in the *development* of students' college aspirations or whether students engaged in the college-going process. Notably, other factors, like students' families, their intrinsic motivation, and participation in specialized courses and programs, were far greater direct influences on the development of students' college aspirations and their behaviors in the college-going process. These findings, again, speak the salience of processes and contexts and the need to consider both in future investigations.

Discussion

Educational policies are statements of purpose and value. In an effort to promote broader access to and readiness for higher education, federal and state policy makers introduced educational policies that tasked public secondary schools with ensuring students demonstrate readiness for college and that school climates support such endeavors (see CDE, 2018; ESSA, 2015). The adoption of these policy measures signaled a shift from past policy foci and highlighted both the value of public secondary schools and their important role in redressing longstanding disparities in college readiness. Unfortunately, the mere adoption of these educational policies has not guaranteed their intended success, nor will it.

Missing from the broader discourse on policy adoption has been an equal focus on how these policies are implemented by school actors within schooling contexts not originally designed to prepare all students for college (i.e., large, comprehensive secondary schools; Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). Educational policies fail to uphold their intended purpose and espoused value when school actors are unable and/or unwilling to implement them with fidelity (Porter, Fusarelli, & Fusarelli, 2015). Findings shared in **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 6** foreground the myriad ways in which school actors engage in reform efforts, largely resultant from new policy mandates, and the reasons why some actors struggle in this process and fail to do so.

To date, studies of policy implementation have not sufficiently nuanced the experiences of school actors in large, comprehensive secondary schools and the micropolitical nature of interactions within these schooling contexts. As such, it is not surprising that school actors have failed to implement certain policy measures. Among many things, the present investigation highlights that while implementing policy within these school settings can fail for a number of reasons, it can also succeed. To bolster the success of policy implementation in all public secondary schools, but especially large, comprehensive sites, the author concludes his discussion with a focus on strategic efforts that can be taken at the level of policy, practice, and research.

Policy

Here, the author recommends that federal and state actors devote additional resources to investigate how educational policies, in particular ESSA (2015) § 1111 (v)(I) through (VIII) and CDE's CCI (2018), are implemented within diverse schooling contexts, especially large comprehensive secondary schools and those situated in urban environments. Federal and state actors seemingly assume that schools are neutral spaces where poilicy measures are and will be implemented with fidelity (Blase & Björk, 2010). This ignores the existing contexts of these insittutions and the negotiations of power that take place among school actors. Moreover, public secondary high schools were not designed to prepare *all* students for college (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Federal and state actors must contend with this reality and provide additional resources to and for schools and local districts seeking to implement these policies and change. College-going cultures represent one plausible pathway to reaching the desired aim of bolstering readiness for a host of college and career options for students. By further investigating the implementation process, these external actors will likely have a more nuanced understanding of why educational

policies fail in particular contexts and why they succeed in others. As a result, they will be better positioned to introduce educational policies and target resources to ensure these policy measures are implemented and that they result in their stated purpose.

Additionally, findings from the present investigation highlight the need for a broad definition of college readiness within federal and state educational policy measures. Broad conceptions of college readiness have largely been avoided due in part to the difficultly that lies in measuring them in practice. Here, the author recommends that federal actors, in particular, adopt a broad definition of college readiness and mandate that state educational agencies ensure public secondary schools meet said definition. As it is currently written, ESSA (2015) permits states the lattitude to define and measure college readiness within their respective contexts. As such, there exist multiple state-based measures of college readiness (Blume & Zumeta, 2014; Welch, Feygin, & English, 2018). For instance, some states measure/assess a student's readiness for college through single measures of performance, like completion of AP/IB coursework and exams and college entrance exams, whereas other states, like California, embody a multitude of metrics (e.g., AP/IB exams, dual enrollment, A-G requirements, CTE pathway, and standardized tests). Accordingly, it is probable that even if states across the nation demonstrate increased readiness in college-bound students, discrepancies in readiness will continue with such disparate measures. By adopting a broad definition of college readiness, one similar to Conley's (2008), federal actors will set the standard and compel states to expand their existing definitions and measurements, thereby ensuring that students are better positioned to leave high school with the requisite knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the 21st century. As an example, Southside High School (or, SHS), and the local school district, adopted a broad definition of college readiness where students' academic knowledge, non-cognitive skills, and college

knowledge were assessed and measured through formative assessments and curricular projects, namely the *Capstone Project*. The experience of school actors at *SHS* signal that broad conceptions of college readiness can be measured in practice and scaled up to Districts.

Practice

The success of school reform efforts hinge upon the participation and buy-in of all school actors. In order to develop and sustain a robust college-going culture that prepares *all* students for college, particularly in large schooling contexts, all school actors must participate and District actors must support these efforts. The present investigation highlighted the ways in which power manifests within schooling contexts and among school actors, as well as the ways in which external actors use their power to alter the direction of what unfolds within schools. Though power has many faces (Malen, 1994), it need not be used to re-inscribe inequity or thwart change efforts but, rather, must be used to challenge the status quo in ways that promote equity for *all* students. Here, the author suggests that District actors use their power to develop schoolwide plans that clearly spell out the goal of preparing and ensuring students are ready for college. These plans must make explicit what "high" expectations mean and outline how systems, policies, practices and procedures should function together to support students in becoming ready for college. Schools and school actors should be free to tailor plans to their schooling contexts to the extent that doing so does not deviate from the stated goal, at whole or in part.

Further, school actors must buy-in to the schoolwide plan and adopt it with fidelity. Failing to do so threatens the success of the stated plan and delimits progress to the stated goal(s). Recognizing that there will be instances where school actors fail to adopt the plan with fidelity, one recommends school leaders, broadly defined, use their power to promote equity in

spaces where inequity thrives by allocating resources based upon need, include dissenters in contexts where they are being silenced, and sway school actors that fail to comply with the stated schoolwide plan. This might require changing long standing policies, programs, practices, and procedures. Further, this might require inviting dissenters to spaces where decisions are made and providing them with a space and opportunity to voice their opinions without fear of judgement or reprisal. It might also include targeted coaching to support those reluctant to change. In short, school actors must adopt and adhere to the schoolwide plan, maintain a standard of high expectations, and approach students and student learning from a growth mindset. Findings shared throughout this document highlight the delimiting nature of deficit-based thinking, colorblind racial ideologies, and defeatist mindsets in efforts to develop and sustain a college-going culture (Liou & Rojas, 2018; Watson, 2011).

Research

And, finally, there must be an increased focus on processes within educational research, broadly, and investigations of school culture and climate, specifically. These institutional contexts have been widely studied and are known to be significant influences on students' development. Yet, less is known about the ways in which school actors change cultures and climates that prove delimiting and how they sustain these efforts over time. When considering the present investigation, this dearth of research raises concerns in that examples of how educators, counselors, administrators, and (district) staff negotiate power and expectations to develop and sustain college-going cultures within complex, political organizations remains understudied. Here, the author urges scholars to explore, more intensively, the process and processes school actors engage in as they change a school's culture. The present investigation has brought to the fore the ways in which school actors at two sites engaged in this process.

Identifying these processes makes it easier to provide school actors with strategies and tools to engage in these processes in more effective ways. It should not be assumed that findings from this investigation will map onto other contexts. Thus, the need for investigations in diverse contexts is high. To aid in this process, the author recommends educational micropolitics as a theoretical lens and empirical focus. Using educational micropolitics will help open the "black box" (Blasé & Björk, 2010) of schools and will help researchers map the myriad ways school actors engage in this important work. Power must feature centrally in any investigation of educational micropolitics and college-going cultures, as should educators' college expectations for students.

Conclusion

Bolstering and ensuring students from underserved backgrounds have equitable access to higher education has been a point of emphasis for decades. Federal, state, and local actors have introduced numerous policies, programs, and interventions to redress this issue but to little avail (Avery, 2013; Doyle, 2006; Hoxby & Avery, 2012). The recent adoption of federal educational policy measures (i.e., ESSA, 2015) represented a pivotal turning point in making college more accessible for students from underserved backgrounds. Interventions of the past largely targeted financial and informational barriers to college and left unaddressed whether, and how, students were prepared for college and the role of public secondary schools. With the passing of ESSA (2015), states were mandated to report on how they prepared students for college and could no longer ignore the important role of public schools in this process. To that end, California adopted a new college and career readiness indicator that all public schools will be measured on (CDE, 2018).

Yet, the potential and hope generated from the adoption of these policy measures has been dashed by the oversight that public comprehensive secondary schools were not designed to prepare all students for college and that implementing educational policies in schools is a political process steeped in power dynamics. Fortunately, educational researchers have documented how public comprehensive secondary schools with college-going cultures ensure students are ready for college (Athanases, Achinstein, Curry, & Ogawa, 2016; Holland & Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Knight-Manuel et al., 2016, 2016; McKillip, Godfrey, & Rawls, 2013; Perry, 2013; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). Unfortunately, research on how school actors develop and sustain such schooling contexts is limited. The present investigation confirmed existing research on the significance of college-going cultures (McKillip, Godfrey, & Rawls, 2013; Perry, 2013; Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011) and school actors' (college) expectations (Liou, 2016; Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rist, 2000). Additionally, this study reified the need to explore how school actors negotiate beliefs and college expectations and how they use power to implement educational policy measures and restructure schools in ways that promote equity for all students. The promise of public education, and secondary schools in particular, and the belief in a future where alternative modes of structuring these long-standing institutions in ways that promote equity and readiness for diverse life opportunities—whether college or career—resides in the hands of countless stakeholders. For the sake of a future hoped for but not yet seen, policymakers, educational researchers, school actors, and District actors must take action and leave no collegian behind.

APPENDIX A
Supplementary Tables

Demographic Profile of Malcolm X High School Participants

Pseudonym	Grade/Title	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
School Actor 1	Math	Asian	Male
School Actor 2	Career and Technical Education	White	Male
School Actor 3	PE	Latino	Male
School Actor 4	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 5	English & Language Arts	White	Female
School Actor 6	Counselor	Black	Female
School Actor 7	Counselor	White	Female
School Actor 8	Counselor	Asian	Female
School Actor 9	Counselor	Latino	Female
School Actor 10	Counselor	Black	Female
School Actor 11	Math	Filipino	Male
School Actor 12	English & Language Arts	White	Female
School Actor 13	Career and Technical Education	Mixed	Male
School Actor 14	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 15	English & Language Arts	Black	Male
School Actor 16	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 17	Math	White	Male
School Actor 18	Math	--	Male
School Actor 19	Science	White/ Native American	Male
School Actor 20	Foreign Language	White	Female
School Actor 21	Science	White	Male
School Actor 22	PE	Asian	Male
School Actor 23	Math	African American	Female
School Actor 24	English & Language Arts	African American	Female
School Actor 25	Science	White	Male
School Actor 26	Math	White	Female
School Actor 27	Social Science	Hmong	Female
Student 1	Senior	Hmong	Male
Student 4	Senior	African American	Female
Student 2	Senior	African American	Male
Student 3	Senior	Hmong	Male

Demographic Profile of Southside High School Participants

Psuedonym	Department	Race/Ethnicity	Gender
School Actor 1	Administrator	Asian	Female
School Actor 2	Counselor	White	Female
School Actor 3	Counselor	Latina	Female
School Actor 4	Counselor	Latina	Female
School Actor 5	Foreign Language	Latino	Male
School Actor 6	English & Language Arts	White	Female
School Actor 7	Math	Indian	Male
School Actor 8	AVID	Latino	Male
School Actor 9	Special Education	White	Female
School Actor 10	English & Language Arts, Music, & Social Science	White	Female
School Actor 11	English & Language Arts	Asian	Male
School Actor 12	Math	Asian	Male
School Actor 13	Science	White	Male
School Actor 14	Title 1 Coordinator	White - Non Hispanic	Female
School Actor 15	English & Language Arts	Mixed/Other	Female
School Actor 16	Social Science	White - Non Hispanic	Female
School Actor 17	Foreign Language	Latina	Female
School Actor 18	Foreign Language	White	Female
School Actor 19	Math & English & Language Arts	Latino/White	Male
School Actor 20	Health	White	Female
School Actor 21	English & Language Arts & Elective Club	Hispanic/Pacific	Female
School Actor 22	Science	White	Male
School Actor 23	Science	White	Female
School Actor 24	English & Language Arts & Elective Club	White	Female
School Actor 25	Science	White	Male
School Actor 26	Foreign Language	Hispanic/Latino	Female
School Actor 27	Science	White	Female
School Actor 28	Math	White	Male
School Actor 29	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 30	Social Science	Hispanic	Male
School Actor 31	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 32	Social Science	Asian	Female
School Actor 33	Science	White	Male
School Actor 34	Social Science	Mexican	Male
School Actor 35	Math	White	Female
School Actor 36	Music	Indian	Male
School Actor 37	Math	White	Female
School Actor 38	English & Language Arts	White	Female
School Actor 39	Social Science	White	Male
School Actor 40	English & Language Arts & Science	White	Female
School Actor 41	Art	Hispanic	Male
School Actor 42	Foreign Language	Latino	Male
School Actor 43	Math	White	Male
School Actor 44	Math	Asian	Female
Student 1	Senior	White	Male
Student 2	Senior	Latino	Male
Student 3	Senior	Latina	Female
Student 4	Senior	Latino	Male

Survey Responses by Site

Site	Survey	N
Malcolm X High School	General Student	1,121
	Teacher	66
	Senior	--
Southside High School	General Student	1,560
	Teacher	91
	Senior	408

Mean Comparison of Scales and Race/Ethnicity

Perception Name	*Race and Ethnicity*							
	Not Reported	African American	Hispanic/Latino	Asian Pacific Islander	Native American	White	Other	Multiracial
	Mean							
Systems and Structures	43.125 (7.37)	45.32 (11.49)	44.82 (9.86)	45.43 (8.08)	45.28 (10.47)	43.83 (10.78)	41.74 (11.87)	43.84 (10.43)
General School Expectations	10.419 (2.83)	11.36 (3.05)	11.92 (2.77)	12.32 (2.06)	11.40 (2.50)	11.69 (2.80)	11.31 (2.92)	11.36 (2.75)
Student Know-How	14.25 (4.06)	14.50 (4.36)	14.29 (4.05)	13.74 (3.86)	13.27 (5.92)	14.21 (4.47)	13.32 (4.72)	14.10 (4.32)

N=991; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Academy Participation

College-Going Behaviors	Academy Participation	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	44.25	45.09
	(9.58)	(10.22)
General School Expectations	11.85	11.71
	(2.61)	(2.76)
Student Know-How	13.84	14.38
	(4.20)	(4.10)

N=965; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and AVID Participation

Perceptions Name	AVID Participation	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	44.39	47.97
	(9.96)	(9.02)
General School Expectations	11.79	11.80
	(2.68)	(2.78)
Student Know-How	14.00	15.40
	(4.15)	(3.83)

N=991; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Free/Reduced Price Meals

Perceptions Name	FRPM Status	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	43.69	45.34
	(9.42)	(10.22)
General School Expectations	11.52	11.93
	(2.61)	(2.70)
Student Know-How	13.59	14.26
	(4.06)	(4.23)

N=952; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken

Perception Name	Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken				
	0	1	2	3	4 or more
Systems and Structures	43.08	44.96	45.28	49.10	52.15
	(10.33)	(9.11)	(8.79)	(9.61)	(7.42)
General School Expectations	11.53	11.92	12.10	12.11	12.48
	(2.82)	(2.49)	(2.54)	(2.69)	(2.48)
Student Know-How	13.73	13.98	14.04	15.34	16.73
	(4.21)	(4.02)	(3.97)	(4.20)	(3.27)

N=982; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Grade Classification

Perception Name	Grade Classification			
	9^{th}	10^{th}	11^{th}	12^{th}
Systems and Structures	42.81	42.76	45.61	49.01
	(9.05)	(10.09)	(9.38)	(10.24)
General School Expectations	11.83	11.39	12.06	11.96
	(2.49)	(2.88)	(2.45)	(2.93)
Student Know-How	12.99	13.62	14.30	16.11
	(4.25)	(4.04)	(4.01)	(3.67)

N=984; All parameter estimates pooled from 5 imputed datasets; Standard Deviations appear in parentheses. SITE: MXHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Race/Ethnicity

Perception Name	*Race and Ethnicity*							
	Not Reported	African American	Hispanic/Latino	Asian Pacific Islander	Native American	White	Other	Multiracial
	Mean							
Systems and Structures	50.60 (7.33)	47.13 (10.16)	47.12 (9.31)	46.51 (9.35)	45.40 (9.61)	43.45 (9.53)	43.98 (9.88)	46.52 (10.49)
General School Expectations	13.40 (1.51)	12.85 (2.02)	12.17 (2.21)	12.28 (2.02)	12.60 (2.19)	11.80 (2.19)	12.60 (1.79)	12.13 (2.62)
Student Know-How	17.60 (2.88)	15.30 (4.11)	14.61 (3.80)	14.63 (3.81)	15.40 (3.76)	13.92 (3.71)	13.28 (3.79)	14.75 (3.98)

Note: N=1407; Sample size represents students that responded to the 2017 General Student Survey; Percentages rounded to nearest whole number. Site: SHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken

Perception Name	Number of AP/Honors Classes Taken				
	0	1	2	3	4 or more
Systems and Structures	45.33 (10.01)	48.11 (9.87)	48.35 (9.41)	49.80 (8.09)	49.38 (11.41)
General School Expectations	12.06 (2.59)	12.35 (2.50)	12.33 (2.26)	12.64 (2.00)	12.05 (3.10)
Student Know-How	14.19 (3.99)	15.03 (3.74)	15.29 (3.77)	15.34 (3.81)	14.86 (4.32)

Note: N=1399; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses. Site: SHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Grade Classification

Perception Name	Grade Classification			
	9th	10th	11th	12th
Systems and Structures	46.03	45.62	47.06	48.02
	(10.19)	(9.68)	(9.55)	(10.38)
General School Expectations	12.22	12.14	12.25	12.11
	(2.77)	(2.51)	(2.41)	(2.76)
Student Know-How	13.98	14.16	14.79	15.41
	(3.73)	(3.78)	(3.86)	(3.99)

Note: N=1407; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses. Site: SHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Academy Participation

College-Going Behaviors	Academy Participation	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	46.47	47.28
	(9.39)	(10.61)
General School Expectations	12.17	12.41
	(2.53)	(2.46)
Student Know-How	14.51	14.73
	(3.93)	(4.21)

Note: N=1316; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses. Site: SHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and AVID Participation

Perceptions Name	AVID Participation	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	45.79	51.05
	(9.84)	(9.49)
General School Expectations	12.15	12.37
	(2.55)	(2.39)
Student Know-How	14.29	16.02
	(3.95)	(3.69)

Note: N=1407; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses. Site: SHS

Mean Comparison of Scales and Free/Reduced Price Meals

Perceptions Name	FRPM Status	
	No	Yes
Systems and Structures	45.42	47.35
	(10.29)	(9.79)
General School Expectations	11.98	12.31
	(2.62)	(2.45)
Student Know-How	14.20	14.77
	(4.01)	(3.94)

Note: N=1387; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Standard deviations in parentheses. Site: SHS

Nonparametric Interitem Correlation Matrix of Controls and Scales

Variable Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1.Applied to College	1.00										
2. Hispanic/Latino(a)	0.009	1.00									
3. Systems and Support	.169**	0.008	1.00								
4. General School Expectations	0.078	0.018	.711**	1.00							
5. Family Expectations	.244**	0.002	.561**	.392**	1.00						
6. Female	.151**	0.091	0.032	0.026	0.069	1.00					
7. AVID Participant	.231**	.119*	.139*	-0.049	0.056	.137*	1.00				
8. PUENTE Participant	.126*	.114*	0.093	0.072	.189**	.126*	-.117*	1.00			
9. College-going Behaviors	.532**	0.007	.181**	0.057	.171**	.204**	.243**	.129*	1.00		
10. English as a Second Language	0.038	.237**	0	0.005	0.051	0.053	0.051	0.023	0.007	1.00	
11. Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch	0.019	.240**	0.06	0.003	0.107	0.04	.135*	0.081	0.05	.229**	1.00

Note: N=322; All parameter estimates are pooled from five iterations of imputed datasets; Test: Spearman's Rho. Site: SHS. Data Source: Senior Survey; ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCL – SCHOOL ACTORS

I. EXPECTATIONS

1. Take a look at the first block on student expectations. At the time you all submitted the grant application in 2014, you noted you were in **"Phase 2 or 3"** where some staff have high expectations for all students, there isn't a plan to address beliefs system wide and where discrepancies based on background are present.
    a. Having been in the grant for about 4 years now, from your perspective, has progress been made on this particular area?
    b. If so, what? If not, why do you think?

2. As an educator, what are your expectations for students regarding college readiness and matriculation?
    a. Would you say that the staff in your department shares these expectations?
    b. If not, elaborate on how you negotiate expectations with educators in your department.

3. How do you actualize your expectations for students in your daily efforts?
    a. What supports enable you to do so?
    b. What challenges prevent you from doing so?

1. From your perspective, what are counselors' and the leadership teams' expectations for students regarding college?
    a. If those expectations differ from yours, how do you engage with those individuals or groups to support students?

I. CULTURE

1. As an educator, how do you define school culture?

2. " ", how do you define a college-going culture?

3. Given your definition of each, would you characterize your school as having a college-going culture?

4. How have you, as an educator, contributed to the development of the school's culture?

APPENDIX C
DIRECT OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Location _____

Observer Name _____

Purpose of Observation _____

Date/Time of Observation _____

Time	Observations	Thoughts/Reflections

General Observations

Student Demographics (where applicable)

	African American	Asian or PI	Latino	Native American	White	Other
Male						
Female						

Evidence of *COLLEGE EXPECTATIONS* depicted on classroom walls and boards (bold all that apply)

- o Commercial decoration
- o Classroom rules/procedures/consequences
- o Standards addressed by the day's instructions
- o Varied and original student work/displays
- o College banners/standards/information
- o Displays reflective of the ethnic/gender demographic of the class
- o Teacher created displays

Classroom set up (bold all that apply)

- o Rows facing front of classroom
- o Clusters
- o Tables
- o A circle
- o Rows facing one another
- o Other: _____

Instructional tools and materials used (bold all that apply)

- o Text books
- o Computers
- o Calculators
- o Overhead
- o Chalkboard/whiteboard
- o TV/VCR
- o Manipulatives
- o Teacher created worksheets and guides
- o Commercially produced worksheets and guides
- o Culturally relevant course material
- o Other: _____

Lesson Structure (bold all that apply)

- Introduction (ties day's content with previous lessons)
- Guided practice or modeling activity
- "Real world" connections of instructional content or activity
- Homework assigned
- Opening activity to engage students
- Instructional activity (Number Observed _____)
- Closure activity – ticket out the door
- Culturally relevant instruction
- Other: _____

Student groupings (bold all that apply)

- Whole class activity
- Independent work
- Collaborate groups
- Working in pairs
- Differential treatment of students (i.e., student placed in groups by ability)
- Other: _____

APPENDIX D

Teacher Survey

Students at my school are expected to graduate from high school.	General School Expectations
Students at my school are being prepared to attend college.	
Students at my school are expected to attend college.	
Conversations about the educational options available to students after high school are ongoing and are initiated by teachers, counselors and other adults at the school.	Ethos of College-Going Culture
Messages about college as an attainable pathway are communicated visually (e.g. in posters or pennants) and verbally.	
Clear, visible statements in your school speak to the value and importance of continuing education beyond high school.	
I have high expectations of my students.	Personal Expectations
During my class, I consistently reinforce the importance of going to college.	
I expect that my students will to go to college.	
I advise my students about where to go to get information about college applications and deadlines.	Personal Actions
I advise my students on where to go to get information about scholarships.	
I advise my students about free or low-cost college visits the school offers.	
I advise my students on how to sign up for the PSAT, SAT, ACT.	
I advise my students on how to request college brochures and applications.	
I help my students fill out college applications.	
I help my students fill out financial aid forms.	
I help my students fill out scholarship applications.	
I advise my students about college choices.	
I connect my students with organizations that support their college goals.	
I help my students make sure that they are on track with their academic requirements to apply for college.	
I advise my students to talk to their counselor about their college plans.	
I advise my students to collect college information.	
My students expect to graduate from high school.	Perceptions of Students
My students try to learn as much as they can.	
It is important to my students that they understand their class work very well.	
My students are motivated to do well in school.	
My students are capable of doing well in school.	
My students expect to attend college.	
My students' families support their academic success.	Perceptions of Students' Family
My students' families expect them to graduate from high school.	
My students' families invest their time and attention in their child's academic success.	
My students' families are knowledgeable of the college-going process.	

General Student Survey

Students at Grant Union are expected to graduate from high school.	General School Expectations
Students at Grant Union are being prepared to attend college.	
Students at Grant Union are expected to attend college.	
I know where to go at my school to get information about college applications and deadlines.	Student Know How
I know where to go at my school to get information about scholarships.	
I know how to sign up for the PSAT, SAT, ACT.	
I know how to request college brochures and applications.	
My family expects me to graduate from high school.	Parental Expectations
My family expects me to attend college.	
My school offers free or low-cost college visits.	Systems and Structures
There is a college center on campus where I can go to learn more about colleges.	
There are college application materials available in my school.	
My school has sent me home with college information to share with my family.	
There are adults at my school who help students fill out college applications.	
There are adults at my school who help students fill out financial aid forms.	
There are adults at my school who help students fill out scholarship applications.	
There are adults at my school who advise students about college choices.	
There are adults who help students make sure that they are on track with their academic requirements to apply for college.	
There is a college counselor who I can go to for information about applying to college.	
My school offers fee waivers for SATs or other college-related fees.	
My school connects students with organizations that support our college goals.	

Senior Survey

Students at my school are expected to graduate from high school.	General School Expectations
Students at my school are being prepared to attend college.	
Students at my school are expected to attend college.	
I felt supported by my someone in my family who gave me materials, financial help, resources, and/or help in other ways while I was applying for college.	Family Expectations
I felt encouraged by my someone in my family who cared for me, gave me advice, listened to me, and/or emotionally nurtured me while I was applying for college.	
At least one of my family members thinks that I can get into college.	
My school provided me with resources to apply to the college of my choice.	Systems and Structures
My school gave me opportunities to apply to the college of my choice.	
Students at my school have access to college applications materials.	
My school offers free or low-cost college visits.	
My school offers fee waivers for SAT and other college-related fees.	
At my school, students are provided with the help to meet their needs so that they can be eligible for college.	
Teachers and counselors at my school help students fill out college applications.	
Teachers and counselors at my school help students fill out financial aid forms.	
Teachers and counselors at my school help students fill out scholarship applications.	
Teachers and counselors at my school advise students about their college choices.	

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