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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Understanding Alternative Education:  
A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences

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

in

Educational Leadership

by

Susan Glassett Farrelly

Committee in Charge:  
California State University of California San Marcos

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University of California, San Diego

Carolyn Hofstetter

2013

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Chair

University of California, San Diego  
California State University San Marcos

2013

## DEDICATION

In recognition of their dreams and ambitions, and with the profound hope that their education provides them a path forward, this research is dedicated to all past, present, and future students enrolled in alternative schools.

## EPIGRAPH

The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students violates the principal of equity at the heart of the American promise.

*Arne Duncan, Secretary of the Department of Education,  
Press Conference March 6, 2012*

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My friends and family allowed me to ignore them when I became immersed in the work for month after month, only occasionally asking when I might be finished, and always providing understanding and support. When I was working, my daughter Jillian showed patience and restraint, neither of which comes easy for her. The interest from my teaching colleagues provided strong motivation when it was needed. I am very grateful to the assistance from teachers and students, which was essential for this research. I also need to acknowledge the guidance I received from my cohort members every step of the way.

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- National Board Certified Teacher (Mathematics)
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- Design and implement Math, Science and Technology instruction for grades 6-12.
- Differentiate instruction based on individual student assessment
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- Monitor and guide accomplishment of requirements for returning to their residential districts or graduating from high school
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- Coordinate with counseling, probation and juvenile courts
- Communicate with parents and students regarding JCCS program and community resources
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- Performed as a Program Teacher and was a liaison and resource for administration, staff and community partners
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- Observed and coached other teachers
- Assisted other teachers with technology implementation
- Conducted workshops for teachers on the math section of the California High School Exit Exam
- Delivered regional educational seminars for parents in technology use and internet safety
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Granite Hills High School El Cajon, CA

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**Glassett, S. (2012).** *Caring is Not Enough: A Critical Systemic Review of Recent Research on Alternative Education.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, April 13-17, Vancouver, Canada.

**Glassett, S. (2012).** *Using Self-Determination Theory in Participant Selection for Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology for the Participant-Selection Variant of an Explanatory Sequential Design.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, April 13-17, Vancouver, Canada.

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A B2B e-commerce firm. Reported to the President, responsible for eWorkplace.com software engineering, quality assurance and on-line support, including training, installation, customization and documentation.

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Ball, S. (1989) Implementing CASE in Real-Time Environments. In Weber, J. S. (Ed), *Proceedings of STA 5 The Mind/Method Interface: Restoring the Balance* (pp. 107-120). Chicago, IL: Structured Techniques Association

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Glassett, S. (1999) Effective Resource Management, *Software Development Magazine*, 7(9) September 1999.  
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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Understanding Alternative Education:  
A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences

by

Susan Glassett Farrelly

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2013

California State University, San Marcos, 2013

Erika Daniels, Chair

Alternative schools operate today as a hidden, parallel educational system, providing a separate and often unequal education to many at-risk students, with little to no accountability. The number of alternative schools, and enrollment in alternative schools, is increasing, due in part to excessive use of zero tolerance policies. Students of color, those with low socioeconomic status, or those with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined and disenfranchised, many ending up in alternative schools. Some of these schools further alienate students and, unconsciously,

encourage deviant behavior. Many others are supportive places where students and adults develop positive relationships. However, even at these schools, teachers and administrators label students “at-risk”, and view them as deficient and incapable of rigorous academic studies. Students are eased along to graduation with generous credits and easy grades, making success after high school difficult at best.

Scaffolded by a theoretical framework constructed from critical theory, self-determination theory, and student voice, this research examined student experiences in alternative school, in an attempt to determine if their educational needs were being met, and identify any opportunities for improvement. A participant-selection variant of an explanatory mixed methodology case study was employed. The study documents, describes, and analyzes students enrolled in an alternative program and their educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school. The first phase used self-determination theory and extant data to describe students attending an alternative school. Cluster analysis was used to establish distinct groups of students. These groups provided a vehicle for maximal variation sampling of participants in the second phase, a narrative inquiry into lived student educational experiences. Narrative analysis produced student stories told in their own words, and heard in their own voice. An analysis of narratives produced four themes, with implications for educational practitioners, leaders, and researchers.

Alternative education students have stories that need to be told and, more importantly, need to be heard. This research captured and presented these stories, in an effort to make sense of how alternative schools affect the lived experiences of their

students. These stories should compel more research and catalyze changes in policy, procedures, and instruction for alternative education.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Disparities in school performance among various groups of students were first dubbed the “achievement gap” in 1963 (Walker, 1963), and have since been a central concern of educational leaders, practitioners and researchers. The achievement gap is not just a gap in standardized test scores. It is a graduation rate gap, a discipline gap, a data gap - an “opportunity gap” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Alternative schools<sup>1</sup> play a pivotal role in all of these gaps. Serving students labeled “at-risk” of educational failure, alternative programs operate “with a relatively high degree of autonomy” (Lehr & Lange, 2003, p. 60). Alternative schools for years have been ignored and shielded from accountability by the education establishment. This lack of accountability manifests itself in a variety of ways that appear to be detrimental for traditionally underserved students.

Although there are many alternative schools serving at-risk students well, examples of struggling alternative schools also abound. In Los Angeles, the County Office of Education, its Superintendent, and the administrators responsible for an alternative school are being sued by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) for failure to provide students with an adequate education (“Landmark federal”, 2010). Given that only 13 % of the students graduate from Philadelphia’s disciplinary schools, questions about the effectiveness of the district’s alternative schools have

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<sup>1</sup> The terms alternative school and alternative program, used interchangeably throughout the literature reviewed, are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

recently been raised (Zaleska, 2010). In Denver, 13 of the school district's 15 alternative schools failed to receive a passing district rating (Mitchell, 2009). At the same time, the number of alternative schools in the United States has risen dramatically over the last decade (Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003). These findings suggest a need for research into the successes – real and perceived – of alternative schools

### **Statement of the Problem**

The educational system has increasingly been using alternative schools to warehouse underperforming students considered disruptive to traditional schools (Cox, 1999; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). The most vulnerable students, the most disadvantaged students, and the students most in need of academic intervention can be found in alternative schools (Arcia, 2006; Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004). Enrollment in alternative schools is increasing (Carver & Lewis, 2010), due in part to seemingly excessive use of zero tolerance policies (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force [APA], 2008; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Traditionally underserved students are disproportionately suspended and expelled (APA, 2008; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), which results in pushing them out of their traditional schools and into alternative programs. Disenfranchised students are thereby marginalized.

Although no standard definition for alternative education exists, there is consensus that alternative schools serve students labeled “at-risk” for academic failure (Lehr et al., 2009). Evidence shows current practices in many alternative programs do

not result in improved academic achievement (Atkins, Bullis, & Todis, 2005; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Warren, 2007). Nationally, and in most states, alternative schools are not held to the same accountability standards as traditional schools (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2009; Martin & Brand, 2006).

Overall, there is little research on alternative schools. A few seemingly effective alternative programs have been identified and studied. Although these studies did not measure student academic achievement, they did identify program characteristics positively correlated with student achievement in traditional schools (Atkins et al., 2005; Quinn, Poinier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). In contrast, Warren (2007) stated, “research on effective alternative programs in California or other states is almost nonexistent” (p. 14). This sentiment is echoed by Atkins, Bullis, and Todis (2005), Foley and Pang (2006), Lehr and Lang (2003), Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009), and Quinn, Poinier, Faller, Gable, and Tonelson (2006), who call for further research in all aspects of alternative education, emphasizing the need for research on student outcomes<sup>2</sup>.

The small amount of research published thus far has primarily used quantitative survey data conducted in cross case, statewide, or national studies. These surveys have pursued convergence in definitions, policies, and trends. The remaining

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<sup>2</sup>Student outcomes are the achieved results or actual consequences; academic and occupational, as well as the intellectual, personal, civic development, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students attain as a result of education (Center For Assessment And Research Studies, 2003).

qualitative studies have been primarily descriptive studies focused on policy, procedures, curriculum, and general environment, in an effort to identify components that either contribute to or hinder effective alternative education. A need exists in the literature for an in-depth study of student outcomes that not only obtains quantitative results, but also explains the results in more detail from the student perspective. Several studies of alternative schools have rightly emphasized the need to incorporate student voice into the research (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009), since to date, we know little about how well alternative schools are meeting the needs of the students who attend them. Do alternative schools reengage their students? How does learning, academic achievement, and personal development in alternative programs compare to the outcomes at traditional schools? Is alternative education really an alternative or just a place to hide and hold disenfranchised students? Alternative program students are the best source for answers to these questions. This research sought to authorize the student perspective, by making meaning of their experiences and telling their stories. If we want answers to the above questions, we need to listen to students “with the following convictions: that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 359).

School and district leaders in alternative education need the product of this research to help them implement recognized, effective practices that will increase student learning. Policy makers need to understand the systemic result of placing

students in alternative education. Student outcomes need to be identified, measured, and described, in order to inform practitioners, policy makers and researchers throughout the educational establishment.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to examine student experiences in alternative schools in an attempt to determine if their educational needs were being met and if opportunities for improvement existed. Little is known about student outcomes in alternative schools (Atkins et al., 2005; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2009). Many alternative programs successfully establish a caring and supportive environment that has a positive effect on student self-esteem and sense of belonging. However, most of these schools fail to provide a rigorous academic curriculum (Fairbrother, 2008; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004). To break the cycle of educational inequality, alternative schools need to offer an educational experience equal to or better than found in their traditional counterparts, because their average student body often lives in poverty or other challenging socioeconomic circumstances.

This study documented, described and analyzed student achievement and experiences in an alternative school. The two-phased, explanatory, mixed methods case study gathered and analyzed quantitative data from a sample of the students, and then examined the reasons behind those results by interviewing a subset of the participants. Emphasis was placed on the second qualitative phase, a narrative inquiry into student educational experiences, because this study wanted to understand the lived experiences of students in alternative schools. The first phase made use of

student surveys and records to identify and purposefully select participants for the second phase.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching questions that guided this study were: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? The specific questions this research explored in order to answer the larger questions were:

- 1) Who attends alternative school?
- 2) What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school?

Understanding students who attend alternative schools, how they came to be enrolled in alternative schools, and their experiences during their tenure, helped answer the question of whether or not students are provided a real, equitable educational alternative. Additionally, listening to the experiences of students, and gaining their perspective, provided essential input to solving the second global question.

### **Researcher Epistemology**

This study identified, documented, and analyzed student lived experiences at an alternative school. Very little research has been conducted in this area. By necessity, this was an exploration. The researcher constructed knowledge about student achievement and experiences based on quantitative and qualitative data, the research process, and participation as a teacher at the alternative school studied. It is important to acknowledge the epistemological lens used to conduct this research, critical constructivism (Kincheloe, 2005a). This epistemology understands the value

of uniting logic and emotion in the process of knowing and producing knowledge, believes that it is impossible to separate the knower and the known, acknowledges the need to construct practical knowledge for critical social action, accepts complexity, and believes that knowledge is socially constructed, with power playing an exaggerated role (Kincheloe, 2005a).

The author of this study is a research bricoleur, described in Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as a researcher who “uses the aesthetic and material tools of his or her craft deploying whatever strategies, methods, and empirical materials are at hand” (p.4). Kincheloe (2005b) expanded this concept to include an active view of research methodology. Bricoleurs use their understanding of a research context to adjust research methods and interpretations, becoming “methodological negotiators” who maintain elasticity, allowing circumstances to shape the methods used. The strength of this way of thinking is that it allows the researcher to deepen understandings about the lived experiences of a previously silenced population. Critical constructivists value knowledge and ways of meaning making traditionally dismissed by the dominant culture.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Critical theory.** Critical theory is not only part of the researcher’s epistemology, but it also provided the foundation for this study. Alternative education literature suggests a need for studies highlighting student experiences conducted with a critical theory or social justice perspective (Brown, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2008). “Critical theory is, at its center, an effort to join empirical investigation, the task of interpretation, and a critique of this reality”

(McLaren & Girarelli, 1995, p. 2). Critical theory holds that researchers should question norms, look deep for answers, and embrace social, cultural, political, economic, and psychological complexity.

**Student voice.** If critical theory is the foundation, then student voice is this study's *raison d'être*. Through their stories, students provided intensity, depth and a unique perspective. Students are capable of expressing their views about their learning and school experience (Groves, 2010; Kruse, 2000; Storz, 2008). The voices of students are the starting point for critical pedagogy (Giroux, 1989; McLaren, 1994) and essential to successful school reform efforts (Fielding, 2001; Fullan, 2007; Lee, 1999; Mitra & Gross, 2009).

Student perspectives are important to understanding how attending alternative school affects student academic, social and emotional wellbeing (Brown, 2007; de la Ossa, 2005). The voices of students help researchers appreciate how school contexts shape student behavior, and contribute or discourage persistence in school (de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Students identify factors that contribute to or hinder motivational classroom experiences, thereby influencing their academic achievement (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002).

**Self-determination theory.** Most students arrive at alternative schools disengaged from the educational system. These students are often described as unmotivated, implying that they bring very little energy or commitment to their academic activities. Understanding student self regulation and motivation are therefore central to the analysis of student outcomes in alternative education. This

study uses self-determination theory (SDT) to provide a scaffold for that understanding (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

SDT posits that humans have three basic psychological needs, whose satisfaction is critical to well being, health, and personal growth. These needs are innate and universal. Human beings strive consciously or unconsciously toward situations that support the satisfaction of these needs. The three needs are autonomy – feeling ownership for choices and behaviors, competence- feeling effective, and relatedness – feeling connected to others. To the extent an environment satisfies these needs, it supports engagement in and mastery of skills and concepts within it (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Substantial research has linked basic needs satisfaction to student classroom behavior, academic achievement, cognitive learning, and persistence in school (Brokelman, 2009; Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Ryzin, Gravely, & Roseth, 2007). This is true across gender, age, and cultures (Chirkov, 2009; Guay, Ratelle, & Chanal, 2008; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009; Sheldon, Abad, & Omolie, 2009; Shih, 2008). Support of these basic psychological needs has been correlated to intrinsic motivation, which in turn has been associated with student engagement and academic achievement (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Ryzin et al., 2007). SDT places particular emphasis on support for autonomy. Research shows that specific teacher and administrator behaviors either support or hinder student perceived autonomy satisfaction and intrinsic motivation (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Teacher support for student autonomy has been correlated to the autonomy support they receive (Roth, Assor, Kanat-

Maymon, & Kaplan, 2007), providing an avenue for improving the instructional environment.

## **Methods**

A two-phased, explanatory, mixed methodology case study documented, described, and analyzed the outcomes for students attending a community school operated by a County Office of Education (COE) in the southwest United States. The study was a participant-selection variant of an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The first phase was a quantitative exploration of student characteristics, basic psychological needs satisfaction, goals and academic achievement, using extant data and student surveys. The purpose of this phase was to establish distinct, generalizable student profiles that served as descriptors of the types of students who typically inhabit alternative schools. The second phase was a narrative inquiry into student lived educational experiences before, during and after attending alternative school. This phase described accomplishments, consequences, intellectual and personal development, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students acquired while attending an alternative program. The researcher also identified structural and cultural aspects that contributed to or hindered academic achievement in the second phase.

In the first phase, students currently enrolled at the alternative school completed a survey with a modified Basic Physiological Needs Scale (BPNS), and open-ended questions designed by the researcher. Student demographic data, school records, and survey results were used to establish a typology of student characteristics. Statistically distinct groups were created using cluster analysis. The researcher

established profiles for each group. These groups formed the basis for purposeful selection of individuals in the second phase, narrative inquiry.

Students were selected from each group for the second phase. The researcher interviewed the selected participants multiple times over a six-month period. These interviews captured each student's lived educational experience. The student biographical narratives provided detailed information that explained and expanded on the results of the first phase. Integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies provided a more comprehensive picture of the educational experiences of students attending alternative school than either methodology could on its own.

### **Significance of the Study**

The current public education system is a meritocracy, rewarding conformance to cultural norms aligned with white middle class culture (García & Guerra, 2004; Kelly, 1993). Students of color, with low socio economic status (SES), or with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined and disenfranchised for their failure to conform (APA, 2008; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Many of these students either drop out or are sent to alternative schools (Arcia, 2006). Literature tells us that the worst of the alternative schools further alienate students and, unconsciously, encourage deviant behavior (Kim, 2011; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Smith, 2003). The best are warm, supportive places where students and adults develop positive relationships (Darling & Price, 2004; de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; May & Copeland, 1998; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008). However, research indicates that even at the best alternative schools, students, teachers, and administrators fail to challenge their

students academically. Students labeled “at-risk” are viewed as deficient, and incapable of rigorous academic studies. They are often shepherded along to graduation with generous credits and easily earned grades, making success in post secondary education or a challenging career difficult at best (Atkins et al., 2005; Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Washington, 2008). This process perpetuates an unjust educational system, and hides significant components of the achievement gap. The cycle of inequity can only be broken if alternative schools are, or become, true alternatives, offering students an equivalent education compared to what they would receive in a traditional school.

Research is essential to shedding more light on the role alternative schools play in perpetuating the opportunity gap, and finding policy and practices that improve student outcomes in these schools. Virtually all aspects of alternative education need research, especially research concerning student outcomes (Atkins et al., 2005; Brown, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006; Warren, 2007). This study is a step toward filling this large and important void.

Alternative schools are analogous to the educational system’s closet. It is time to open the closet door, turn on the lights, and examine the contents, in this case, alternative school students. Alternative education students have stories that need to be told and, more importantly, need to be heard, by educational administrators, policy makers, and practitioners. This study captured and presented these stories, in an effort to make sense of how alternative schools affect the lived experiences of their students.

It is hoped that these stories will compel more research and catalyze changes in policy, procedures, and instruction for alternative schools.

In the first phase, this study generated valuable insight into how alternative programs could differentiate placement and instruction for students at the time they enroll. Alternative education students are not one homogenous group. This investigation identified factors, instruments, and procedures that facilitated student-oriented analysis and aggregation into distinct groups. The purpose of this process was to assist in participant selection for the interview portion of the study. The results also have relevance to practice. Effective alternative schools individualize instruction (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). A better understanding of student profiles, and the use of an instrument to help predict student motivational needs, will benefit instructional placement and planning.

Additionally, this study contributed valuable methods for research. In part or as a whole, the methodology developed is generalizable and useful to future studies. The use of person-centered statistical analysis to profile participants and facilitate maximal variation purposeful sampling for a narrative inquiry is an uncommon, if not unique, approach, and will benefit future research studies.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

*Alternative education.* There is no consensus on a standard definition of alternative education (Aron, 2006). The most recent definition from the U. S. Department of Education is:

Alternative schools and programs are designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. The students who attend alternative schools and programs are typically at risk of educational failure (as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school). (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 1)

*Autonomy.* The perceived origin or source of one's own behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 8).

*Autonomous motivation.* Performing an action because it is interesting, exciting, or pleasurable in its own right (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

*Competence.* Feeling effective in one's ongoing interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7).

*Controlled motivation.* Performing an action for the sake of obtaining rewards or avoiding punishments, including the approval or disapproval of significant others (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

*Explanatory sequential design.* A two-phased, mixed method design, in which the researchers starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by collection and analysis of qualitative data to help explain the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 411).

*Mixed methods data analysis.* A set of analytic techniques applied to both the quantitative and the qualitative data, as well as to the mixing of the two forms of data concurrently and sequentially in a single project or multi-phase project (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 413).

*Participation-selection variant.* A variant of the explanatory design in which the researcher places priority on the second qualitative phase, but uses initial quantitative results to identify and purposefully select the best participants for qualitative study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 414).

*Relatedness.* Feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belonging both with other individuals and with one's community (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 7).

*Self-Determination Theory (SDT).* An approach to human motivation and personality that uses traditional empirical methods, while employing an organismic metatheory that highlights the importance of humans' innate psychological needs (competence, relatedness and autonomy) that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration. The satisfaction of these needs is essential for constructive social development and personal well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68).

*Student Outcomes.* The achieved results or the actual consequences of what a student has demonstrated or accomplished; may be academic and occupational, as well as the intellectual, personal, civic development, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students attain as a result of education (Center For Assessment And Research Studies, 2003).

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The intent of this literature review is to discuss the primary bodies of existing research that both informed and framed this research. It discusses first research concerning alternative education, and synthesizes the aspects of each body that relate to this study. Although no standard definition for alternative education exists, in recent years the definition intentionally narrowed to schools serving students labeled “at-risk” of academic failure (Aron, 2006). A large and growing percentage of alternative schools are places where students are sent, rather than places students or their parents choose to attend (Carver & Lewis, 2010). This literature review focuses on “no choice” public alternative programs in the United States. Current research is synthesized to (a) define alternative schools, (b) describe the students who attend them, (c) document the systemic role played by suspensions and expulsions, (d) examine student outcomes, and (e) identify characteristics of effective alternative programs.

Following the literature review on alternative schools is a review of the three theoretical frameworks that inform this research; critical theory, self-determination theory (SDT) and student voice. Literature is used to define each framework, show the interrelation of theoretical concepts, and describe how this research was situated within these concepts.

## **Alternative Education**

### **Description of Alternative Schools**

**Definition.** There is no consensus on a standard definition of alternative education (Aron, 2006). The most recent definition from the U. S. Department of Education is:

Alternative schools and programs are designed to address the needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular schools. The students who attend alternative schools and programs are typically at risk of educational failure (as indicated by poor grades, truancy, disruptive behavior, pregnancy, or similar factors associated with temporary or permanent withdrawal from school). (Carver & Lewis, 2010, p. 1)

This definition is consistent with most recent literature, which finds alternative schools primarily serve students labeled “at-risk” (Lehr et al., 2009). The vast majority of alternative programs are for ninth through twelfth grade. Nevertheless, there are a growing number of schools serving grades sixth through eighth as well (Carver & Lewis, 2010). The exact definition of what constitutes or qualifies as an alternative school varies from state to state, as do the policies regulating and funding them (Lehr et al., 2009).

**History.** Modern public alternative schools in the U.S. trace their roots back to John Dewey’s progressive movement in the 1930s and 1940s, and the Civil Rights Moment in the early 1960s. During the 1960s, alternative programs flourished as a response to a public school system thought, by some, to be restrictive and limited culturally. In the mid 1960s, President Johnson declared a war on poverty, and introduced the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Having a goal of

equity, and nurtured by federal funding, alternative schools aimed at serving disadvantaged and minority students sprang up quickly (Kelly, 1993; Young, 1990).

Most of the public alternative schools created in the 1960s and 1970s were “Open Schools”, emphasizing a non-competitive, student-centered approach. These were schools of choice. Parents, students, teachers and community members choose to attend and support them. Many current public Magnet Schools, Multicultural Schools, and Charter Schools embrace Open School principles (Lange & Sletten, 2002). In fact, in her seminal article, Raywid (1994) claimed many current school reform efforts come from the early alternative schools. She cited downsizing, student and teacher choice, theme based schools, schools operating as a community, and authentic assessment as examples.

Despite their innovations, many alternative “Open Schools” did not survive. The 1980’s ushered in a new era of political and social conservatism for the United States, altering the role of alternative education (Young, 1990). Education’s focus changed from experimental to a “back to basics” approach. The National Council of Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk* in 1983. This report decried the state of education in the U.S., and recommended an immediate focus on excellence in education. The definition of alternative education began to narrow and focus on remediation and dropout prevention.

The 1990s also saw an increase of violence in public schools attributed to an increase in overall youth violence, gangs, and the prevalence of firearms (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). More students with delinquent and disruptive behaviors began to attend alternative programs. Beginning with the Gun-

Free Schools Act of 1994 (1994), federal and state laws were passed mandating long suspensions or expulsions for offending students. School districts, county offices of education and states were encouraged to place these students into alternative education programs (U.S. Department Of Education, 1996). The number of alternative schools grew, and continues to grow. Most of the growth is attributed to the rising number of students suspended or expelled from their traditional schools (Lehr et al., 2009).

**Purpose.** Researchers, educators, and policy makers debate the current rationale for alternative schools (Quinn et al., 2006). The federal government declares alternative education's purpose is serving students who are "at-risk" of academic failure (Carver & Lewis, 2010). Dropout prevention, therefore, is a high priority for alternative programs. However, some researchers and educators have questioned whether simply keeping students in school until they receive a diploma or equivalent is a sufficient objective. According to Kim and Taylor (2008), this educational track does not meet the benchmark of a fair and equal education, as established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002). Researchers have continued to ask whether alternative schools exist to serve their enrolled students, or to serve the traditional schools by warehousing disruptive students (Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr et al., 2009).

Raywid (1994) questioned whether alternative education assisted students, schools, or school districts. She identified three types of alternative programs. Type I are schools of choice, usually popular schools with programmatic themes. These schools resemble Magnet Schools, and often emphasize a curricular focus or instructional strategy. Type II schools receive students via suspension, expulsion or

the courts. Often labeled “Last-Chance” or “Second-Chance”, students are “sentenced” to Type II schools. These schools focus heavily on behavior modification. Type III schools have a remedial focus, helping students catch up, and thus enabling a return to their regular school. Traditional schools refer students to Type III programs for academic, social, and emotional help. Most alternative schools, as defined by Carver and Lewis (2010), are a mix of Type II and Type III.

This mix is evident in the California continuation schools studied by Kelly (1993). She identified four institutional roles played by continuation schools. First, they served as a “safety net”, serving students not succeeding in their traditional high school. Second, they were a “safety valve”, operating to serve the comprehensive high school by removing students who were disruptive. The third role, according to Kelly, was to “cool-out” students. This, essentially, was a systematic way to allow the student to fail. Students were sent to a less academically rigorous school. Attendance and specific behaviors were valued over academic performance. Either students met behavior and attendance requirements, or they slowly left the system through a phased probationary process. Finally, Kelly observed, many alternative schools serve as a place to warehouse unproductive teachers and administrators.

**Common characteristics of alternative programs.** There is general agreement on some common characteristics of alternative programs. Alternative schools are smaller, have lower student to teacher ratios, and have a greater degree of autonomy compared to their traditional counterparts (Lehr et al., 2009). Students attend alternative schools for shorter durations, and some degree of vocational training exists in most alternative programs (Carver & Lewis, 2010).

## Students at Alternative Schools

**“At-risk” population.** Students attending alternative schools, by current definition, are at risk for academic failure. Educators debate what constitutes academic success, but define academic failure as not earning a high school diploma or its equivalent (e.g., a GED). The term “at-risk”, however, is not used consistently. It sometimes describes characteristics of students associated with higher dropout rates, such as low socioeconomic status (SES), specific minorities, homelessness, living in a violent neighborhood, having a disability or a low parental education level. Other times the label reflects a student’s educational experiences. Examples include low academic achievement, suspension, or poor school attendance. NCLB’s (2002) definition combines both aspects:

The term ‘at-risk’, when used with respect to a child, youth, or student, means a school aged individual who is at-risk of academic failure, has a drug or alcohol problem, is pregnant or is a parent, has come into contact with the juvenile justice system in the past, is at least 1 year behind the expected grade level for the age of the individual, has limited English proficiency, is a gang member, has dropped out of school in the past, or has a high absenteeism rate at school. (NCLB, 2002, § 1432)

Researchers have found alternative schools serve students who have been suspended or expelled, are in the juvenile justice system, are pregnant or parenting, or are homeless (Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003).

The majority of students enrolled in the studied alternative programs were students of color<sup>3</sup>, with a low SES. Several studies found these students were

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<sup>3</sup> Students of color refers to students who are of African American, Latino or Native American descent

disproportionately represented when compared to the demographics of their community or regular school (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Loutzenheiser, 2002; May & Copeland, 1998; Smith, 2003). Also disproportionately represented were students with disabilities (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Smith, 2003).

In their nationwide Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) of students in alternative schools, Grunbaum et al. (2000) found significantly more high risk behaviors compared to students attending traditional schools. Alternative school students are significantly more likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, use marijuana, use cocaine, or carry a weapon. They are also more likely to participate in physical fights, attempt suicide, drive under the influence, and have sex with multiple partners. These findings are consistent with smaller studies reviewed by Lange and Sletten (2002), and conducted by Escobar-Chavez, Tortolero, Markham, Kelder, and Kapadia (2002).

**Motivation challenges.** Labeling students “at-risk” can be counterproductive. It marks students as failing at a “normal” school. Students are viewed as deficient and unsuccessful, and a focus is placed on their needs or failings, rather than on the failings of the educational system (Loutzenheiser, 2002). Many students arrive at alternative schools disengaged from their education. Often thought of as defiant, students may simply not want to conform to society’s definition of success (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). When Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) studied reluctant learners at an alternative school, they concluded this disengagement is due in part to a lack of

connection between student interests and what they are taught. They conjectured motivation would increase if the curriculum matched student interests.

Students at alternative schools have a more external locus of control compared to students attending traditional schools. Alternative education students tend to believe their achievements or failures are determined by external factors. They feel they are being controlled, as opposed to being in control, of their destiny (Miller, Fitch, & Marshall, 2003). Students in alternative schools are also more likely to use avoidant coping strategies such as drinking, using drugs and staying away from home. Avoidance strategies are associated with less effective coping and negative outcomes, which also contribute to decreased motivation in academic achievement. In comparison, active strategies, such as seeking assistance, are associated with higher motivation and persistence (May & Copeland, 1998).

**Self image and feelings about school.** Research findings indicate alternative schools are often perceived as repositories for struggling, delinquent, and disruptive students (Brown, 2007; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr and Lange, 2003; Muñoz, 2004; Warren, 2007). The ethnographic study of McNulty and Roseboro (2009) found students at an alternative school had a “spoiled identity.” Expelled from their traditional school, students arrive at the alternative school having been labeled deviant. Staff and other students encourage rather than eliminate antisocial behaviors, thus reinforcing this stigma. Smith (2003) documented similar findings. Both studies concluded the authority, discipline and rules administrators and teachers used to control the students created resentment and further disenfranchisement, resulting in disruptive, defiant behaviors (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Smith, 2003).

Feelings about school were consistent with the findings on self-esteem. The studies that found students acquired a negative self-image also found the students had negative feelings about school. Students in these studies expressed dislike for the school, the education system and specific administrators and teachers (Brown, 2007; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Smith, 2003).

In contrast, findings in other studies showed students attending alternative schools to have positive views both of school and themselves. Five studies reported students attending alternative programs improved their self-esteem (Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Yearwood & Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007). Compared to similar students in traditional schools, many students in alternative schools feel more positive about school and have better relationships with their teachers (Darling & Price, 2004; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr and Lange, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). Warren (2007), however, hypothesized students may like their schools because the schools have reduced hours of attendance and require less effort. Likewise, Kelly (1993) observed some students feel they have “tricked the system”, attending a school that expects less but still awards them a diploma.

### **Systemic Role Played by Suspensions and Expulsions**

**Suspended and expelled students in alternative schools.** Lehr et al. (2009) synthesized data gathered from a 48 state review of legislation and policy documents, and a national survey about alternative schools completed by state Departments of Education. Their findings noted a growing use of alternative schools to warehouse students who have been suspended, expelled, or removed from their regular schools

for disruptive behavior. Suspensions and expulsions have increased dramatically since the 1970s (Arcia, 2006; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006). Some authors attribute this growth to the misuse and extension of zero-tolerance policies. Initially intended to deter students from bringing firearms on campus, these policies are now used by some schools and districts to abandon responsibility for students with behavioral problems (APA, 2008; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

**Achievement gap concealed.** The increased use of suspensions and expulsions to push students into alternative schools, often results in the concealment of a growing portion of the achievement gap. Ironically, the intensified focus on groups of students who have traditionally been underserved by the educational system may result in an increasing number of them being removed from mainstream education into what Kelly (1993) called a “hidden world” (p. 2). Students of African American, Latino, or Native American descent are disproportionately suspended or expelled (APA, 2008; Kewalramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Wallace et al., 2008). Moreover, students with disabilities are more likely to be suspended or expelled (APA, 2008; Brown, 2007; Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), as are students with low SES (Kelly, 1993; Skiba & Rausch, 2006) or with low academic achievement (Arcia, 2006). NCLB (2002) was enacted to spotlight and encourage achievement for all of these categories of disadvantaged students. However, implementation of NCLB has focused on traditional schools, virtually ignoring alternative programs (Brown, 2007; Muñoz, 2004; Warren, 2007). Alternative schools represent a large and growing loophole in

the accountability system, which encourages investigation into whether alternative schools are truly an alternative path to success.

**Effects on suspended and expelled students.** For students, suspensions and expulsions start a negative spiral of lost instructional time, disengagement, resentment, deviant behavior, and lower academic achievement (Arcia, 2006; Brown, 2007; Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Kelly, 1993; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). Brown's (2007) study revealed most suspensions or expulsions resulted in significant lost instructional time, due in part to a chasm that exists between the traditional school and the alternative school. For the 37 students surveyed, the lost instructional time conservatively totaled over 6 years. Students felt suspensions and expulsions were arbitrarily issued, happened more often than necessary, and were frequently an unreasonable punishment for the offense. The more suspensions or expulsions received, the more the students perceived adults at their schools did not care about them (Brown, 2007). These disciplinary procedures are intended as punishment, not as interventions to help the students. This retribution contributes to the pervasive lack of motivation found among students in alternative programs. Through this process, alternative schools are stigmatized, and seen as "jails" rather than as places to assist and educate (Brown, 2007; Lehr et al., 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009).

Suspensions and expulsions have a negative effect on student achievement and increase the likelihood of further disciplinary actions (Arcia, 2006). In their study of middle school students in Texas, Kraveich, Slate, Tejeda-Delgado, and Kelsey (2010) found the severity of disciplinary actions correlated with lack of student achievement.

Arcia's (2006) longitudinal study in a large urban school district found frequent suspensions significantly lowered academic achievement and increased dropout rate.

### **Student Outcomes at Alternative Schools**

**Lack of research.** Very little research has been done on student outcomes at alternative schools. Student achievement data for alternative schools is lacking (Atkins et al., 2005; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr et al., 2009; Quinn et al., 2006). Additionally, data on employment, enrollment in post secondary education, community involvement, and graduation needs to be collected (Foley and Pang, 2006). Researchers also assert the need for longitudinal studies (Atkins et al., 2005; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Yearwood & Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007). Consequently, there is very little empirical data available to inform the discussion of student outcomes.

**Continuation in school.** One desired student outcome for alternative schools is to keep students in school until they earn a high school diploma or equivalent. In 2007, the US Census Bureau found the medium annual income of people between 18 and 65 years of age who had the equivalent of a high school diploma was \$40,000. The corresponding figure was \$18,000 for those who did not graduate from high school. People without high school diplomas are far more likely to be unemployed, in worse health, or incarcerated, compared to individuals with high school diplomas (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009). The number of students dropping out of high school is a national concern, particularly when examining the rates for male students of color. The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University reports a national graduation rate of 68%. However, boys of African American, Latino or Native American descent have graduation rates of 43%, 48%, and 47% respectively (Aron, 2006).

The differences in definitions, practices, policies, and reporting between states make national numbers for alternative school enrollment difficult to determine. In California, analysts' best guess is 10% to 15% of high school students enroll in alternative schools each year. An unknown "large" number of these students are dropped from the state's data reporting systems. Warren (2007) speculates most of these students are unreported dropouts. This is alarming, given more than 25% of the reported high school dropouts in California leave while attending alternative schools (Warren, 2007).

Students can consciously drop out or simply get lost in the system. There is a data void between referring traditional schools and receiving alternative schools. Researchers have established a need to plan, track, and execute transitions into and out of alternative programs. Currently an unknown number of students simply slip through the cracks, and effectively are removed from school (Brown, 2007; Warren, 2007; Yearwood & Abdum-Muhyamin, 2007).

**Academic achievement.** In many alternative schools, there is a disconnect between creating a caring, supportive environment and delivering rigorous, purposeful academic instruction. Fairbrother (2008) studied three "at-risk programs" in a southwest city school district. She found students appreciated the smaller, caring environment and were able to accumulate credits toward graduation more quickly than in their traditional school. However, the courses were not academically demanding, and lacked rigor. Essentially, the students and staff accepted a quicker, easier route to graduation, at the expense of not challenging the students intellectually or academically. This finding is the most prevalent theme among the articles included in

this review, which are representative of the existing research (Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004; Nichols & Steffy, 1999; Washington, 2008).

**Delinquency and recidivism.** The research on the effect of alternative schools on delinquency and recidivism is limited, and findings are contradictory. Some findings indicate the alternative schools created an environment where negative tension between a student's culture and the school's values encourage deviant behavior (McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Smith, 2003). In contrast, other studies indicated delinquency and recidivism were reduced as a result of attendance at alternative schools. Researchers speculate the reduction in delinquency occurs because the schools maintain strong connections to both the community and the juvenile justice system (Atkins et al., 2005; Yearwood & Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007). An experimental study by Cox (1999) found no effect of alternative school attendance on delinquency. The contradictory findings could be due to differences in the sites studied or, as Cox suggests, research methodologies.

### **Effective Alternative Schools**

**Definition of "effective".** There are alternative schools perceived by their students, communities, local, and state educational systems to be effective. In large part, whether an alternative program is deemed effective depends on how "effective" is defined. Effectiveness in alternative schools is measured, on the low end, by the ability of an alternative school to provide a place for disruptive students separate from their traditional school, thereby keeping them off the streets and out of sight. At the other end of spectrum, success is defined as providing students who have been

disenfranchised from the educational system with a high-quality education equivalent to what is received in the traditional environment. No common definition currently exists.

**High expectations & personalized instruction.** Quinn et al. (2006) studied the climate at three alternative schools recommended by an expert panel. The selected schools “had available data to show their effectiveness” (p. 13). The article did not describe the data or the school selection criteria. Nevertheless, they found these successful schools created “personalized environments” where students felt respected by staff. High expectations of social and academic success were also maintained at these schools.

Other research supports the findings of Quinn and associates (2006). Maintaining high expectations is important to academic achievement at alternative schools (Aron, 2006; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Washington, 2008). Instruction tailored to individual students is also an attribute of successful alternative schools (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). Personalized learning is highlighted in the reports by Aron (2006) and Lange and Sletten (2002) as an essential component of alternative education.

**Family involvement & community connections.** Family support has been established as a positive factor in student persistence in alternative schools (May & Copeland, 1998). Brown and Beckett (2007) present a compelling case study of families working with a school district to create a year-round K-8 alternative school serving at-risk students in Cincinnati. The school fostered an intimate school-home

connection, resulting in a 94.5% attendance rate, with 89% of the students successfully returning to their regular schools. Supportive parents, grandparents, other adult family members or advocates were also identified as being important to student achievement in alternative programs (Brown & Beckett, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Yearwood and Abdum-Muhaymin, 2007).

A majority of alternative schools collaborate with health and human services agencies, and even more coordinate with the juvenile justice system (Foley & Pang, 2006). A few states (12%) have enacted legislation mandating some form of social services connection to their alternative programs (Lehr et al., 2009). Successful alternative schools establish community connections (Aron, 2006; Atkins et al., 2005; Brown & Beckett, 2007; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Warren, 2007).

**Caring is essential.** Students in alternative schools perceived by stakeholders to be effective do not display the antisocial attitudes and behavioral problems often associated with students who are referred to alternative programs (Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006). These schools are successful in creating environments which change student attitudes about themselves, and about school. Establishing a caring and supportive environment nurtures the positive adult/student relationships essential for alternative programs to be successful (Darling & Price, 2004; de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; May & Copeland, 1998; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008).

Establishing a community or family atmosphere increases a student's sense of belonging, and is linked to effective alternative programs (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Swaminathan, 2004).

**Caring is not enough – academic rigor vs. dropout prevention.** Despite the positive changes in students, Kim and Taylor (2008) concluded the “exemplary” alternative school they studied did not provide effective instruction to students. Using critical theory, Kim and Taylor found the school contributed to an inequity in the educational system, despite a caring, nurturing environment. Students expressed positive feelings about the school and had good relationships with their teachers. However, Kim and Taylor concluded the school’s intentional focus on vocational education, lack of college counseling and refusal to implement a rigorous curriculum deprived students of the opportunity to realize their stated career goals, many of which require a college education.

Kim and Taylor’s (2008) findings mirror earlier findings by Muñoz (2004) and Atkins et al., (2005). Muñoz conducted an ethnographic case study of an alternative school in Los Angeles. The school served at-risk female students, the majority of whom were “Chicana”. As in Kim and Taylor’s study, Muñoz established that students had positive feelings about their school, and he conceded that learning did occur. Nevertheless, he found the school’s ideology and methodology of remediation deprived the students of an education that prepared them for success in life outside of school. Very few students graduated, returned to their traditional school, or continued their education. Muñoz reported that “academic standards were lacking [and] pedagogical consistency was absent” (p.14), replaced by an ideology founded on the belief that students should feel “good” about themselves.

This theme repeats itself in many of the articles. Despite the supportive environments staffed with caring adults, researchers often noted the lack of rigorous

academic standards as a weakness in the alternative schools studied (Atkins et al., 2005; Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Washington, 2008). A remedial curriculum, often with a vocational focus, contributes to a socially unjust educational system. The system preserves a dominant class, by applying culturally biased norms, resulting in the disproportional disenfranchisement of students in traditionally underserved populations. These students are subsequently offered a less challenging education, which hinders their chance for success in higher education, or enriching employment (de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Washington, 2008).

### **Summary of alternative education literature review**

Alternative education serves students labeled “at-risk” of educational failure. These students may be either disruptive, frequently truant, involved with the juvenile justice system, judged to be failing academically, pregnant, or already parents. They are disproportionately students of African American, Latino, or Native American descent, students with low SES, and students with disabilities or special needs.

The number of alternative schools is growing fast, as is the number of enrolled students. Much of this growth is the result of increases in suspensions and expulsions, pushing students out of their traditional schools and into alternative schools. The majority of these schools are site-managed programs, administered with a large degree of autonomy. Currently, there is little to no accountability for student outcomes in alternative schools (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr et al., 2009; Martin & Brand, 2006).

Alternative programs are typically small, with low student to teacher ratios. Many offer flexible hours and individualized study. Most offer remedial education

courses, and some form of vocational education. The more effective alternative schools have strong connections to the community, providing students and their families with links to both health and human services and communication with the juvenile justice system.

Dropout prevention or recovery is the primary purpose of alternative schools. Although alternative schools are often filled with caring, dedicated teachers and administrators, many also serve as places to warehouse problem students and ineffective teachers (Kelly 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lang, 2003; Warner, 2007). Increasingly, alternative schools are created not to serve the students enrolled in them, but for the benefit of the traditional schools, which use alternative programs as holding pens for their disruptive and underperforming students (Brown, 2007; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr et al., 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Warren, 2007).

Through the overuse of suspensions and expulsions, disadvantaged youth are marginalized. Kelly (1993) identified this trend over 17 years ago, when she documented how a disproportionate number of students were “excluded from mainstream schools for violating white, middle-class norms” (p. 32). Zero-tolerance policies and an increased focus on accountability in traditional schools lend rationale to exclusionary discipline policies which result in a rising number of students being disenfranchised (Brown, 2007; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Lehr et al., 2009; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004).

Just how effective alternative schools are is currently unknown. The lack of accountability measures, and substantial voids in student data systems, make it

difficult to track student outcomes. The effect alternative programs have on delinquency and recidivism is also ambiguous.

Many alternative schools appear to establish a caring and supportive environment, which has a positive effect on student self-esteem and sense of belonging. However, most such schools fail to provide a rigorous academic curriculum. Studies find no measureable increase in academic achievement after students return to their traditional environment (Cox, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002).

Because the existing research on the effectiveness of alternative schools is ambiguous and/or inconclusive in a number of areas, it is also important to situate an understanding of this type of education within a theoretical framework. Three theories guided the development of this study, and framed the findings.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

#### **Critical Theory**

The two overarching research questions for this study are: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them and how can alternative schools better serve their students? These questions were generated from a critical review of recent research on alternative schools and are grounded in critical theory. They, therefore, require a study scaffolded by critical theory. Examining alternative schools with the goal of determining if they provide a “real” alternative necessitates an investigation focused on collecting and analyzing data with an interpretive framework that accepts complexity, conceives knowledge as being socially constructed, and plays particular attention to the role power plays. When examined from the student’s viewpoint, is it a “real alternative” that provides students

with a fair and equitable education, as opposed to a “reasonable solution” when viewed through the lens of a dominant white culture? Asking how alternative schools can improve invokes action. It embraces critical theory’s goals of critique and transformation, restitution, and emancipation (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Critical theory is a large, ever changing, meta or über-theory. This theory is difficult to define because, as Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) explain, there are many critical theories, these theories are continually evolving, and by its nature, critical theory refutes the existence of one specific way of seeing and knowing. However, Kincheloe and McLaren provide a description of a contemporary critical theory, after it incorporated the “post-discourses” (e.g., postmodern, critical feminism, post-structuralism). Their description delineates “an elastic, ever-evolving set of concepts” (p. 307) that form the basis of critical theory: (a) *critical enlightenment* – factors (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality) establish group privilege and a societal tendency to protect the status quo; (b) *critical emancipation* – the same factors prevent individuals and groups from influencing decisions that significantly affect their lives; (c) *rejection of economic determinism* –there are multiple forms of power, including, but not limited to, economic, race, gender and sexuality; (d) *critique of instrumental or technical rationality* – rationalistic researchers often over emphasize issues of technique, procedure and methods at the expense of research’s humanistic purpose; (e) *immanence* – building and working toward a vision of what can be; (f) *hegemony* – the ways dominant power creates and maintains inequalities; (g) *ideology* – the cultural forms, meanings and rituals that reinforce adherence to the status quo; (h) *discursive power* – the rules that govern social constructions validating some and rendering

others irrelevant; (i) *interpretation* – all research is interpretation, there is no privileged methodology or theory that can claim the production of authoritative knowledge; (j) *cultural pedagogy* – the ways cultural agents produce dominance, and the normalization of that dominance. While all these concepts support this research, four are particularly pertinent: critical enlightenment, critical emancipation, immanence, and interpretation. Each of these is briefly discussed and applied to this research.

**Critical enlightenment.** One hallmark of critical theory is that it analyzes competing power interests between groups in society. These groups are formed around factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality. Because privileged groups have an interest in protecting their advantage, and therefore work to maintain the status quo, research grounded in critical theory works to discover and understand these societal dynamics, identifying winners, losers, and processes that create and maintain inequities (Kincheloe, Steinberg, Rodriguez, & Chennault, 1998).

Groups of students that are traditionally disadvantaged are disproportionately represented in alternative programs (Kelly, 1993; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Smith, 2003). Similar to Kim and Taylor (2008), this study used critical theory to help researchers and educators understand what is actually happening in alternative education from a student perspective, versus what could be happening. This research documented students' educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school. It questions who currently benefits from current practices surrounding alternative education. Listening to individual student voices that until now have been largely unheard, and analyzing their experiences provided new data. This research imparted a

unique perspective about how students come to be placed in alternative schools, and the implications of that placement. Analyzing the data identified the processes that either created and maintained an educational inequality, or sought to develop educational experiences more equitable for groups of students.

**Critical emancipation.** Critical research attempts to identify societal processes that prevent individuals and groups from influencing decisions that significantly affect their own lives. The intent is to provide voice and agency to the silenced. This part of critical theory is emphasized in student voice research, which seeks to provide opportunities for students to be actively involved in determining their own learning and school experience (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007).

Research indicates that effective alternative schools find ways to listen to their students (Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001) and involve students in the decision making processes (Brown, 2007; Kim & Taylor, 2008; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Quinn et al., 2006). Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) concluded listening to students could help identify how to motivate reluctant learners. This research used student voice to capture student experiences, with the goal of encouraging educators and researchers to embrace their complexity, be involved with meaning-making, and come to understand the student lived experience. In this way, research provides necessary agency as readers vicariously encounter alternative education through the voices of students. The goal is to increase the influence of student voice in the educational system's decision-making processes, in an effort to balance between schools who focus on students' needs and schools that emphasize

academic rigor. Both are described earlier in this chapter, and each seems to exist independent of the other.

**Immanence.** Critical theory is concerned with building and working toward a vision of what can be. Freire's (1970/2000) work is often cited as an example of immanence, and used to support educational decisions. Critical research aspires to not only heighten awareness of social injustices, but also motivate self-empowerment and bring about social transformation. Freire termed this *conscientization*, which he defined as "learning to perceive social political and economic contradictions and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p.35). Critical reflection and action are thus two separate but tightly interwoven efforts. All of the concepts of critical theory inform this research. Immanence, however, is emphasized. This research listened to students, in order to understand better, how all students might be empowered with an equitable and appropriate education.

Following Kim's (2011) lead, this study asks readers to (re)imagine alternative education and create a revolution aligned with Dewey's (1915/2010) ideas about education. "In this educational revolution, students who have been 'tossed' around from school to school can be 'the' center around which all the appliances of alternative education are revolved" (Kim, 2011, p. 93).

**Interpretation.** Critical researchers maintain that all research is interpretation. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), there is no single correct methodology or theory that produces absolute knowledge. No perfect interpretation exists because all interpretation is socially constructed and unique to the research context. This study interpreted both quantitative and qualitative data. It made meaning of student stories,

while looking for similarities and differences across the stories, hoping for a deeper, more descriptive explanation of the statistical conclusions. The methodology for this study required iterative interpretations of an evolving data set.

This research intended not only to contribute to the existing knowledge base in education, but also to improve how students are served by alternative education. Critical theory supports an interpretation from stakeholders traditionally marginalized. This study looked to the individual perspectives of students, to answer the research questions. When addressing improvements in alternative education it asked how the system could adapt to serve the students better, as opposed to the traditional approach that asks how the students can adapt to the system. In the world of alternative education this work is essential, because “when young people in the United States are increasingly subject to forces that commodify them, criminalize them, and deem them unworthy of receiving a critical and laudable education, it bodes very ill for the nation as a whole” (Giroux, 2009, p. 145).

### **Self-Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2000) aligns with the primary tenets of critical theory in that “SDT is substantively focused on human liberation and enhancement, as well as on the association between our inherent tendencies toward active growth and realization of potentials and ambient social, economic, and cultural supports and obstructions” (Ryan & Niemiec, 2009, p. 264). Critical theory focuses on the collective whole, while SDT focuses on the individual’s beliefs, experiences, and decisions. SDT assumes individuals internalize cultural values and ideologies that shape their meanings, perceptions and experience, which in turn determines behavior.

These assumptions are consistent with the critical theory concepts of enlightenment, emancipation, and hegemony and are an appropriate frame for this research because of its focus on understanding the lived experiences of often-marginalized individuals.

Central to SDT is the concept that all humans actively develop a unified sense of self. Individuals naturally strive to grow. They search for challenges and discover new perspectives (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Naturally curious, people assimilate knowledge, customs, and values from their surroundings. Educators can tap into and encourage these innate tendencies and create active learners, or they can introduce controls that often result in disengagement (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). SDT is a macro-theory of motivation and development that researchers have applied to education for more than two decades in order to understand how aspects of school environments contribute to or hinder individual student achievement.

**Basic psychological needs.** SDT posits that human beings have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfaction of the basic psychological needs is a critical determinant of well-being. These needs are innate, not acquired, and are found in all individuals, regardless of age and culture. SDT further suggests that whether or not humans are conscious of these needs, they strive to satisfy them and, when given a choice, will gravitate toward environments that provide them (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

**Autonomy.** Autonomy refers to being the source of one's own decisions and behavior. When the need for autonomy is satisfied, individuals feel they are acting in a way consistent with their values and interest, even when outside influences are present. Autonomy is often erroneously thought of as synonymous with independence

and thus in opposition to structure. However, a person can autonomously act on requested behaviors if the requests are consistent with the individual's values and beliefs. It is equally possible for someone to rely on others for opinions or directions and still not satisfy their need for autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Research has linked students' perceived autonomy satisfaction to academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009; Jang et al., 2009; Miserandino, 1996) and well-being (Gillison, Standage, & Skevington, 2008; Ryzin et al., 2007; Sheldon et al., 2009). Frequently students end up in alternative schools because their innate need for autonomy conflicts with schools' embedded need for control.

**Competence.** The need for competence encourages people to seek experiences that are aligned with their capabilities. Competence refers to feeling effective and experiencing opportunities to exercise one's capabilities. Competence is not attained through acquiring skills and knowledge, but rather a feeling of confidence that one's skills are a reasonable match for the challenges of the task at hand. Growing competence satisfaction drives people to practice. Capabilities are attained and improved through practice (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In educational settings, student perceived competence has been associated with academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009; Jang et al., 2009; Miserandino, 1996), well-being (Sheldon et al., 2009) and persistence (Lavigne, Vallerand, & Miquelon, 2007)

**Relatedness.** Relatedness is the feeling of being connected to others. It includes both being cared for and caring for others. In alternative education research, relatedness is referred to as a "sense of belonging" (Poyrazli et al., 2008; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). It is both caring as experienced individually, and in a community.

Relatedness is not connected with status or position but rather with feeling a sense of security, being in relationships with others, and experiencing empathy in a range of instances. It is concerned with being both accepted by others and accepting of others (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Students' perceived relatedness satisfaction has been correlated with well-being (Gillison et al., 2008; Ryzin et al., 2007; Sheldon et al., 2009) , academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009) and more satisfying learning experiences (Jang et al., 2009).

Students whose need for relatedness is satisfied are more likely to internalize and accept the values of those they feel connected to and environments they experience a sense of belonging with (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). They are therefore more likely to exhibit autonomous motivation that, as is discussed later in this chapter, is correlated to student achievement. In alternative programs perceived to be effective, increases in a students' sense of belonging are reported (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Swaminathan, 2004). As documented earlier in this chapter, there is a consensus among researchers that establishing a caring and supportive environment is an essential attribute of successful alternative schools (Darling & Price, 2004; de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; May & Copeland, 1998; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008). Effective alternative schools appear to support students' need for relatedness better than their traditional school counterparts do.

**Motivation.** SDT believes humans naturally seek challenges and experiences that they integrate into themselves. They intentionally take actions to achieve goals, which is a definition of motivation, and a significant contributor to student

achievement. Human motivation, the reason why individuals engage in activities, is divided into three types: *intrinsic motivation*, *extrinsic motivation*, and *amotivation*. These motivation types, including several types of extrinsic motivation, form a continuum of self-determination.

***Intrinsic motivation.*** Intrinsic motivation is the most self-determined, and refers to active engagement in activities that one finds interesting, therefore deriving pleasure and satisfaction from participation. Intrinsically motivated people participate in a task because they receive benefit directly from the experience. They do not require external rewards or penalties to encourage involvement. Internal motivation does require support (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002).

***External motivation.*** External motivation is directly related to a separate outcome. This can be positive and rewarding or negative and punishing. Even though all external motivation shares an outside incentive, rather than inherent satisfaction in the activity, the external motivation continuum identifies four types of regulation, ranging in level of self-determination; *integrated*, *identified*, *introjected*, and *external* (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2002). The integrated and identified regulation types of extrinsic motivation have high self-determination, and when combined with intrinsic motivation they form a composite referred to as *autonomous motivation* (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Introjected and external regulation types of external motivation are referred as *controlled motivation*.

**Amotivation.** The state with the least amount of self-determination<sup>4</sup> is amotivation, lacking intention to act at all. Amotivation leads to either inaction or passive action, where individuals simply go through the motions with no regard for the activity or its outcomes. Amotivation generally results from a lack of perceived competence (Bandura, 1977; Deci, 1975), not valuing the activity or its outcome (Ryan, 1995) or not expecting it to yield the desired results (Seligman, 1975).

**Autonomous motivation and education.** Autonomous motivation has been positively linked to student academic achievement (Flink, Boggiano, Main, Barrett, & Katz, 1992; Guay, Ratelle, Roy, & Litalien, 2010; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004), positive cognitive outcomes such as retention and depth of learning (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004) and persistence (Hardre & Reeve, 2003; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Reeve (2002) explains it:

Two premises central to the theory are that (a) different types of motivation exist (viz., autonomous and controlled), and (b) some types of motivation (viz., those that are autonomous) are associated with more positive educational and developmental benefits than are other types (viz., those that are controlled) (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelleteir, & Ryan, 1991). Instead of arguing that motivation *per se* is the key resource that allows students to thrive in educational settings, research on self-determination theory shows that students benefit specifically from autonomous motivations. (p. 185)

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<sup>4</sup> At this end of the scale self-determination is so minimal it is generally referred to as nonself-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Autonomous motivation and well-being are not directly related to environment supports, but rather related to satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which correlates with social supports or barriers. According to Ryan and Deci (2002), evidence that directly relates autonomy and competence to autonomous motivation is “considerably more plentiful” (p. 14) than evidence that directly connects relatedness. Relatedness appears to play a more distal role. Student perceived autonomy and competence satisfaction directly mediate autonomous motivation (Jang et al., 2009; Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2003, 2005). Students who perceive their teachers to be supportive of autonomy, competence, and relatedness have greater levels of perceived needs satisfaction (Sheldon et al., 2009; Standage et al., 2005) and autonomous motivation (Arnone, Reynolds, & Marshall, 2009). Reeve (1998, 2006) has identified teacher autonomy supportive behaviors, and showed that teachers can learn to be autonomy supporting. As this research critically examined student experiences in alternative education, attributes that support or inhibit autonomy were identified and provided clues to improving how these students are served.

### **Student Voice**

Since research indicates that autonomy and feelings of control are essential to a desire to achieve, understanding what the students themselves think about their school experiences is the final appropriate frame for this study. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) assured “to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child” (p. 168). There has been a growing effort worldwide to listen to student voice in schools. These efforts have focused on research, school reform, and

student engagement. Robinson and Taylor (2007) define the four values informing these efforts as: (1) communication as dialogue, (2) participation and democratic inclusivity, (3) recognition of unequal power relations, and (4) the possibility for change and transformation. All of these are consistent with critical theory. Although these concepts coexist with student voice research, they are discussed separately to organize a review of the literature and to relate the concepts to this study.

**Communication as dialogue.** Fullan (1991/2007) and Kozol (1991) were two of the first in North America to draw attention to the need for student voice in education and educational reform. In the United States, Kozol noted that “we had not been listening much to children in these recent years of ‘summit conferences’ on education...The voices of children, frankly, had been missing from the whole discussion” (p. 5). Weis and Fine (1993) also included “a set of essays in which the voices of children and adolescents who have been expelled from the centers of their schools and the centers of our culture are invited to speak” (p.2). Meanwhile in Canada, Fullan asked: “What would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion matters?” (p.170) and Levin (1994) would argue that reform efforts should involve students in the establishment of goals and learning methods. In the United Kingdom, Rudduck, Chaplain, and Wallace (1996) also called for student involvement in school improvement discussions. All authors stressed the communication must be a dialogue in which students are actively listened to.

Beginning in the mid 1990s, the term student voice started to be associated with a shift in educational research. This shift placed emphasis on conducting research *with* students as opposed to *on* students (Cook-Sather, 2007). It transformed

into a dialogue in which all participants contributed to and learned from each other.

Early evidence of this can be found in a special issue of the journal *Theory Into Practice* (Volume 34, Issue 2, Spring 1995) published on the theme of “Learning From Student Voices”. In her introduction, Oldfather (1995) explained:

Learning from student voices is not simply a matter of letting students raise their hands to offer ideas in class discussion or asking their opinions through a survey. Learning from student voices—in the fullest sense—requires major shifts on the part of teachers, students, and researchers in relationships and in ways of thinking and feeling about the issues of knowledge, language, power, and self. (p. 87)

Making the connection between student voice research and critical theory is essential if educational research is to make a difference in the quality of student experience and achievement. Critical emancipation is about giving voice and agency to marginalized individuals (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In student voice research, dialoging with students gives voice to these educational stakeholders who, despite the United Nations’ resolution, are not always allowed a say in their learning.

The communication aspect of student voice is described differently by different researchers, but is always a two-way process or dialogue. Rudduck (2007) referred to it as consultation but described it as an active participation. Lodge (2005) felt student voice had the most impact in school improvement programs when it is dialogic, occurring with students who are actively involved in the school community, and for enhancing human development in the community. Both Rudduck (2007) and Lodge (2005) view dialogue as a meaning-making conversation that requires participation and active listening from both participants. Lodge differentiates dialogue from debate, the latter being centered on confrontation. This view is consistent with

Freire (1970/2000), who believed that dialogue must involve mutual respect and people working with each other as opposed to one person acting on another.

Examples of alternative school research where researchers and students have engaged in this kind of dialogue include Kelly (1993) and Kim (2011), both of whom highlight systemic issues of inequality employing narrative inquiry and student voice. Using a similar approach, this research built on their work with the intent of learning how to increase student achievement through improving the quality of their school experiences.

**Participation and democratic inclusivity.** Providing students with agency is another benefit associated with the elicitation of student voice. According to Thiessen and Cook-Sather (2007), student voice initiatives “strive to elicit and respond to student perspectives on their educational experiences....and to give students greater agency in researching educational issues and context” (p.579). Lincoln (1995) observes that one “major contribution” critical theory provides to student voice research is a focus on assisting students to examine their lives and recognize patterns identifying structures of racism, classism, and sexism. They come to understand that these arrangements can undermine their sense of self-worth. Studies have shown students very capable of recognizing, analyzing, and communicating about inequalities in their educational environment (Lee, 1999; Pritchard, Morrow, & Marshall, 2005; Storz, 2008).

It is important in student voice research to think carefully about which students are engaged in dialogue. Authenticity and inclusivity are essential in student voice work (Rudduck & Fielding, 2006). Critical research must always be concerned with

hegemony. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) and Giroux (1989) argue that schools need to listen to a range of voices, not just those most likely to say the things schools want to hear. In research in which just a few participants are selected, it is important to guarantee a broad range of voices is included. This is precisely why the study designed a methodology using SDT to ensure maximal variation sampling.

Informed by critical theory, student voice insists that educators do more than just ask students what they think. It requires us to think critically about student thoughts and perceptions, and then act thoughtfully and purposefully on the findings (Cook-Sather, 2002). When researchers dialogue with students considered “at-risk” they can uncover structural impediments that usually go unnoticed (Kroeger et al., 2004; Lee, 1999). It is hoped that by dialoging with students in a narrative inquiry, this study will discover both supports, which can be strengthened and equitably distributed, and barriers, which can be removed, to successful student outcomes.

**Recognition of unequal power relations.** The concept of *respect* features prominently in student voice work. Levin (1994) pointed out that “If we take seriously the idea that students are people, we must respect their ideas, opinions and desires (p.97). Furthermore, students want and need respect in school (Levin, 1994; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). If students feel respected within their school, they have a greater sense of belonging, and are less likely to disengage from learning or school in general (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). In fact, Mitra (2004) documents that student voice work contributes to the development of students who participate in it, by supporting the growth of agency, belonging, and competence. It is worth noting that although they are defined and measured differently, these three constructs show a

strong similarity to the three basic psychological needs of SDT- autonomy, competency, and relatedness.

As with critical theory, student voice work recognizes that power inhabits all social processes. Groups differ in their access to institutional structures and communication. Inherent in student voice is a challenge to structures and processes that maintain these power imbalances, thereby seeking equality of voice in public education (Fielding, 2004; Rudduck, 2007; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Cook-Sather, 2006). Studies have identified a lack of student voice as contributing to disengagement in alternative school (Kim & Taylor, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Washington, 2008) and dropping out (Smyth, 2007) because decisions about structure and content are made independent of what the students actually want, need and think.

**Possibility for change and transformation.** Student voice means not only actively listening to students, but also providing students with “the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). Immanence – building and working toward what should be – is an essential part of student voice (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2004; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Rudduck, 2007; Smyth, 2007). This takes on different forms in student voice work. Teachers who enter into dialogues with students are able to understand how students learn most effectively, and make changes to their teaching practice (Kroeger et al., 2004; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Students have sometimes served as co-researchers, as with Garcia, Kilgore, Rodriguez, and Thomas (1995), to examine the use of student

voice itself. Fielding and Bragg (2003) documented student led research which produced school improvements.

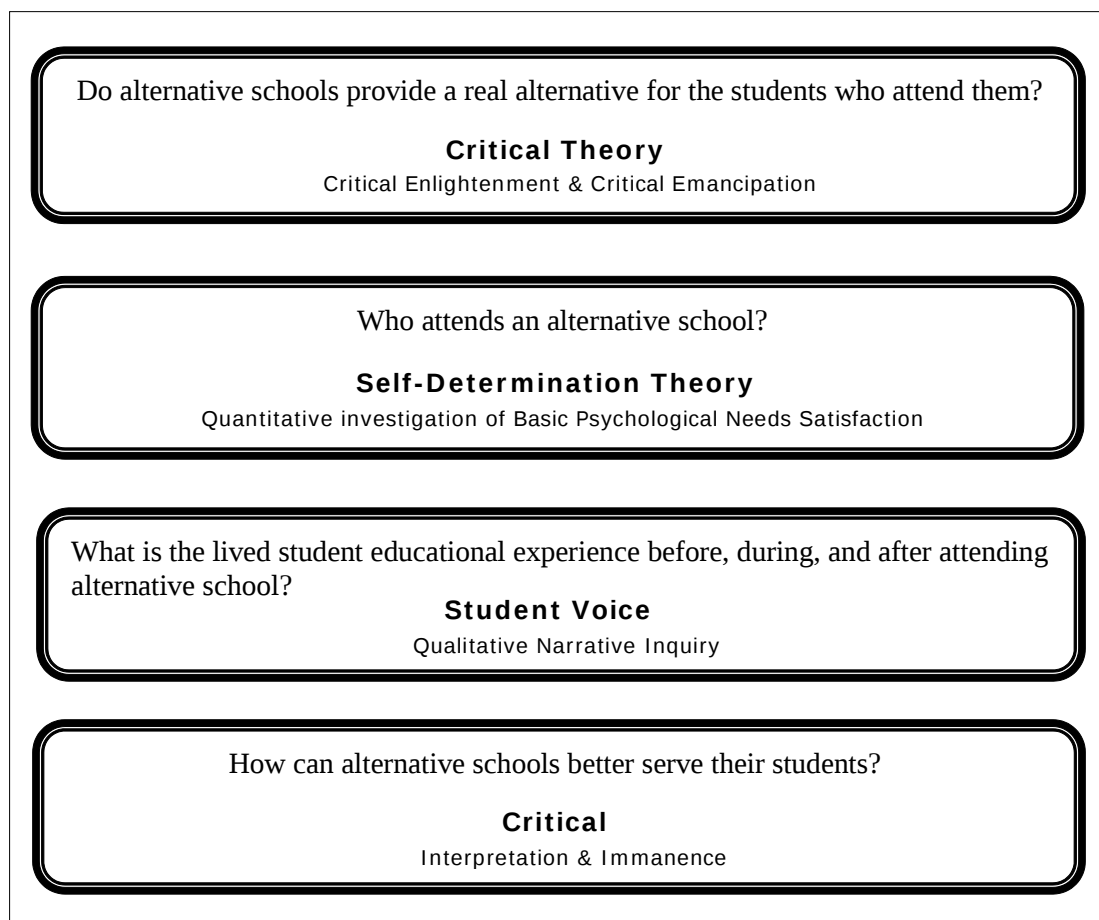
Student voice efforts have been centered in school reform. Democracy requires change, but education have proven very effective at resisting it (Cook-Sather, 2006; Rudduck, 2007). Reform efforts worldwide have proven impotent. Smyth (2007) uses student voice research to understand and thereby improve student experiences in Australia, with the hope of increasing engagement and reducing the number of dropouts. As he expresses the hope that student voice research can address what reform efforts to date have been unable to, he states:

It is becoming very clear from the widespread current attempts worldwide to impose reforms on schools from the outside (most notably muscular forms of accountability and zero tolerance) that this way is not working. Far from fixing the problem it seems likely that such reforms have become part of the problem” (p.647)

In general, researchers who privilege the use of student voice, like those who engage with critical theory, are committed to taking action, to changing the educational culture and practices by dismantling much of the current structures, listening to a diverse set of perspectives, and affording students the opportunity to actively shape their learning (Cook-Sather, 2006; Oldfather, 1995; Rudduck, 2007). “The four underpinning values of student voice work [communication as dialogue, participation and democratic inclusivity, recognition of unequal power relations, and the possibility for change and transformation] are each potentially significant in enabling school improvement through enhancing social justice” (Robinson & Taylor, 2007, p. 15).

## Summary of Theoretical Framework Review

Figure 2.1 illustrates the intersection of the research questions, theoretical frameworks and methods used in this study. Critical theory informed the umbrella questions: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? Although interrelated, the two specific research questions are each associated with a theoretical framework, supporting methodology, and specific methods.



*Figure 2.1* Research scaffold composed of research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methods.

Critical theory provides the lens through which the data collection and analysis is conducted. Enlightenment requires that, during the data collection and analysis, the researcher look to identify processes that are creating or maintaining inequalities. How do the students come to be in an alternative school? What happens when they get there? Emancipation asks the researcher to recognize how agency and voice might be provided to those who are traditionally silenced both during the study and in the educational system. Do students have a say in their education? Can they freely express their views? Hegemony cautions the researcher to examine language, process, and procedures for ways they convey acceptance of the status quo. Is the label “at-risk” contributing to an unjust system, or helping marginalized individuals acquire beneficial interventions? Research is interpretation. Bringing the right tools to each job with transparency is the challenge. Always questioning, analyzing, iterating, and recording are how the researcher rises to that challenge. Finally, immanence is the goal. The findings of this study must result in action.

The next chapter describes the methodology for this study in detail. The framework for this methodology includes both self-determination theory (SDT) and student voice. This study used SDT in three ways. First, the classification of participants in the first phase used SDT, which facilitated a maximal variation sampling strategy. Second, SDT provided this research with a mechanism for understanding an individual student’s motivation and well-being. Finally, by examining autonomy support, SDT provided a way of identifying opportunities for improvement. Student voice provided both a framework for collecting rich data about

student experiences and a reason for the research, giving voice to a group that has been too long silenced.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In the first chapter, the critical need for research on alternative education was established. The need to document, describe, and analyze student outcomes in alternative programs was highlighted. The second chapter reviewed literature on alternative schools. Research has established that the most vulnerable students attend alternative schools. Questions about how students come to be enrolled in alternative schools, and the instructional programs at these schools, have raised social justice concerns. Also in the second chapter, literature concerning critical theory, self-determination theory, and student voice was reviewed, and a theoretical framework for this research was established. This chapter describes the research design methodology used to explore student educational experiences before, during, and after attending alternative school.

#### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This study documented, described, and analyzed student experiences at an alternative school. The two-phased, explanatory, mixed methods case study gathered and analyzed quantitative data from a sample of the students about their basic psychological needs satisfaction, and then elaborated on the results by interviewing a subset of the participants. Emphasis was placed on the second qualitative phase, a narrative inquiry into student educational experiences, which was designed, in part, to explore the reasons behind the quantitative results.

The overarching questions that guided this study were: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative

schools better serve their students? The specific questions this research explored in order to address the larger questions are:

- 1) Who attends alternative school?
  - a) What are the descriptive statistics?
  - b) What are their goals?
  - c) What are their perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction?
  - d) How might students be associated into homogenous groups, which, once described, can help educational leaders in alternative schools design and assign effective instructional environments?
- 2) What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school?
  - a) What are student outcomes from attending alternative school?
  - b) What factors (structural and cultural) support or challenge academic achievement and persistence in school?

The first phase, described in the next section, answered the first set of specific questions. The results of the first phase informed the second phase, and provided a mechanism for participant selection, a contribution into the subsequent data collection process, and support for the final findings.

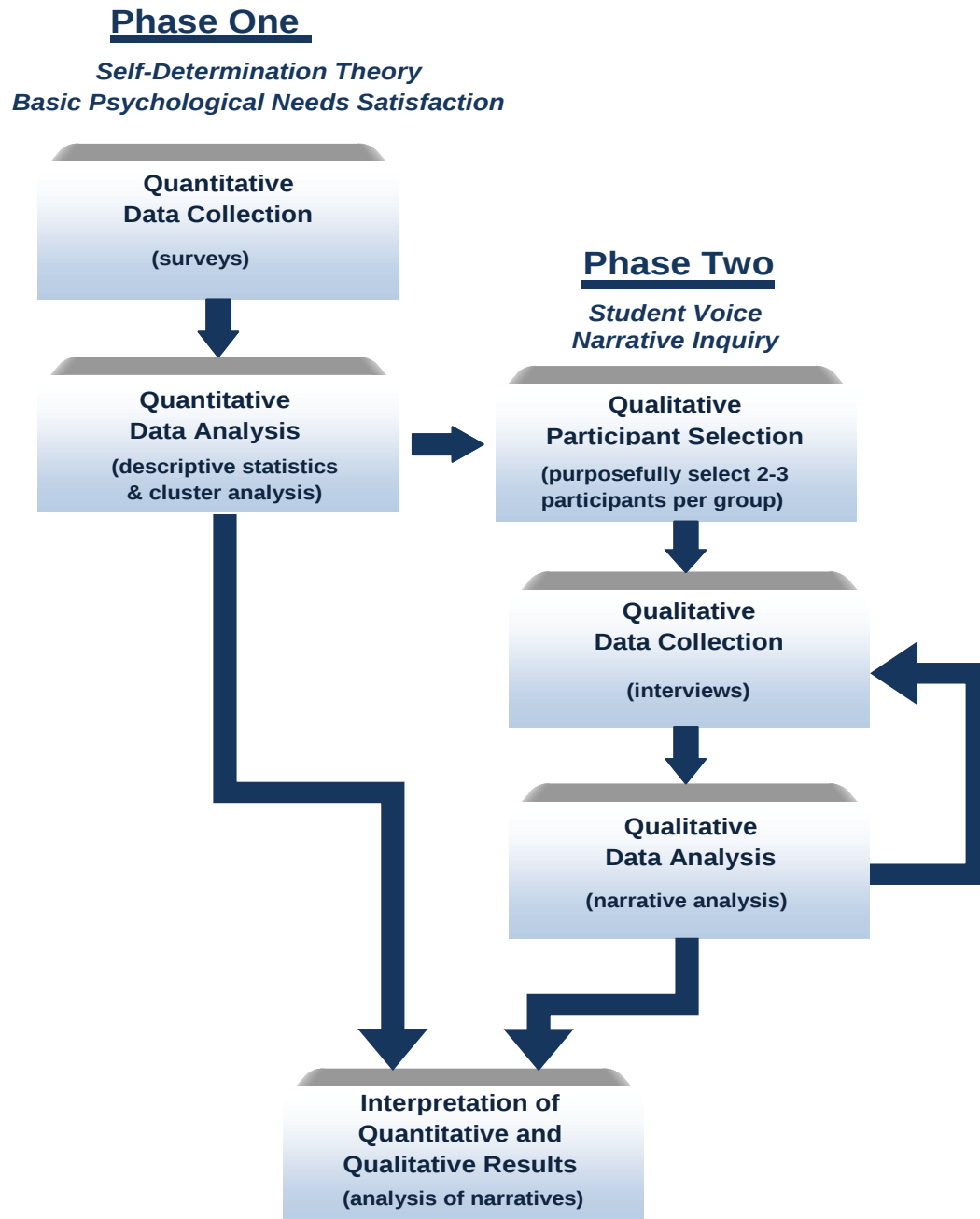
### **Design of the Study**

This methodology used a two-phased, mixed methods design. Specifically, it was a participant-selection variant of an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). As Creswell & Plano Clark explain, “this variant is used when the researcher is focused on qualitatively examining a phenomenon, but needs initial

quantitative results to identify and purposefully select the best participants” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 86). The first phase of this study was a quantitative exploration of participant characteristics, with the goal of establishing distinct participant groups. The second phase was a narrative inquiry into the lived experience of students enrolled in alternative schools. Figure 3.1 is a diagram of the methodology, showing the phases and the associated procedures.

In the first phase, participant selection used convenience sampling. Participants complete a survey consisting of an established SDT instrument. Cluster analysis performed on the survey results established statistically distinct groups. A profile was created for each group. In addition to answering the first set of research questions, the profiles were used in participant selection during the second phase, narrative inquiry, and in the analysis of the narratives.

SDT and narrative inquiry are complementary approaches. Narrative inquiry involves making meaning out of individual experiences expressed in lived and told stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Bauer and McAdams (2000) found that SDT’s basic psychological needs “underlie the content and structure of life stories” (p. 278). Narrative research with students has been conducted using SDT as a framework (Dawes & Larson, 2011; Nordmo & Samara, 2009). SDT is quantitatively supported with well-validated instruments, to measure theoretical constructs at the individual level. These measures can be used alone or in connection with other individual measures to group participants.



*Figure 3.1* Diagram of methodology design showing a participant-selection variant of a sequential explanatory design using Self-Determination Theory and Narrative Inquiry

The groups and their profiles formed the basis for maximal variation purposeful selection of individuals for the second phase, narrative inquiry. In this phase, participants were selected from each group for in-depth interviews. These interviews attempted to capture each participant's lived experience. The subsequent interpretation used both narrative analysis and an analysis of narratives.

Polkinghorne (1995) makes the distinction between “*analysis of narratives*” and “*narrative analysis*”. Chase (2005) identifies the same distinction, treating each as one of five analytic lenses used in narrative inquiry. *Narrative analysis* gathers descriptions of events through some combination of interviews, writings, artifacts and observations, then interprets and assembles the data into a story, generally ordered chronologically. This story is in the participant's voice, highlighting not only the events but also emotions, thoughts, and interpretations. In *narrative analysis* the interpretation stays within a single story. On the other hand, *analysis of narratives*, while acknowledging the uniqueness of every narrative, looks for similarities and differences across narratives, identifying patterns (Chase, 2005). In this methodology, the qualitative data analysis was *narrative analysis*. *Analysis of narratives* was used to interpret the quantitative and qualitative data together at the end of the study. The participant narratives provided more detailed information and explained and expanded on the results of the first phase.

## Context

### Research site

**School.** This study was conducted at the County Community School (CCS), operated by a County Office of Education (COE)<sup>5</sup> in a state located in the southwest part of the United States. CCS is a distributed school with eight locations serving 300 to 450 students at any one time. CCS takes students from a 60 square mile region. There are 11 classrooms, 15 classroom teachers, and five independent study teachers. Four of the classrooms run reduced hour school days, allowing for two different groups of students to be serviced, one in the morning (7:45 am – 12:15 pm), and one in the afternoon (12:15pm – 4:30pm). Two of the afternoon sites are managed by long-term substitutes, allowing them to be opened and closed throughout the year, to accommodate changes in enrollment.

**Operations.** CCS serves sixth through twelfth grade, and operates a 245-day school year. Approximately 25% of CCS students are enrolled in independent study, with the remaining 75% attending small (20 – 25 students) multi-grade classrooms located throughout the community. Most sites are two classroom sites. One teacher and one part-time teaching assistant manage the instruction delivery and administration for each classroom. At some sites, the teacher provides instruction for all grades in all four core curricular areas (mathematics, English, social studies, science). At other sites, teachers specialize, with each teaching two content areas. At these sites, students change rooms midway through each school day.

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for all organizational names and specific locations

**Student achievement.** In the 2010 - 2011 school year, all subject areas showed less than 11% of CCS students to be proficient or advanced (8.9%, 10.8%, 6.9% and 8.5% in English, mathematics, science and social studies respectively). These scores were significantly below the local district averages and targets set by NCLB. CCS's *Single Plan for Student Achievement* lists the following issues affecting student achievement:

- Significant gaps in school achievement, attendance, and grade level completions
- Intermittent enrollment
- High rates of mobility
- Homelessness
- Designation as “abused, abandoned and/or neglected”
- Multiple pending legal issues
- Perpetrators and victims of sexual offenses
- Chronic substance abuse
- Pregnancy and parenting youth
- An increasing number of students taking prescribed psychotropic medications
- An ever-growing middle school population

### **Participants**

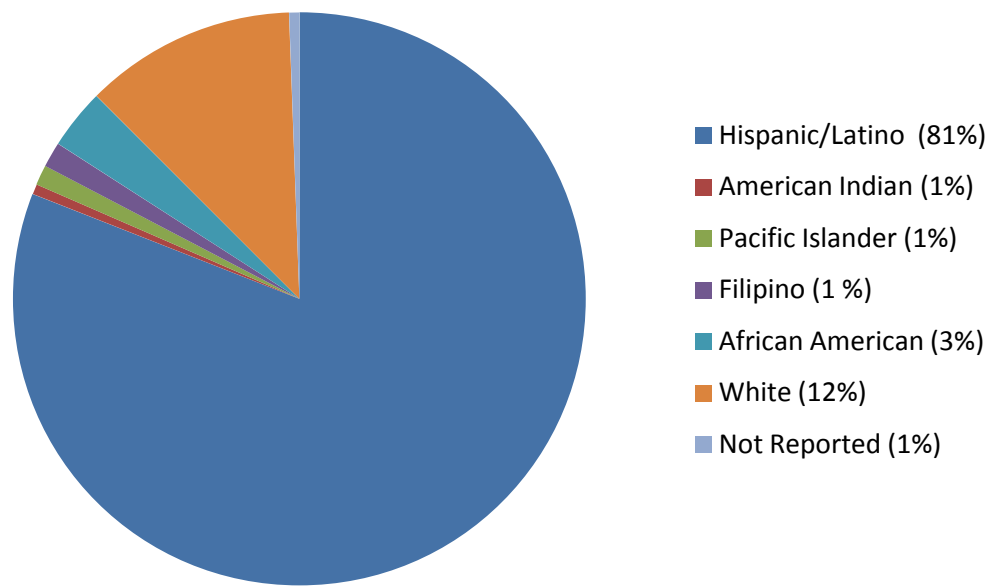
The student population is highly mobile. In the 2010-2011 school year, the official enrollment for CCS was 336. In that same school year, 1,024 different

students were enrolled. The average mobility rate<sup>6</sup> for CCS is 77%, with fewer than 30% of the students attending for more than one year. CCS serves students who have been referred by 22 local school districts, the probation department, and social service agencies. Most CCS students have been expelled from their local school districts or are transitioning into or out of the juvenile justice system.

As Figure 3.2 shows, in the 2010-2011 school year more than 81% of students at CCS identified as Hispanic or Latino, 11% identified as white, non-Hispanic and 4% identified as African-American. County enrollment is 44% Latino, 35% White, and 6% African-American. All 22 districts serviced by CCS have a combined enrollment that is approximately 39% Latino, 30% White, and 4% African American student enrollment (Educational Data Partnership, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Mobility rate is calculated as 1.00 minus (the number of valid census students tested divided by the total number of students tested).



*Figure 3.2 CCS enrollment by race/ethnicity*

In addition to Latino students being disproportionately represented, special education students, and students with low socioeconomic status (SES) are also disproportionately enrolled. CCS's special education population is 19% of enrollment, compared to 11% for the county and statewide. CCS did not certify their 2010-2011 English learner data. CCS enrollment is 64% Limited English Proficient (LEP), as defined by NCLB. At CCS 79% of the students, qualify for a free or reduced lunch, in contrast to 48% for the county. Females account for 20% of the enrollment.

## **Methods**

### **Phase One – Quantitative analysis of student surveys and records**

**Participant selection.** After approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher visited each class, described the study, and gave all students

present a parental and participant consent form in both English and Spanish. See Appendix B for the consent forms. This form requested permission to have the student complete a survey about how they felt about the school, their learning, and the instruction they receive, and to use specific data from the student's school records. Those students who returned the form indicating parental approval completed the survey on the researcher's return visit a few days later. Independent Study (IS) teachers, who met with their students weekly, handed out and collected the consent forms, in addition to administering the survey.

**Quantitative data collection.** The data collected in this phase were obtained through student records and a survey composed of a modified SDT scale along, supplemented with both open and closed questions added by the researcher. A copy of the survey is located in Appendix C. The data included student demographic data, enrollment data, students' perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction, students' self identified goals, and students' assessment of their instructional environment. Each survey had a unique number matched to the students unique school id in an electronic table encrypted on the researcher's personal computer, and backed up on a portable hard drive.

**Instrument.** The survey was a modified version of the Basic Needs Satisfaction at Work Scale (BNSW-S), one version of the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS). This scale measured the participant's perceived satisfaction of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The original scales and scale descriptions can be found on the University of Rochester's Self Determination Theory web site (University Of Rochester, 2008). Two versions of the scales have been used in

educational settings: BNSW-S (Brokelman, 2009; Gillison, Standage, & Skevington, 2008) and the Basic Needs Satisfaction in General Scale (BPNG-S) (Lovett, 2009; Wei, Shaffer, Young, & Zakalik, 2005). For this study the BNSW-S was used because it is more established, context specific, and the reported reliability was higher. Gillison, Standage, and Skevington (2008) used the BNSW-S to establish that autonomy and relatedness satisfaction predicted quality of life improvements for adolescents transitioning from primary to secondary school in the United Kingdom.

The BNSW-S had 21 items that comprised three subscales: eight autonomy items, six competence items, and seven relatedness items. Participants respond on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by (1) not true at all to (7) very true. A 5-point Likert scale was used in this study because it was deemed more appropriate for the participants. The researcher's experience with this student population and feedback from the pilot study suggested reducing seven categories to five would make the scale easier to understand. The original Likert scale consisted of five categories and this is still the most popular form of the scale (Peterson, 2000). Additionally, this adaptation is consistent with other studies using this instrument with adolescents (Arnone et al., 2009; Brokelman, 2009). The researcher modified items to reflect a school context. For instance, "I get along with people at work" was changed to "I get along with people at this school".

***Piloting the instrument.*** The researcher and a colleague piloted the instrument in three classrooms at two different schools within the county community school organization. A total of 122 students anonymously filled out the modified BNSW-S.

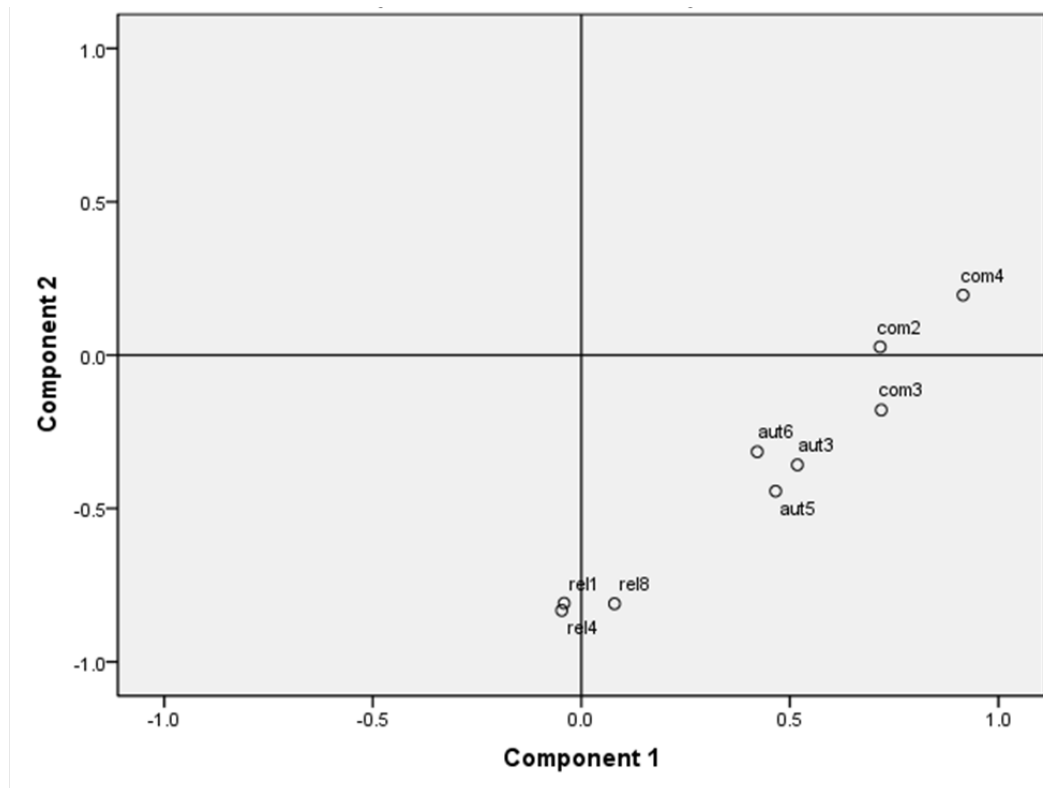
Data from the survey were coded and entered into SPSS Version 18 data analysis software program.

A reliability analysis performed on the subscales produced Cronbach alpha coefficients for autonomy, competency, and relatedness of .59, .54, and .75 respectively. Examining the inter-item correlations for each scale, we discovered that all the reverse coded items had low corrected item-total correlations. This indicated that the students were not consistently interpreting the questions in the same way and their answers were not consistent with their answers to positively worded questions. After these items were removed, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for autonomy, competency and relatedness were .71, .67, and .80 respectively. Trouble with the reliability of negatively worded (reverse coded) questions in BPNS when used with students had been reported in previous studies. Once these items were removed, alphas consistent with existing research were obtained (Arnone et al., 2009; Gillison et al., 2008; Johnston & Finney, 2010; Lovett, 2009). Since many of the students in this study spoke Spanish as their native language, the researchers conjectured that negatively worded questions were misunderstood because negative sentences are created differently in Spanish and English. DiStefano and Motl (2006) found that there is a significant method effect for negatively worded questions in self-reporting surveys.

According to Johnston and Finney (2010) “there are no known studies that have examined the factor structure of the BNSW-S” (p. 281). Additionally the researcher felt there were advantages to having standardized scores for each subscale that used only three items. In their development of the Activity-Feelings States Scale

(AFS), Reeve and Sickenius (1994) made a convincing argument for using three or four items for each subscale, stating that “fewer than three indicators for a latent variable three factors tended to produce problems with improper solutions” (p.507) and “additional indicators tend to produce multiple, rather than single latent factors” (p. 508). Three items for each subscale appeared optimal for achieving efficient unidimensional measurement when measuring basic psychological needs satisfaction. Therefore, the data were analyzed using factor analysis. The data revealed many coefficients of .3 and above. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .89, which exceeds the recommended minimum value of .6, and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant at .000 demonstrating  $p < .05$ . Based on the data, three factors were selected for each subscale: autonomy (8,13,17), competency (4,10,12) and relatedness (2,9,21). A second factor analysis using these nine factors revealed 85% of the correlation coefficients above .3. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .86 and the Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity revealed statistical significance at .000 demonstrating  $p < .05$ . A review of the total variance showed three components explained a cumulative 70.27% of the variance. In figure 3.3 the component plot in rotated space shows the two components with eigenvalues greater than 1 (4.41 and 1.06), although only 1 component could be confirmed by Parallel Analysis (9 variables x 110 respondents). Eigenvalue measures the amount of the variation explained by each component or factor. An eigenvalue greater than 1 is retained using Kaiser’s criterion, however Parallel Analysis that compares the Eigenvalues to those obtained from a randomly generated data set is more accurate (Pallant, 2010). Even though autonomy

and competency load together into one component and relatedness loads as a separate component, three groupings are evident.



*Figure 3.3* Component plot in rotated space for indicating chosen instrument items in pilot.

An Oblimin rotation was performed on the three component solution. The pattern matrix In Table 3.1 shows the factors loaded as expected, with the absolute value of all coefficients above .4.

*Table 3.1* Pattern Matrix for Items Chosen for the Pilot BPNS

|                                | Component |      |       |
|--------------------------------|-----------|------|-------|
|                                | 1         | 2    | 3     |
| Q2 Relatedness Scale Factor 1  | .890      |      |       |
| Q9 Relatedness Scale Factor 4  | .821      |      |       |
| Q21 Relatedness Scale Factor 8 | .732      |      |       |
| Q12 Competence Scale Factor 4  |           | .896 |       |
| Q4 Competence Scale Factor 2   |           | .792 |       |
| Q10 Competence Scale Factor 3  |           | .578 |       |
| Q17 Autonomy Scale Factor 6    |           |      | -.946 |
| Q8 Autonomy Scale Factor 3     |           |      | -.603 |
| Q13 Autonomy Scale Factor 5    |           |      | -.483 |

Note: Extraction method was Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method was Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Using just the chosen three factors for each subscale, a new reliability analysis for each subscale and the total scale showed acceptable Cronbach alphas for autonomy, competency, relatedness, and total basic psychological needs satisfaction (.77, .75, .79 and .88 respectively).

**Final instrument.** The instrument used in this study reflected the results of the instrument pilot study. It was composed of three questions for each subscale: autonomy, competency, and relatedness. It also had three questions added by the researcher. In these three questions, students commented on their learning, educational goals, and suggestions for school improvement. An image of the survey is found in Appendix C.

**Quantitative data analysis.** The researcher coded and entered data from student records and the survey into SPSS (PASW Statistics 18). Descriptive statistics

were gathered, and are reported in Chapter Four. Totals for each subscale and BPNS were calculated and checked for normality and outliers. The researcher checked the reliability of the instrument by looking at the internal consistency of the BPNS and its subscales. Using confirmatory factor analysis, the researcher also verified the theoretical subscale structure of the BPNS (Pallant, 2010). The strength and direction of relationships between demographic variables such as age, grade, gender, time enrolled, instructional assignment, special education status, and free and reduced lunch qualification were determined by correlational analysis, and are described in Chapter Four. The researcher also analyzed the correlations between demographic variables and the BPNS.

The researcher used cluster analysis to build student profiles. Cluster Analysis was used to group participants based on the BPNS subscale scores. Cluster analysis uses multiple characteristics “so as to maximize between-group heterogeneity and within-group homogeneity and thereby capture the multivariate interactions” (Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Soenens, Luyckx, & Lens, 2009, p. 675) . Consistent with recommendations made by Hair and Black (2004) and studies done by Mouratidis and Michou (2011) and Vansteenkiste, Sierens, Soenens, Luyckx, and Lens (2009), a Ward’s hierarchical cluster analysis with an agglomeration schedule was used to explore the possible clusters, followed by a k-means clustering. The Wards method is based on the combined squared Euclidian distances between cases. In a hierarchical cluster analysis, each case starts out as its own cluster, then, through a series of steps the closest cases are combined, until all the cases end up in one group. This preliminary analysis allowed the researcher to compare different cluster solutions.

The selected solution served as the starting point for non-hierarchical clustering. The number of clusters and the center of the clusters obtained by the Ward's hierarchical cluster analysis served as input to the k-means clustering. The k-means clustering starts with the given center, and combines cases based on the distance from the center. Through subsequent iterations, the center is refined and cases reallocated until the best possible distribution is obtained. The hierarchical cluster analysis is a way to determine the optimum number of clusters and starting centers. The k-means cluster analysis then fine-tunes the preliminary cluster solution through an iterative process (Gore, 2000). Following the cluster analysis, the researcher used a double-split cross-validation procedure to examine the stability of the cluster solution (Breckenridge, 2000).

## **Phase Two – Narrative Inquiry**

**Narrative inquiry.** Narrative inquiry is a broad category of qualitative research designs that concentrate, as the name implies, on telling a story. In narrative studies, researchers describe individual experiences by collecting and analyzing data from interviews, observations, and artifacts. The purpose is to reveal or communicate an untold story, thereby giving voice to people often marginalized. Narrative researchers seek to understand and represent the meanings of experiences through stories lived and told by individuals. The researcher places emphasis on using the participants' own words and capturing their "voice". The stories are complex and interwoven with their context. Participants and the researcher collaborate to capture and retell the story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) explain the evolution of narrative research. They describe four “turns” researchers make as they embrace this approach. The first turn is away from the traditional view of scientific objectivity that treats the researcher as a separate entity, unrelated to what is being researched. In narrative designs, the researcher and what is being researched have a relationship that uniquely shapes the work. This relationship exists within a context, a distinct time, place, and social environment. The second turn is from numbers to words as data, and away from a narrow view of reliability. This is not a rejection of numeric data and its usefulness, but rather an acceptance that in translating experience and feelings into numeric codes, relationship nuances of researcher to participant and of experience to context are lost. When numbers are used to express findings, the understandability and usefulness of the information can be obscure to a reader. “When researchers make the turn toward a focus on the particular, it signals their understanding of the value of a particular experience, in a particular setting, involving particular people” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 21). The third turn is from the general to the particular. This would appear to be a turn away from generalizability. However, narrative researchers disagree with the assumption that it is possible to discover universal laws that can be used in all contexts to predict and control human behavior. They do not believe that it is possible to account for, and remove, the influence of context in human relationships. Rather, they embrace complexity, and consider the details of individuals, experiences, and contexts to provide a deeper understanding of human interaction. Finally, the fourth turn is away from the idea that there is one way of knowing and one world to be known. Narrative researchers embrace the concept that there are multiple ways of

understanding human experience. This turn is also a turn from a narrow definition of validity based in numbers, and toward validity as found in authenticity, persuasiveness, and trustworthiness.

**Qualitative participant selection.** Consistent with maximal variation sampling, two individuals from each group, established by the cluster analysis in the first phase of the study, were purposefully selected for Phase Two. The researcher created an ordered list of potential participants, based how close to the center they were statistically. The differences between the cluster mean for autonomy, competency and relatedness and each cluster member's total scale scores were added together and sorted in ascending order. Students who had indicated they were willing to be interviewed were solicited in order, and selected based on their motivation to participate, the return of appropriate consent forms, and their availability to be interviewed.

**Qualitative data collection.** Qualitative data collection consisted of multiple taped interviews with each participant over a six-month period. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews during the school day in a location that was private from and convenient to the student's classroom. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. To reflect quantitative data results and data captured in previous interviews, the researcher amended interview protocols throughout the interviewing process. A copy of the initial interview protocol is in Appendix B.

The protocol was very sparse. As stressed in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), after the initial request for the story the narrative interviewer should remain a listener asking very few questions. The researcher used questions to clarify comments and/or

encourage the participant to continue the story. The story was a co-production of the researcher and the participant. As the participant recounted the story, the researcher captured and directed it with questions, gestures, and silences. The interviews in this study, as in pilot interviews, required very few questions to prompt especially detailed accounts from students about their educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school.

**Narrative analysis.** Interview data was used to construct each participant's story. In this phase, narrative was the form of inquiry, reasoning, and presentation. The result was each student's unique account of their school experiences, told, as much as possible, in their own words.

During the pilot interviews, the researcher found that it was impossible to capture all the richness of the voice recordings in a transcript. Much of the emphasis and emotion was lost, even when transcription notes attempted to include them. The researcher, therefore, worked directly with the digital voice recordings made during each interview. The researcher created and coded voice clips creating an audio restorying for each participant by assembling selected clips, in the chronological order of the experiences the clips describe. As each story was constructed in auditory form, a transcript was created to facilitate the analysis of narratives that integrated all the qualitative and quantitative data. The researcher could not find the use of this exact procedure in the literature. However, Crichton and Childs (2005) did conduct three ethnographic studies working directly with video and audio files in a similar manner.

The researcher created transcripts with timestamps for each interview audio file using the software Transana, written and maintained by the Wisconsin Center for

Education Research at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. The researcher also used Transana to assemble each story by linking coded and assembled clips with their associated transcripts. Audio clips were created with the use of a clip report that showed the start and stop times of each clip. These clips were then compiled into an audio story. The associated transcript was created by Transana's reporting function. This enabled all the work, publication and presentations associated with this study to use the original source material.

### **Interpretation of Qualitative and Quantitative Results**

**Analysis of narratives.** In the final stage of data analysis, the researcher conducted an analysis of narratives. The researcher compared participant and cluster demographics identified in the first phase, and performed a sequential event-state analysis on the narratives, comparing each participant's chronology of events. Commonalities and differences in the stories were integrated, with the results of Phase One to form profiles of each cluster. Using plot analysis and In Vivo coding, the researcher conducted several iterations of First Cycle and Second Cycle coding. The data were segregated, reduced, grouped, and regrouped (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher identified and described patterns and established emergent themes that the data supported.

***First Cycle Coding.*** The initial step in the First Cycle of coding was In Vivo. "In vivo" literally means "in life", and refers to codes that relate to a word or phrase actually located in the narrative. In Vivo Coding is particularly applicable to "studies that prioritize and honor the participant's voice" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74) and studies that involve youth, because "child and adolescent voices are often marginalized, and

coding with their actual words enhances and deepens an adult's understanding of their cultures and worldviews" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). The researcher reviewed each audio story and accompanying transcript, assigning a code to words or phrases that repeated required emphasis, or seemed to capture a significant feeling, event, behavior, or attitude. A second step in the First Cycle used Value Coding to identify participant values, attitudes, and beliefs.

***Second Cycle Coding.*** In the Second Cycle, the researcher reanalyzed and reorganized the data coded and grouped in the First Cycle to synthesize the data and form categories. In this process, some of the First Cycle codes were refined, combined and renamed, and others dropped (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern Coding was used in the Second Cycle to identify emerging themes or explanations. The researcher grouped codes from the First Cycle into meta-groups to form possible themes, patterns of actions or theoretical constructs, and briefly described each using narrative.

**Integration of data.** Each pattern was examined to determine how it explained or was explained by the quantitative results from the first phase. The researcher connected the results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses, and examined the results in relationship to existing literature using the lens established in the theoretical framework explained in Chapter Two. The goal was to provide answers to the overarching research questions: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students?

## **Limitations**

### **Generalizability**

There is a tremendous need for research concerning alternative education. This study was, however, limited in scope and context. In congruence with effective qualitative research methods, it examined in detail the experiences of only a few students from one alternative school. The purpose was to understand in-depth the experiences of those participants. The knowledge created was unique to those students, that school and this researcher.

As with qualitative research, generalizability was not the goal. Critical research by definition cannot and should not be normative, instead it elicits stories in an effort to understand the lived experiences of a group of individuals. While each student's lived experience was unique, there were commonalities across experiences that are useful for educational leaders and alternative educators to understand. In addition, there were connections found between student experiences and their basic psychological needs satisfaction, providing insight into structural and cultural aspects that contributed to or hindered academic achievement. Finally, each unique individual story provided valuable insight into the alternative educational experience. These deep, rich stories presented a wealth of knowledge from which all educators can benefit.

### **Positionality**

The researcher's positionality was also a limitation. The researcher is a former Head Teacher at the research site. This position brought a wealth of experience and context knowledge, but also could have influenced the information students provided

in their surveys and interviews. There were procedures, member checking, and triangulation of data put in place to mitigate this risk and minimize bias, therefore, allowing the use of the researcher's positionality as a resource.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This study identified, documented, and analyzed students' lived educational experiences before, during, and after attending an alternative school. Using critical theory as the theoretical framework, the researcher employed a two-phased mixed methods design. The first quantitative phase drew upon SDT, using student surveys, to answer the question: Who attends alternative schools? A narrative inquiry grounded in student voice followed in the second phase, to answer the central research question: What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school? Following the methodological flow of the research design (See Figure 3.1), this chapter discusses the findings of both phases in three sections: Quantitative Results, Narrative Analysis, and Analysis of Narratives, ending with a summary.

### **Quantitative Results**

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

Of the 183 surveys collected and analyzed, 45 came from IS teachers and the remaining 138 were collected in classrooms. The researcher coded and entered data from student records and the survey into SPSS (PASW Statistics 18). The demographics of the survey participants (n=183) proved to be representative of the population. Table 4.1 shows a demographic comparison between the survey participants and school population.

*Table 4.1* Demographic Comparison between Survey Participants and School Population

|                            | Survey Participants | School Population |
|----------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Latino                     | 81%                 | 81%               |
| White non-Hispanic         | 11%                 | 11%               |
| African American           | 6%                  | 4%                |
| Special Education          | 18%                 | 19%               |
| Limited English Proficient | 47%                 | 64%               |
| Free or Reduced lunch      | 86%                 | 79%               |
| Female                     | 17%                 | 20%               |
| Independent Study          | 25%                 | 25%               |

The age of the students was normally distributed around a mean of 16.25 years, with the youngest being 12.5 and the oldest 20. A majority of the students were in the 10th, 11th, or 12th grade (20%, 24%, and 23% respectively). Detailed descriptive statistics are shown in Appendix E.

### **Normality and Outliers**

Totals for each subscale and BPNS were calculated and checked for normality. The mean for the totals of each subscale was 11 and for total BPNS was 33. Assuming that the middle of the scale is neutral, this placed the sample means slightly on the positive side of the scales. All scales appeared normally distributed from examination of the histograms, detrended normal Q-Q plots, and the boxplots created for each scale (Pallant, 2010). The researcher removed one case identified as a univariate outlier.

Because hierarchical cluster analysis is very sensitive to outliers, the researcher also removed four multivariate outliers with high Mahalanobis distances over 16.27 (Pallant, 2010).

#### Reliability of Instrument

All of the scales showed acceptable internal consistency. According to Pallant (2010), a Cronbach alpha coefficient above .70 is considered acceptable, but alpha above .8 are preferable. A reliability analysis performed on the subscales produced Cronbach alpha for the autonomy, competency, and relatedness subscales of .85, .83, and .85 respectively. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the entire BPNS was .92.

Factor analysis confirmed the theoretical subscale structure of the BPNS (Pallant, 2010). The nine items composing the BPNS were subjected to principal component analysis (PCA). Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlational matrix showed all coefficients above .3. In fact, all but one was above .4. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .91, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Pallant, 2010), and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant at .000 demonstrating  $p < .05$ . These results supported the factorability of the correlation matrix.

PCA revealed only one component with an eigenvalue exceeding 1. An inspection of the screeplot revealed a clear break after the first component, and lesser breaks after the second and third components. The three-component solution explained 77.0 % of the variance, with Component 1 contributing 60.5%, Component 2 contributing 10.5%, and Component 3 contributing 6.0%. In order to validate the

subscales of the BPNS an oblimin rotation using three components was performed. The rotated solution revealed a structure consistent with the subscales and theory.

Table 4.2 shows items loaded strongest in their appropriate subscale with high communality values. However, the components were strongly correlated ( $r = .52, -.63$ , and  $-.50$ ). When a two-component solution was rotated, the autonomy and competency items loaded in one component and relatedness items loaded separately. This is consistent with Deci and Ryan (2000), who indicated that while all three basic psychological needs were connected, autonomy and competency plays a direct role in creating autonomous motivation while relatedness plays more of a supporting role.

Table 4.2 Pattern and Structured Matrix for PCA with Oblimin Rotation of BPNS

| Item      | Pattern Coefficients |             |             | Structure Coefficients |             |             | Communalities |
|-----------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
|           | C1                   | C2          | C3          | C1                     | C2          | C3          |               |
|           | Autonomy             | Competency  | Relatedness | Autonomy               | Competency  | Relatedness |               |
| <b>Q1</b> | .208                 | .319        | <b>.800</b> | -.393                  | .600        | <b>.861</b> | .799          |
| <b>Q2</b> | -.179                | <b>.661</b> | .056        | -.624                  | <b>.803</b> | .486        | .670          |
| <b>Q3</b> | <b>-.876</b>         | .088        | -.049       | <b>-.907</b>           | .616        | .435        | .828          |
| <b>Q4</b> | -.123                | -.135       | <b>.905</b> | -.490                  | .408        | <b>.896</b> | .816          |
| <b>Q5</b> | -.018                | <b>.899</b> | -.046       | -.562                  | <b>.886</b> | .426        | .787          |
| <b>Q6</b> | -.134                | <b>.750</b> | .070        | -.643                  | <b>.871</b> | .524        | .776          |
| <b>Q7</b> | <b>-.615</b>         | .179        | .175        | <b>-.815</b>           | .657        | .574        | .719          |
| <b>Q8</b> | <b>-.690</b>         | .133        | .150        | <b>-.849</b>           | .646        | .563        | .756          |
| <b>Q9</b> | -.269                | -.010       | <b>.720</b> | -.622                  | .531        | <b>.849</b> | .773          |

Note: major loadings for each item are bolded

### Correlational Analysis

**Age, grade, time enrolled, and assignment.** The relationships between age, time enrolled, and classroom or IS assignment was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. As expected, there was a strong, positive correlation between age and grade ( $r = .938$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), with age explaining 88% of the variation in grade. There was a medium correlation ( $r = .358$ ,  $n = 178$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) between age and whether the student was assigned to a classroom or IS. Students in IS were older, with an average age in years of 17.3, compared to 15.9 for students in classrooms. Over 85% of IS students

were in grades 10th through 12th, with 12th grade accounting for more than 50% of IS students. There was also a medium positive correlation of age ( $r = .403$ ,  $n = 171$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) and grade ( $r = .411$ ,  $n = 170$ ,  $p < .0005$ ) to time of enrollment. There was no significant correlation between time of enrollment and assignment.

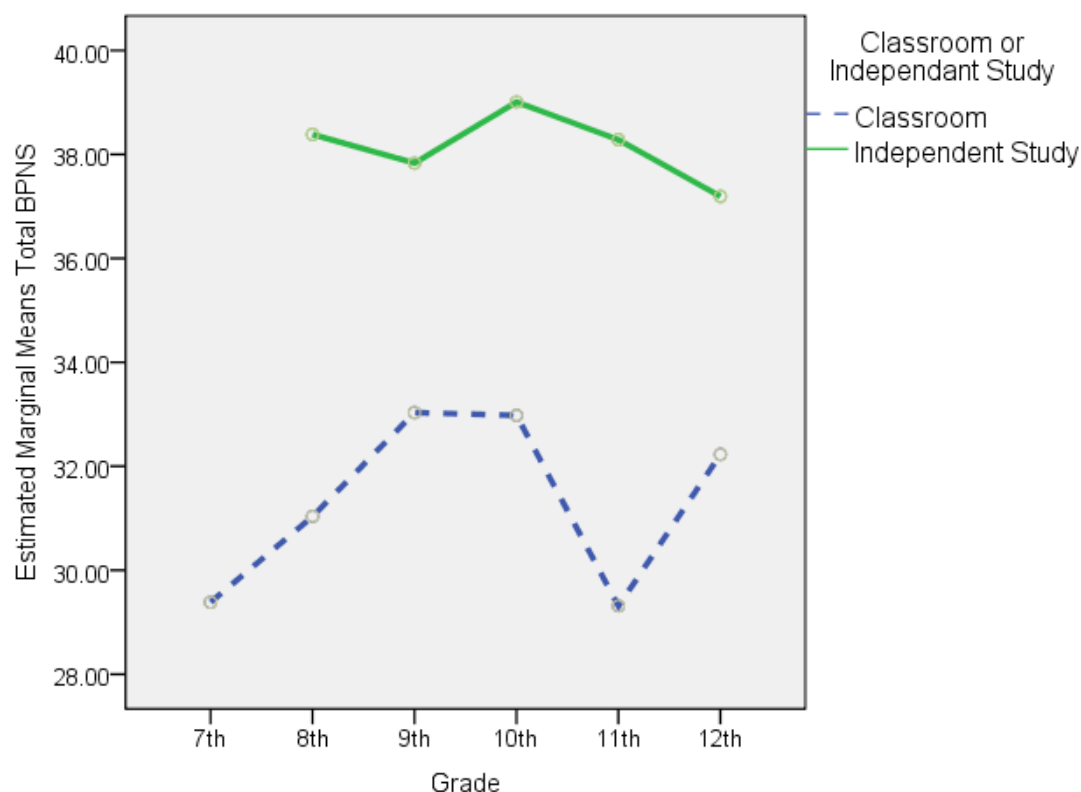
**Special education status, gender, and free or reduced lunch.** A Chi-squared test for independence (with Yates Continuity Correction) indicated no significant association between classroom or IS assignment, gender, or special education status. A significant association with a medium effect size was shown between assignment and student eligibility to receive a free or reduced lunch  $\chi^2 (1, n = 171) = 12.10$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $\phi = .29$ . Students assigned to IS tended to be older, with a mean age of 17.3 years as compared to classroom students with a mean age of 15.9 years.

A Chi-squared test for independence also indicated a significant association with a medium effect size between English proficiency and special education status  $\chi^2 (2, n = 170) = 6.82$ ,  $p = .033$ , Cramer's  $V = .200$ . Students classified as English Learners accounted for 58% of students in special education, as compared to 45% for the entire sample. There were no significant correlations established between special education status, gender, age, or time of enrollment.

**Autonomy, competency, relatedness, and total BPNS.** As expected, when investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, all subscale totals and BPNS were strongly related. Scatter plots and a correlation table are shown in Appendix F. Classroom or IS assignment was found to have a moderate correlation to autonomy ( $r = .361$ ,  $n = 173$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), competency ( $r = .341$ ,  $n = 175$ ,  $p < .0005$ ),

relatedness ( $r = .316$ ,  $n = 175$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), and total BPNS ( $r = .402$ ,  $n = 169$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), with the higher satisfaction rating occurring in IS. Age had a small, less significant correlation to autonomy ( $r = .185$ ,  $n = 166$ ,  $p = .017$ ), competency ( $r = .151$ ,  $n = 168$ ,  $p = .050$ ), relatedness ( $r = .158$ ,  $n = 168$ ,  $p = .040$ ) and total BPNS ( $r = .211$ ,  $n = 162$ ,  $p = .007$ ). An equivalent small correlation was found between grade and autonomy ( $r = .175$ ,  $n = 166$ ,  $p = .024$ ) and total BPNS ( $r = .197$ ,  $n = 162$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

A two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to see if the correlations between BPNS and both age and grade could be explained by the instructional assignment. The independent variables were instructional assignment and grade. The dependant variable was total BPNS. Age was the covariate. Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure there were no violations of assumptions of normality, homogeneity of variance, and homogeneity of regression slopes. After adjusting for age, there was no significance in BPNS score between grades  $F(5,149) = .246$ ,  $p = .94$ , partial eta squared = .008. Additionally, age did not have a significant relationship with BPNS  $F(1,149) = .336$ ,  $p = .56$ , partial eta squared = .002. However, there was a significant correlation, with a medium to large effect size, between instructional assignment and BPNS after controlling for age and grade  $F(1,149) = 17.44$ ,  $p < .0005$ , partial eta squared = .105. The correlation was evident in Figure 4.1 showing the adjusted means for total BPNS by grade and by instructional assignment.



*Figure 4.1* Estimated marginal means of total BPNS by grade and instructional assignment. Covariates appearing in the model were evaluated at age in years equal to 16.2624.

The results for the BPNS subscales, autonomy, competency and relatedness, were similar. Graphs for each are located in Appendix G. Time of enrollment, special education status, eligibility for free and reduced lunch, and gender had no significant correlation to BPNS scores.

## Cluster Analysis

The researcher used cluster analysis to generate profiles for groups of participants. Participants were grouped based on their BPNS subscale scores in autonomy, competency, and relatedness. Cluster analysis maximizes between-group heterogeneity and within group homogeneity, and thereby allows for the capture of multivariate interactions. As recommended by Gore (2000), the clustering used a two-step process. The first step used Ward's method to carry out a hierarchical cluster analysis. Examination of the Agglomeration Schedule and the Dendrogram both suggested a four-cluster solution. The researcher conducted a one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the three, four, and five cluster solutions. Post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD indicated that the mean score for at least two of the five-cluster solution groups failed to show significant variation in each of the subscales. There was statistical significance in the mean scores between all the groups for the three and four cluster solutions. Both solutions also explained over the requisite 50% of variance in each dimension (Milligan & Cooper, 1985). The four-cluster solution explained 80%, 74%, and 58% of the variance in autonomy, competency, and relatedness respectively. The three-cluster solution explained 60%, 72%, and 58% respectively. The researcher chose a four-cluster solution based on the strength of the Agglomeration Schedule, Dendrogram and amount of variation explained.

**Internal validity.** The four-cluster solution centers from the Ward's hierarchical analysis became the starting point for the k-means clustering procedure. Z scores were calculated for the subscale totals (autonomy, competency, and

relatedness). The Z score transformation standardized variables to the same scale, producing new variables with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. A mean Z score represents the distance between the cluster mean and the sample mean in standard deviation units (SD). The researcher interpreted the Z scores as effect size analogous to Cohen's (1988) *d*. Cohen considered 0.2 SD small, 0.5 SD moderate, and 0.8 SD large. Figure 4.2 shows the Z scores, or effect size when compared to the whole sample, of each subscale for each of the four resulting clusters. The first clusters showed effect sizes in the small to medium range, while clusters 3 and 4 showed a large effect size.

A one-way analysis between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for the clusters using the subscale scores. As would be expected from the results of a cluster analysis, the ANOVA showed significant differences ( $p < .0005$ ) between the means for autonomy, competency, and relatedness with large effect sizes (eta squared = .85, .75, .60 respectively). Post-hoc comparisons using the Turkey HSD test indicated significant ( $p < .005$ ) differences between all means for all clusters except relatedness between the second and forth cluster ( $p = .364$ ).

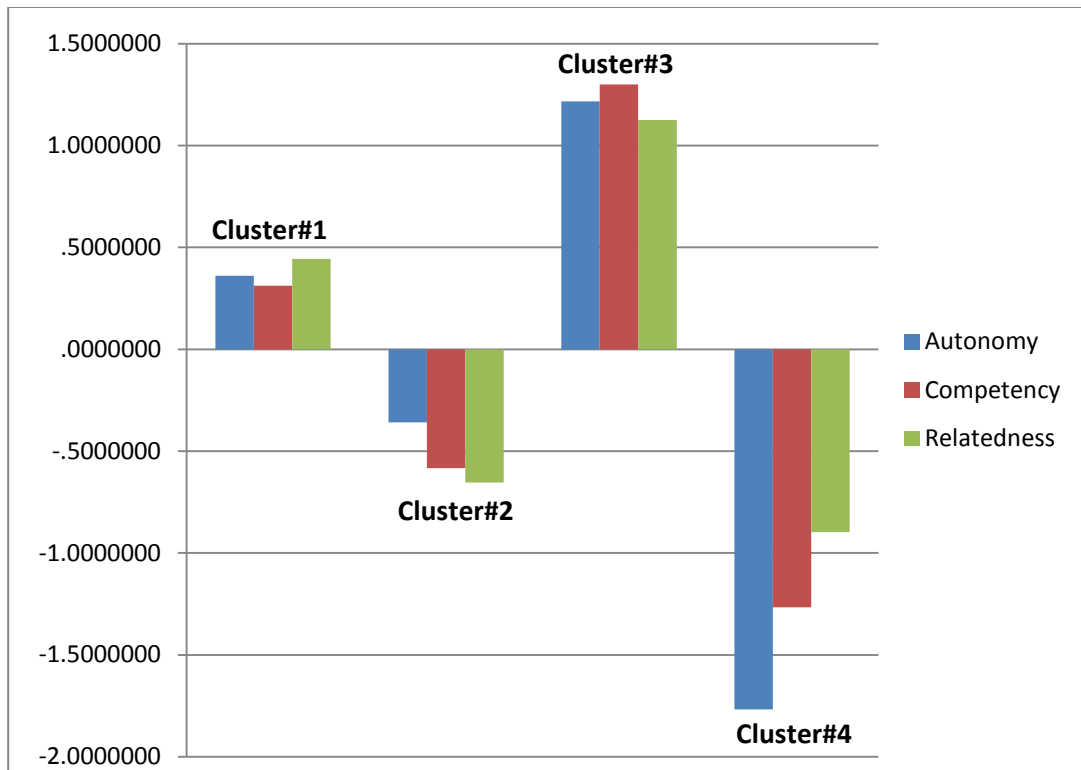


Figure 4.2 Z score means for autonomy, competency, and relatedness in each cluster

The first cluster was composed of balanced slightly above mean scores, which gave them an average BPNS score of 4 (True for me). If not totally satisfied they score slightly higher than the mean. The second cluster was characterized by lower than average satisfaction scores. Notably, the relatedness score was not significantly different from the cluster with the lowest scores. All the scores were significantly above the mean in the third cluster. They would be predicted to have good, positive motivation and a sense of well-being. Finally, although all the scores for the last cluster were low, most significant was the very low autonomy score. Figure 4.3 shows the four distinct clusters in a histogram for total BPNS.

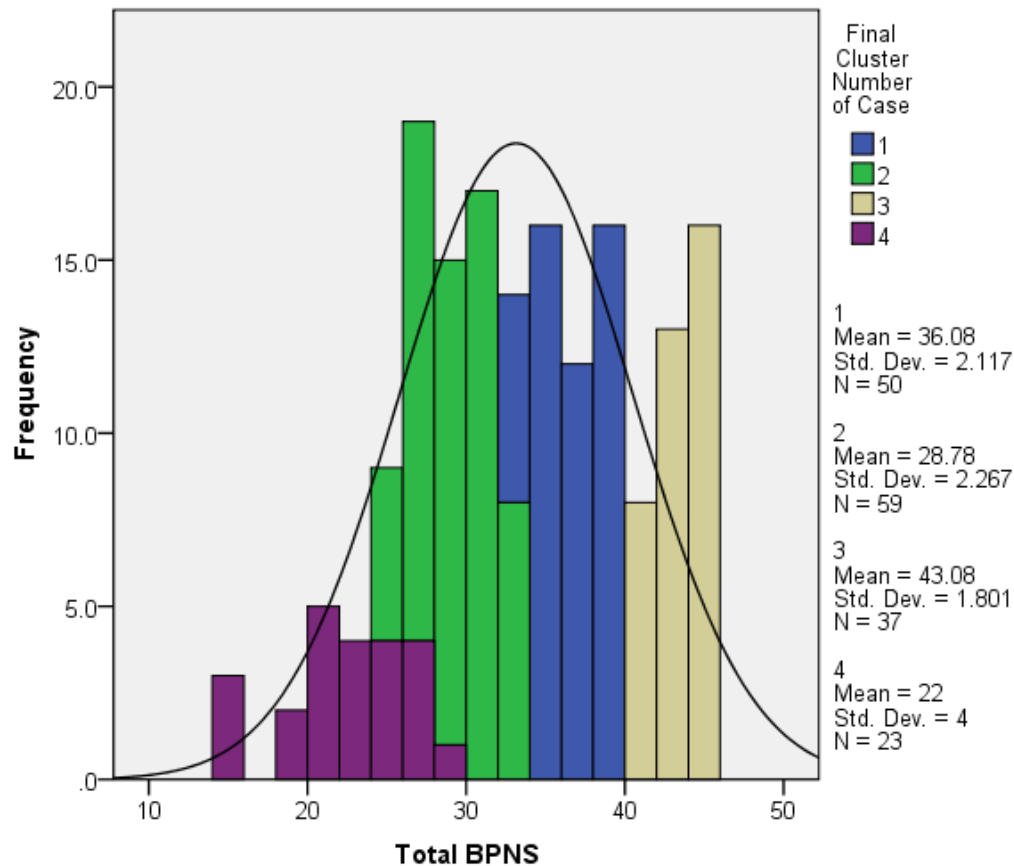


Figure 4.3 Histogram showing the total BPNS by cluster.

**External validity.** Chi-square tests for independence indicated significant associations between cluster and grade<sup>7</sup>, with a medium to large effect size  $\chi^2(12, n = 171) = 23.93, p = .021$ , Cramer's  $V = .22$  and between cluster and classroom or IS assignment with a large effect size  $\chi^2(3, n = 178) = 29.79, p < .0005, \phi = .41$ . The fourth cluster (low autonomy) had 92% assigned to a classroom; while in the third cluster (high BPNS) 56% were assigned to IS. The largest percentage of middle

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<sup>7</sup> It was necessary to combine sixth, seventh and eighth graders into a middle school group (MS) in order to have enough cells with an expected count of 5 or more necessary for a valid Chi-squared test.

school students (45%) and 11th grade students (43%) were found in the second cluster (low average), and a considerable majority of 12th graders were found in the first and third clusters (38% and 33% respectively).

Also indicating a strong, significant association were cluster membership and how students answered question #10 on the survey: “Do you learn more or less at this school as compared to other schools?”  $\chi^2(3, n = 175) = 18.72, p < .0005, \phi = .33$ . All clusters had a higher percentage answering they learned more at CCS than other schools. The third cluster, however, had 95% answering in this manner.

**Cluster profiles.** A demographic picture of each cluster emerged from the data analysis. Table 4.3 summarizes the cluster characteristics.

*Table 4.3 Cluster Statistical Characteristics*

| Cluster | N  | Average Age | Predominant Grades | Percent in Classroom | Percent Learning more |
|---------|----|-------------|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1       | 51 | 15.64       | 9th , 12th         | 76%                  | 78%                   |
| 2       | 62 | 15.40       | MS , 10th, 11th    | 87%                  | 59%                   |
| 3       | 39 | 16.13       | 12th               | 43%                  | 95%                   |
| 4       | 26 | 15.19       | MS, 11th           | 92%                  | 58%                   |

**Cluster #1 – High Average.** The first cluster students were in high school, older, and assigned to a classroom in the same percentage as the overall school. Research would predict their general well-being and motivation to be slightly above average, which was reflected by the percentage who believes they are learning more at their current school.

**Cluster #2 – Low Average.** The second cluster was younger, a little less motivated, and generally defined by their negative relatedness. About 75% of them were in middle school or in 10th and 11th grade. They were more likely to be assigned to a classroom and less likely to think they were learning more in their current situation.

**Cluster #3 – High BPNS.** The third cluster was defined by their overall significantly high scores in autonomy, competency, and relatedness. They were the oldest group, with over one third being 12th graders. They were more likely than not to be assigned to IS, and overwhelmingly thought they were in the right place for their learning.

**Cluster #4 – Low Autonomy.** The forth cluster was the group with significantly lower BPNS scores, led by the score with the largest effect size of all the clusters – autonomy. These students were overwhelmingly in the classroom, and averaged the youngest age of all the clusters. One quarter of them were in middle school, and over 38% were recorded as 11th graders.

**Reliability.** Stability and replicability of the four-cluster solution were analyzed by a double-split cross validation procedure, as recommended by Breckenridge (2000). The researcher randomly split the sample into two halves. The researcher, using a Ward's analysis, followed by k-means clustering, then conducted the same two-step cluster analysis used on the complete sample to each half. The solution for each half was subsequently applied to the alternate half by classifying each half using the cluster center means of its counterpart. The two results for each half were compared using the Kappa Measure of Agreement. The Kappa measures of

.847 and .853 were each significant at  $p < .0005$ . The Kappas' average of .85 represents very good agreement (Pallant, 2010). An agreement of at least .60 is considered acceptable (Asendorpf, Borkenau, Ostendorf, & van Aken, 2001).

## Goals

Participants indicated their education goals on the survey. They selected one of six choices. Table 4.4 shows the frequencies of each choice for all respondents. Notably, only one respondent indicated intent to drop out and 39% intended to pursue post-secondary education. Less than 5% indicated their goals did not include a high school diploma.

*Table 4.4 Student Educational Goals*

|         |                                     | Frequency | Percent | Valid<br>Percent |
|---------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|------------------|
| Valid   | Graduate with a diploma             | 84        | 47.2%   | 47.7%            |
|         | Graduate then military              | 15        | 8.4%    | 8.5%             |
|         | Get out fast - no diploma necessary | 1         | 0.6%    | 0.6%             |
|         | Graduate then higher education      | 69        | 38.8%   | 39.2%            |
|         | GED                                 | 3         | 1.7%    | 1.7%             |
|         | don't know                          | 4         | 2.2%    | 2.3%             |
|         | Total                               | 176       | 98.9%   | 100.0%           |
| Missing |                                     | 2         | 1.1%    |                  |
| Total   |                                     | 178       | 100.0%  |                  |

No significant correlations between the goals and age, enrollment time, grade, classroom or IS assignment, ethnicity, free or reduced lunch, or special education status was indicated. However, when the goals were grouped to keep the number of cells with a frequency equal to or greater than 5 above 80% (Pallant, 2010), a Chi-

squared test for independence indicated a significant association between goals and clusters with a medium effect size  $\chi^2 (6, n = 176) = 15.68, p = .016$ , Cramer's  $V = .21$ . Over 50% of Cluster #3 (High BPNS) members indicated their intention to pursue higher education, compared to 29% of Cluster #1 (High Average) and 38% of Cluster #2 (Low Average) and Cluster #4 (Low Autonomy). One hundred percent of the respondents that indicated either an intention to dropout or that they did not know their educational goals were in Cluster #2. There was also a significant association with a small effect size between gender and education goals  $\chi^2 (2, n = 168) = 6.41, p = .040$ , Cramer's  $V = .20$ . Fifty-two percent of females indicated they planned a post-secondary education compared to 37% of males.

### **Narrative Analysis Results**

Eight students were interviewed for the narrative inquiry. After generating a ranked list for each cluster in Phase One, the researcher obtained permission from and interviewed students who were among the five cases closest to the cluster center for all clusters except Cluster #4. While students in Cluster #1 (High Average), Cluster #2 (Low Average), and Cluster #3 (High BPNS) seemed eager to share their educational story, it was very difficult to get two participants from Cluster #4 (Low Autonomy) who were willing to be interviewed. Cluster #4 showed more volatility in terms of attendance and enrollment. At the time of participant selection, either because of incarceration, or an intent to drop out, only one of the closest five for Cluster #4 was still enrolled, and he choose not to be interviewed. Therefore, the five Phase One participants who had their autonomy, competency, and relatedness scores closest to

the means for Cluster #4 were unavailable. Both participants for Cluster #4 came from the next closest five.

All of the participants were male. There were only two females listed in the closest five students for all the clusters. One did not want to be interviewed, and the other had already graduated and was vacationing out of the area. Six of the eight participants were Latino. Latino males were disproportionately represented at CCS as were special education students, and students who qualify for a free or reduced federal lunch. In alternative schools nationwide, students of color and with low SES are disproportionately represented (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Loutzenheiser, 2002; May & Copeland, 1998; Smith, 2003). Also disproportionately represented were students with disabilities (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Smith, 2003). One of the interviewed students qualified for special education services.

The researcher recorded the audio of each student interview. This audio recording was professionally transcribed. The audio and transcription were loaded into Transana. The researcher time stamped and corrected each transcript so that it was verbatim. From the audio file, the participant's individual story was assembled by creating audio clips and sequencing them chronologically. After assembling the audio stories and their transcripts, each was played for the participant. The researcher taped the subsequent interview and incorporated any corrections offered by each student into the final audio story and its transcript.

The objective of this research was to have each participant tell his education story in his own words. Therefore, each story begins with only a brief description of

the student, followed by the student's story, assembled in his own voice, and transcribed as accurately as possible. After each story, the researcher provides a brief epilog to update the reader on the status of the student when this study was completed. The participants selected their pseudonyms. All names of individuals, cities, schools and the state were deleted or changed. Square brackets [ ] indicate these modifications. For context, please note that the students attended residential school districts, which combined grades six through eight into separate middle schools, and administered at least one district alternative school.

### **Cluster #1 (High Average)**

**Oscar's story**<sup>8</sup>. When interviewed, Oscar was 18 and nearing graduation from CCS. He was a handsome, Latino young man with fair skin and a muscular body. On his left arm is a large tattoo of his father's hand clasping his mother's hand, with an intertwined rosary. Oscar was relatively soft-spoken and rarely used profanity. He was expelled twice from his traditional high school for various drug offenses.

However, he has never been incarcerated. Oscar's story:

I would always know that school, I had to do it because I had no choice and that school is going to get me to somewhere. My parents did raise me with, 'You've got to go to school. You've got to do this if you want to be somebody in life.'

I always thought that way. It was that marijuana started.

Well, my first time I ever smoked weed was when I was 10 years old. And after that, when I was doing really heavy, like doing on a lot of times it was when I actually started you know, the beginning of the beginning of seventh grade. That's when I was doing a little bit big, and

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<sup>8</sup> Audio files are "Oscar's story.mp3" and "Oscar's Story.wav".

that's when, at the end of seventh grade, that's when I got introduced to crystal meth, cocaine, and ecstasy. But I mean that's what killed me the most right there, the crystal, because, for that, I would do it every day. I didn't do that much, like extended years, but, I mean, I would do it a lot, from the beginning of eighth grade all the way to the end of ninth.

I was always a, I should say, C, B, B- student. I wasn't that much of lower grades a little bit. Only until my, oh, in freshman year I was pretty low. I had F's.

I mean for homework, it was a whole different thing. I actually even loved doing homework. It was nothing that I would get upset about and I wouldn't do it. But my parents never had trouble with me in school either. I really don't think that they would always...because I would see the other friends that they would always call their house because they were doing something bad, or stuff like that. But my parents never had that. The only thing bad was the drugs.

My dad, my mom, they have never done any drugs. They don't know what addiction is like, you know. It's a whole different perspective [perspective] on their view, how they look on drugs.

They think it's the most horrible thing ever, I mean which, in reality, it is. That's why school-wise it would take an affect because I would always take it there, so I had always a chance that one day I can get caught.

Well, I wasn't very smart, either. Because it reeked, it reeked a lot. I had it, you know, I had a lot in my backpack, you know, and every time I would open my backpack I had to take out my binder, so that wasn't smart. And my teachers, they would always... they, I guess, supposedly from what they told me, that my teachers were already like suspecting something that every day it would smell like that.

It was really, really strong and I mean, it wasn't that I had a little bit, maybe like two or three grams. It was highly. Every day, back when I was in high school I would always try, I would always carry my backpack at least minimum to 18 to 24 grams of marijuana, just to sell on my person right there.

It started off that my teacher, it was...this, actually, it happened in math class. That she uh, she told the supervisor, and I mean, they got me on the bad day right there. That's when I had everything in my backpack.

They started, you know, 'All right, put your hands up,' you know, the police, because there's a deputy inside there. He started, 'Put your

hands up.' He started cuffing me. He was searching all over me. Finally, you know, he got my backpack and he got everything right there. He's, like, 'All right', boom!

The thing was that I had it in different baggies. I had one big bag and then I had a little bit of the small bags. So they of course, they're going to say, with attempt to sell. and that's how I got made.

That was...Yeah. Freshman year, ninth grade. It was different. It was more of a whole story with my parents. It was a whole different experience and my parents never evolved, like saying, 'Oh, my son is doing crystal meth.' They would never expect that.

When my parents found out, the first time I got expelled, it started going down the drain with them. Like, I started losing trust with my family. Well my dad, right now we're picking that up, but since the first time I got expelled it was, damn, it was a living hell you know. My dad wouldn't talk to me. I remember I wouldn't talk to my dad for six months straight.

You know, my parents, you know I, I felt embarrassed every time I would see them at my house. Like, I would go out sometimes. I didn't go to the kitchen, I wouldn't want to even eat with them because I would just feel so embarrassed that, you know what I did because I know they showed me different and I mean.

For me, I went through the whole process. I got expelled and I went...Either it was [name deleted] or I did [program name deleted] at [district alternative school name deleted]. So I choose [district alternative school name deleted]. I did [program name deleted] and I was getting also, umm, I was doing the inpatient program right here in [CCS site name deleted].

And um, I finished all that. Everything went well. I mean I went back to school. I was clean. I was going to AA meetings, NA meetings. And then, everything just went down the drain again.

I went back my uh, the end, the end semester, I believe, of sophomore year. Back at [name deleted] high school again. It was ah, I started hanging out with different people again, that wasn't I should say, a good influence towards me. That's how it all ended up going bad again.

But then, once I got back to regular high school again, when I was expelled, I started, you know, doing a little bit better. Grades? School was, yeah, I didn't like it but I knew I had to do it.

It wasn't that, you know, I wasn't that much of a bad student. But the only thing that was bad for me was, you know, my addiction to drugs I was doing and the actions I was taking. That's what was keeping me down from that, but it was, it was nothing that I should say that I didn't, I didn't know how to read, or, you know, drugs were...It was just taking a lot of my time.

I think I was doing OK. I mean, yeah, I wasn't a perfect student, but I wasn't that much of a lazy student, either

My teachers, man, they loved me you know. I got bonds with my teachers. Even in high school, also, they would be like, 'Oh, [name deleted] this and that. Let's go to a baseball game.' They would take me, you know, even though they wouldn't know that I would sell or that I would smoke marijuana or that I would do all these kinds of drugs.

You know, for me, the teachers saw me like a, like an athlete, you know, somebody good, like somebody that was going to make it in high school, someone, you know, someone who was going to go right up through high school to go to university, do something good in their lives and I mean.

And I remember that the second time I got expelled, because I was in my uniform. Because I was in the ROTC. I was going to join the Air Force and I had that all planned out, everything great. I was, I was going to learn, I mean, enlist early at 17. And then I would go to uhh. Right when, when I got off from school in June, I was supposed to be, the plan was to get uhh, to go to boot camp in August. So I like had maybe a couple weeks free, and then I would get shipped.

Where they were telling me they were going to take me was up by Georgia or South Carolina but, sadly, no that never happened. They didn't let me in at all.

And, I mean, when they found out. I was actually, when I got expelled, I was in my uniform and I was like, 'Damn.' The saddest part was that when I was in the office one of the supervisors, he took me to go see my colonel. He, He wanted me to go tell him that I had just got expelled right now and he wanted me to tell him why I got expelled right now.

And that was hard for me because my colonel, because that's what we called our teacher, he was our colonel, and he was a great guy. For me, he saved me a lot because I was going to go to [name deleted] for other credits that I was missing, but he saved me. He told the principal, 'He's

a great kid, let me work with him, let me give him extra credits and I can work things out with him.'

He'd always have me in his drill teams. I would be the first. I was always be the first like sergeant to be there. And until that one day, dang, he took; he took me to his office. I remember, when he saw me, he just, he nodded his head and he just slammed the desk.

He's like, 'Damn,[name deleted]' he's like, 'you let me down.' He's like, 'Most important, you, you let yourself down.' That's one of those big ones. Since then, I never, I've never talked to him because I've always embarrassed to go back and talk to him, see how he's been.

I had, I had a lot of opportunities and everything went down the drain.

I believe cocaine; I let cocaine go when I was 16, the beginning of 16.

I, honestly, I would just do it cause my body would say to do it. It wasn't that, I really that I really needed it, but I really was addicted to marijuana.

I do not know why but marijuana, marijuana was always my drug of choice. It's always been that. I couldn't let go of marijuana. There's something about it that's, I don't know. I can't even see inside my own, my own thoughts like what is it. Sometimes, for me, how do I say it? It's like a daily routine. It's already natural to me. It's like if somebody was smoking a cigarette.

It's weird how you see in the years, when you keep going back. When you first started using like you don't get that much into it until you start using every day. It's, I guess it's like it becomes like your buddy. It gets used to you. Something inside of you. Further on, it tells you, you need it instead of you want to smoke it. It's because you need it inside of your body.

Well, I mean, that one I would always carry also, and that's when I got normally caught my senior year with...But that was, that actually happened, a different other, even worse story about that. For that, I was also selling, you know, and my smart enough was not very smart.

I started, I started smoking a joint in front of campus. I should say, there's like hidden like trees when you go in the lunch area, because we'd always do it in lunch. It was, we thought we were sneaky.

In reality, it wasn't cause I mean, in reality that whole smoke would go all the way up to the cafeteria and all that. That's when, that's when we ended up getting caught with that one, also. At least myself, I did.

I started smoking, and then the supervisor turned around. He saw me with the smoke, and he's like, 'All right, let's go to my office.' Because he didn't know if I also had weed on me, because I would always sell. For that I was like, 'Damn.' Everything went down.

No more, you know, the principal was like, 'You know what? You're done, you're basically done already, you had too much chance already. We tried to save you so much times, and we can't do nothing for you no more.' They had to release me. They had to expel me from that school.

I saw the teacher, Mr. [name deleted] he said 'the principal. He told me, you know what? You already had charges for crystal meth, selling marijuana, and then now again having marijuana for intent to sell, and smoking on campus, so that makes it even worse.' I was like, damn. He told me I couldn't go back. He's like; the only choice I had is to go to [name deleted]. I ended up coming here [name deleted] when I was 16.

After that, it went down. I lost everything. Now, I'm working for myself. I'm looking for a job again and I'm going to have to do things on my own now since I'm already 18. It's going to be harder for me now but I mean, I'm going to try to pick myself up, go to college, do something at least with my life.

I've been here since October, yes, since October of last year. It's only been a little bit. It's actually been like six months, five months.

I believe that this is the same as a traditional school. Because in a traditional school, there's, there's a bunch of kids, and there's only one teacher, and they don't give you the same uh attention that you need. Right here, you can ask for individual help, you know, because you're doing your own thing, and they can help you, you know.

I don't think that I have learned less here than over there, and I mean they're preparing me for right now for to go to [community college]. They're telling me, 'All right, all your courses you've got to take. What do you want to take in [community college]? What do you want to do after [community college], your two years? What university would you like to go?' I believe they're striving me for, you know, for that success. I know they're trying really hard to push me there. That's why I don't think that...it's the same here, I believe, like if it was a traditional

school. Even maybe better than here. Maybe better here than over there, I should say.

I should say the atmosphere was different, yes. I mean, it would, they would focus on you. It was that, you know, you had to do your work there, you know. Your teacher, like here it's mostly, independent. You do your own thing, right? Over there, it was the whole class. The teacher would be up. And there would be different lectures every day. They would be teaching you. And like they would be like on you, more, you know. You know, they would tell you, 'You know what? You better do your work. Have you done your work?' If not, then they would call your house, and stuff like that yeah.

Yeah, it was a whole different, a whole different thing. But I mean, I was always, I was always good at doing independent work, like doing my homework. It was something that I liked. It didn't bother me. What bothered me was the tests. I was never good for tests. And, I mean, even though I would study, it was that, right when the test was going to start, I would get nervous and I would forget everything.

When I came here, you know, I, I had uh, I didn't have that much of, a lot of credits behind. But, a little bit only that I was taking some classes at [community college] also. I finished, I should say I passed my math [state exit exam].

The only thing that I didn't pass was my language arts and that's what I've been doing right here, right now. I've been, I took already twice my English[state exit exam] and right now we're actually umm waiting for the scores, because I just took one recently and um in May and we're waiting right now for the scores, see how I did on that. Hopefully, I passed it.

That's all that's holding me back right now, I should say, just the [state exit exam], the English [state exit exam]. In order to graduate, I've got to pass that. Other than that, subject-wise, all my student portfolio and stuff like that, I'm guaranteed that I'll be done by June. All I have to do is pass the English [state exit exam]

Well, I'm almost close. All I need is the subjects I'm doing right now. Well, basically, it's just my student portfolio, and do some language arts, and I believe I only have 10 credits. 10, 20...15 credits, I should say, and then I'll be done with that. You know

I just got to do those two electives that I'm doing right now. Hopefully, what I'm thinking is by mid-June I'll be done with everything, or the end of June.

I set my goal already to go to [community college], do a transfer. Do the two years in [community college] and then hopefully transfer to a university.

I'm debating. I have two things in mind. One is business, a business degree, and then the second one is going into the medical field as a nurse or assistant nurse. Right now, I'm still at the edge where I don't know what to do still. I'm still debating about those two

Two months after his final interview, Oscar had completed all his graduation requirements, but had not passed the English-language arts section of the state exit exam. While he continues to study for the exit exam, he is enrolled full time at a community college.

**Rainman's story**<sup>9</sup>. Rainman talked quickly in spurts. He had a lisp and often mumbled and slurred his words. He was difficult to understand. Comprehension of Rainman's story requires that the transcript be read while listening to his story. Rainman admitted to using alcohol and marijuana regularly. These habits forced him to leave a continuation school he loved to come to CCS where he intended to graduate a few months after the interviews. This is his story :

Yeah, well yeah it's throughout elementary and middle school. I never did good. I never did good on school at all. Elementary, too I would always go home with referrals because I never did my homework. School is just not for me. I would just look at it and then, get bored of it after doing a question or something and go play football or soccer. It looked hard.

My mom would try, but she was always at work, so was my dad. But, like, I guess it would just go in one ear and come out the other ear, you know. I would go home, make excuses. Yeah, I volunteered for the referral. But my parents would find out. 'Oh, yeah, you haven't been

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<sup>9</sup> Audio files are "Rainman's story.mp3" and "Rainman's Story.wav".

doing your homework.' 'Oh, I know I haven't.' and then, that's when they'd get on my case. But, I would just go to play football after.

Yeah, I expected [in] third grade to be held back. That was the grade, that was the year that I would never do my homework. Like, every day, I would go home with a referral because I never did my homework.

They would just pass me cause, just cause, you know. That's what I think. Because I had to pass with the other kids. Moved along. Yeah, I'm surprised I never got flunked.

I was, like, never disrespectful at all, you know. I was never a problem in my class. I just never did my schoolwork. Like, in fourth grade, they would try to teach me the multiplication chart, but I barely knew how to do multiplication.

Sixth grade, still, I wasn't doing right, you know, passing with D's and C's, barely. Things were going on then. That's when you woke up from your black out of your childhood, you know. Middle school's when you started looking at girls. You started looking at the way girls looked at you, you know. And you played sports, everybody loved you. But in order to do sports, you needed education, and that's why I was never in sports in school because of my education. You needed a 2.0 high, mine was always like 1.53, 1.49. I would just want to stick to one sport and go with it, throughout all school. See how it would have been, you know. But I just couldn't, because of my grades.

And then, I thought about dropping out because I did a few times, but, no, nah, I never did. I would just get that thought of just dropping out. Then I would get that other thought of like what don't...are you going to be when you drop out. You're going to be like those...at the...like at [down town], seeing the whole bum center right there, smoking a cigarette or something, just smoking some drugs.

Seventh grade, I was like...I'm going to forget seventh grade because my English teacher, he told me to just drop out. No. I'm not kidding. I teared up, but I didn't really cry because I held it in. It was in front of the class. In front of the class, yeah, she told me to drop out, and I was like, 'No, I'm not. I just can't.' you know and like, she was being serious about it. I'm going to be nothing in life and all this stuff. It really got to me. That's why I like English a lot now, because of her.

She was very frustrated with me. I never did the essays she told me to do. I'd just do the ones that she would write on the board, I would just pretty much copy.

I wasn't having success at all. You know when you get that one ball in your throat when you're about to cry? I had to hold it in. All my friends were in that class. They were all doing good so I'd just copy their homework. I was always like a copycat.

Towards the end of the year, I just started doing some work, catching up. I don't know, I think I was high.

I think um, eighth grade, I was like doing a little bit better, you know, actually trying to pay attention in class and stuff like that. But, still, I couldn't...For some reason, I just couldn't pay attention. It was really hard. It's been really hard for me to pay attention in school. I don't know why.

Some days, I do [have attention problems] because I'm trying to focus on one thing and then I go somewhere else. It's just like I zone off. Or like I'd try to count something and it takes me five times to count it. I was like...I don't know.

I was a daydreamer all my life. Daydreaming. Dreaming about being an actor, dreaming about wars, dreaming about all this stuff. Random stuff pops up in my head, still does.

I was just going through the school year, just going to see my friends, just coasting. Yeah, somehow I managed to keep my grades up, like a D and above.

I was always trying, to tell you the truth, but it just never seemed to work. I don't even remember eighth grade to tell you the truth.

Freshman year? I, I was really bad. Like, my grades were so bad, like, I didn't even think it was funny anymore.

Freshman year, I started smoking a little bit, drinking a lot of bit. Freshman year was like just get me out of here, right; just send me to [district alternative school name deleted]. That's what I was trying to do. They held me there until sophomore year. Cause, I don't think they can send you to continuation schools until you're a sophomore.

Freshman year, I liked it because of the girls.

Just that throughout my whole years in school, in general, every teacher had doubt in me like because I would just like slack off on schoolwork. They would just be like, 'What are you doing here?' My reply would always be, 'Look around you. These are my friends.' I don't know. I just like socializing.

Um, [district alternative school name deleted] changed it, though. At [district alternative school name deleted] like, I actually started liking school. Like, I was paying attention a lot in there.

When I got kicked out in sophomore year, it wasn't unexpected because they were looking for me, I guess, all ready to kick me out to [district alternative school name deleted]. Mrs. [name deleted], she was just telling me this school's really easy, teachers, you get along with them. Every teacher there knew you. You knew every teacher there, not like in the regular high schools. They only know the smart kids there.

It was the best year of my high school. I was passing every class – 3.0. The teacher can talk to everybody, and like goes through the class with everybody, so everybody can understand. It was really easy, cause the teachers knew how to like put the work in front of you, and make it look easy. It was easy there. I did very well at it.

I was there for a few years. I was known there. The friends I grew up with were at regular High School. But the guys went to [district alternative school name deleted] for a few months to get their credits up you know, then went back. But I met friends there, got along with people. Everywhere I go, I get along with people. They all just seem to like me or something. Yeah, I don't think I would change anything about [district alternative school name deleted]. I was trying to graduate there.

At [district alternative school name deleted], I was doing good, but, like, I had...One day, I had a marijuana piece, and I got out of the bathroom and they thought I was tagging. They searched me, and I saw a girl that I knew in the office, and I tried to hand her my piece. They saw me doing that and they tried to expel her. I was like, 'Naw, it's mine. You should just let it go.'

I just wanted to, like, hold my piece with me. Well, actually I didn't hold it. I had the same pants on the next day, and I was late for the bus. But the day before, I was smoking, and I went to school and I forgot I had it. And like...yeah. I was really mad.

School, yeah, every day I was doing good at school. Just go home and after, smoke. Then, I got expelled because they saw my record. I got suspended once in freshman year for going high to school, and I said, 'No.' They looked me up. They originally suspended me, but they found that and they sent me over here.

I wanted to go to [name deleted] Job Corps, but they said I couldn't, so I had to come here. That's why I'm here.

I started smoking when I want to like, well, I first hit it like, young. Movies got to me when I was little. Smoked my first cigarette when I was six. It was a really bad care, really bad care with smoking. Thinking about smoking.

Hitting [started at] eight - gravity bong loads. Just to play Nintendo 64. They were just telling me, it'll take my asthma away. That's why I would do it.

Yeah, they just kicked me out man, they just sent my, my pipe to the police officer, you know. Paraphernalia?

Yeah, I got sent over here. I think it was senior. I got here senior year. Every day I just want to go back to that day of taking that pipe and just not bringing it.

I passed my [state exit exam]. That was at [district alternative school name deleted]. It was my third try. I did it. It really helped you and they had the [state exit exam] math and the [state exit exam] English. It was really easy.

There's more people [district alternative school]. There's periods, like different class periods, like, math, English, history. You would switch rooms, switch teachers. Sometimes you get a teacher for three periods, sometimes you get five different teachers. There is five periods.

Right here is just too much, um gangsters, you know. I'm not into that stuff. It's just too crowded here. Not enough room to spread out. Like, it's just distraction. Talking about this, talking about that. It just interests me when I'm done with work. You know, 'we're gonna go smoke later on', you know. Stuff like that. To tell you the truth, it [district alternative school] was like the classes now. But you weren't allowed to talk about this kind of stuff and that's what helped me out because all we would talk about is learning. No side chatter about, 'Yeah, you know what happened last week?' you know?

I knew it all about the outside, but not education. I realized that you need an education here. When I started coming to [CCS], I, I would just think about working all this time, just think about work, work, work. And, I found out that you needed to graduate in order to get a job in the real world. You need an education to be somebody, not a nobody.

Thoughts coming into my head, random thoughts just telling me that. Because I see the big ballers out there and they all have money and that's education right there. An education is happiness, mostly.

Education brings happiness - when you're done with it. Getting it is a pain in the ass. But when you look at it, when you're already making \$500 checks just graduating high school, or if you go beyond, you're getting more than that, twice as that. You get cars, houses.

Yeah. I'm graduating here. I'll work for a year with my dad, and then join the marines. Like, cut down and take the trunks of the trees and grind them up, shred them up. Carry them up big hills, you know. I just want to do that so I can get a good credit and buy them a home before I go to the marines, because they always wanted a house.

I can handle the Marines. I've always wanted to be a Marine. I've always wanted to be in the Army, in the military. There was something about war I really liked.

My parents didn't go to school. My mom only made it up to Sixth Grade. My dad only made it up to no grades. They were both born in Mexico. But they were here for 23 years already. No education what so ever but they're really intelligent people.

My mom's scared of being arrested.

If I wake up at 7:20, my mom's in my ear barking like a Chihuahua. Can't miss a day of school. If I have to, that's when I'm really, really sick. My asthma's coming up. That's the only days I miss school, when my asthma comes up.

School's important to me, yeah. Yeah. I want to get it done. I don't want to be considered a dropout. I don't want to be considered a...What are those people called? Never went to have school.

I just want to get out of here. And go to work. Yeah. I just want to work. Help my parents out. I need a diploma in order to get a job somewhere, anywhere.

Rainman did graduate and did get a job as a cook at a local pancake house. He registered for community college and qualified for a grant that covered books and tuition. However, the financial aid office was slow to process the paperwork so the funds were late in arriving. Without money for books, he had to drop all but one class.

## Cluster #2 (Low Average)

**Eddie's story**<sup>10</sup>. Eddie was a charmer and a con artist. A listener knows he should not be encouraged but cannot help but smile at his beguiling ways. When asked about the pseudonym he would like to use, he winked at the researcher and asked, "What's your husband's name?" Throughout his schooling, he has demonstrated strong academic capabilities, notably in math. According to his teacher, he completed the first quarter of a mastery based, self paced, online Algebra II course in one weekend, because he wanted to stay inside to avoid getting in trouble.

However, his story suggests that trouble has a way of finding him:

[In elementary] I would be disruptive in class, just being a little kid messing around. I wouldn't let the teacher teach. I was just messing around, not listening to her, just doing my own thing. Not listening, that's about it. Just talk back to the teacher and not do my work, that's about it.

They would call my mom every other day telling her, 'Oh, your son is behaving bad.' I really never got suspended, but they would just always call her and tell her about my behavior. She got tired of it. Like I wouldn't listen to them. Like they would tell me to sit down, I wouldn't. I would just talk back to them. Like, I can't stay still. Like I have to move around, just get up out of my seat and walk around. Which, teachers don't like that and that's about it.

Like I said, I would do all my work. The main reason was my behavior. They suspended me once cause, um, I pushed a kid in the classroom, but...

My parents aren't really ever home. They're usually at work. So, I would just be with my brothers. Well, two of my brothers. The other one, the one that gang bangs, he would be out there with his homies. But, yeah, like my mom and dad would get home late, like around sevenish, and by that time I'm just in my room, watching TV. I would

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<sup>10</sup> Audio files are "Eddie's story.mp3" and "Eddie's Story.wav".

clean the house and stuff for my mom so she won't have to go home tired from work and have to deal with cleaning the house. I would just clean it for her. She would be happy with that. She would just say, 'Oh, thank you, son' I'm like, 'you're welcome' So, I didn't really cause problems at the house.

When I was 13, like I would see my brother doing it [hanging with a gang]. Like back then, I was just into soccer. I still am, but not as much. But like my brother would bring his homeys to the house and stuff. He would have respect. So, I was like, 'Oh, that's cool.' My brother wouldn't do drugs, so I was like, 'Oh, that's cool because I don't want to do it either.' But as I got, as I got older, I started kicking it with my brother's homies and he would get mad at me. But, he really couldn't do nothing because he went to juvie for about a year and two months for attempted murder.

So he would just write to me. He'd just tell me, 'Oh, don't do the same mistake as me.' But, I don't know. I just didn't hear him. I would be kicking it with his homies. Then that's how I got into the gang.

Yes ma'am. To this very day, I am [a gang member].

I think seventh. Yeah, middle school. They would just send me to the office. They know me a lot. They'd just be like, 'Oh, you again [name deleted]? You don't understand your lesson, huh?' I'm like, 'Nope.' In middle school, I would have to stay Friday night school and all that stuff. But at times, I would lie to my parents. I would tell them, 'I'm going to stay after school and get extra help.' In reality, I was in Friday night school detention.

They [my parents] got frustrated with me, but I told them at least I'll do my work. I have passing grades. I haven't flunked. Be happy with that. They're like, 'Yeah, but change your behavior. That's all we're asking.'

Yeah. I've always done my work. That's my first thing. I always do my work. That's what teachers told me before they told my parents. 'He's a good student, he does all his work and stuff, but his main problem is his behavior. He's just very disruptive' and just stuff like that.

I'd use profanity. I would just cuss out other students. I would never even, I wouldn't fight, but I would just, I would um kinda start fights, so yeah. That's about it. I would be disruptive, like I said. I wouldn't listen to the teacher. I would just get up and do my own thing, like command myself. Like, I kinda wouldn't listen to my own parents at the

house, so I'm like, 'Who are you to tell me what to do in school? You're a nobody. You're just a teacher.' But, now, I see things different, because they're the ones trying to teach me, trying to make my future better, and I got to respect that.

It really didn't work. One point in time in my life, like, I think it was 9th grade; I behaved good like for two months. Like, they wouldn't call my parents. None of that. I told my parents, 'Are you guys happy now? They're not calling you no more.' They're like, 'No. That's your job. You're not supposed to be disruptive in class.' Then that kinda disappointed me. I thought they were going to be happy like, 'That's well done son. That's what I'm expecting from you.' Like, they didn't tell me nothing so I was like, screw this and I went to behaving bad again.

Yeah, I would do my work and stuff. But like I said, it's just my behavior. That's what got me into trouble. Yeah, [I got] Bs, Cs. [I failed] just one, Spanish. I'm a Mexican so it's weird if I failed it, but, yeah, it was pretty hard.

I'd have to say [my favorite subject] it would be math, because I'm pretty good at math. I'm not really good at English because, like I said, I'm Mexican. So, Science, I don't like it. History, I don't like it. Like the way I see it, I don't care about history. That's in the past. I just like doing math. I like working with numbers

Yeah, I got, I got expelled like the first couple of, like the first month of 10th grade.

Cause, in my regular high school, I was making easy money, which that means I was slanging [selling drugs]. I was slanging marijuana, I got too excited. I had to stop, but I was making easy money so I didn't want to stop. To one day security caught me.

During school, yeah, yes, ma'am, during break. I was...

Yeah, I guess someone snitched on me so. During break, I was delivering a sack and then I looked kinda suspicious that day so they just stopped me and searched me and they found a 50 sack of marijuana on me. Plus I already, I was on two behavior contracts already so that was my last chance.

Yeah, well as soon as I got expelled, I went to [CCS] for like a year. Then some kid, well not a kid, some adult told me if I wanted a gun, cause I'm into gang banging. So, I was like, oh sure, it's just protection, you know. And then yeah, I had it with me for at least a

month. Then one day I caught the homeys and two girls so we went to go drink up. I had the gun on me. And like, just the police rolled up on us and then they ended up searching all of us, and I was the one with the gun. So that's the first time I visited juvie.

It was my first offense, so I didn't do no major time. I was just there for like a month and a half. But then that got me on probation, well not just normal probation. It's GSU [Gang Suppression Unit] because they have me down as a [gang name deleted] member. So I can't hang around with my brother because he's from [gang name deleted] too, or any other gang members. So yea that's what got me on GSU.

Then I went back to Mr. [name deleted] and [CCS site]. He took me back and gave me another chance but then like five months, no it was exactly eight months later, one of the homeys told me if I wanted to start slanging again. So, I said, 'Yeah, easy money. Why not? I need money for my baby for diapers and stuff.' I just said yeah. I went to his house and picked up the weed. It was past my curfew cause my curfew is six. It was around 7:30 aroundish 7:30 yeah and then yeah the gang unit rolled up on me. That was while going back home on my beach cruiser and then um, and they just stopped me. They were like, 'Oh, [name deleted] it's past your curfew'. They just put me in handcuffs and ended up searching me. I had 9.9 grams of weed on me. And back to the Hall, same amount, a month and a half.

I tried to go back with Mr. [name deleted] but he wouldn't accept me. Then I had to come over here to [another CCS site].

I was [a good student], but like I would mess around too because like I had my homies there. If we're all together, then we all mess around and stuff. That's what got him mad, too. That's why he don't want to take me back, because he knew I was going to mess up again. That's why in [CCS] right here in [CCS site] I'm doing good. If I would have gone back to [CCS site], pretty sure I would have gotten kicked out again. I got suspended so many times over there, but I guess he never put it in the computer in the system, but yeah. I would do good. I would do my work, but my behavior wasn't that good.

It's just something about me that has to mess around or something. Be the comedian in the class, I don't know.

Cause right here in [CCS], they pay more attention to you. They help you more out. Like in a regular high school, because they have a lot of students so, they really don't focus, focus on you just at once. Cause there's a lot of students so they've got to pay attention to all of them. On the other hand, over here, like if I ask for help, they help me out

because there's not that many students here. Right here because I got more attention. They helped me more out. Meanwhile at [my regular high school] the classroom was about 24 students so the teacher couldn't just focus on me. I was falling behind. My grades went up [at CCS].

Well, I wouldn't [change anything at CCS] because I've learned a lot of things here. It's perfectly fine here. People think it's a bad school. Oh, it's a continuation school. You're a bad guy. But, in reality, you're not. It's just a better school. On my part, I think it's a better school than a regular high school because they give you more attention and stuff. Yet, again, people think, 'Oh, no, that's a continuation school. You shouldn't graduate from there. You should graduate from [names of traditional high schools deleted] high school cause it's a good well known school.'

But, yet, again, like I said, I'd rather stay at [CCS]. But I want to go to [regular high school] and graduate there so my parents can be happy with me because that's one of their wishes, for me to graduate.

I had the choice to go to [district continuation school] and graduate there because you only need 200 credits, I think. And then I could take the easier way and just graduate there but, naw, I want to go and give my parents the happiness and graduate at [name of regular high school deleted] High.

I'm going to take the summer off and help my mom out. Cause she's helped me out with a lot of stuff. She's been there for me. She cleans houses, so she gets tired. She's getting old, so I'm going to help her out. Just get money and give it to her and some for my baby and stuff, try to help out the family.

No, no [I am not going to sell drugs]. It's an easy way, but sooner or later, you're going to get caught. If you do it 99 times and get away with it, the 100th time you're going to get caught. So it's not worth it.

Yeah, I've learned it. It had to take two times for me to learn it, but I did, and that's the good part. Some people say it's too late, but in reality it's not. It's never too late to change.

No, I don't [use drugs]. I've done it before. I've tried marijuana. But what's the point of getting high if you're all dumb and looking stupid? I really don't see the point of doing that. I don't smoke my own product. I just sell it. Why would I smoke my own product? I'd rather have money than being all dumb and stuff.

Some people get hooked up on their own product, and instead of selling it, like they smoke it or inject it, and that's how they ruin their life. I'd rather make money instead of ruining my life. I could ruin it by just, yeah, getting caught, but I can ruin it faster by getting...like if I inject myself, or do marijuana. Then, yeah, I'm going to finish with my life quicker.

Yeah, I go back in August, August, back to regular high school. I'm pretty nervous because I haven't been there for two years. So, I don't know what to expect. I'm pretty sure I'm not going to mess up. I'm going to just do my work and graduate and get over it.

No. It's just that...The only thing I'm scared about is just my behavior that I'm going to fall back into not listening to the teacher and stuff. I'm pretty sure I'm going to come through and graduate at least.

I'm pretty sure they'll be looking at me closely and stuff because they know me already. So, yeah, they're going to be checking up on me and stuff.

[Stay in the gang?] I don't think so, because it's getting pretty old. It's just the same thing. So, I think I'm going to get out pretty soon. It's not going to get me nowhere in life, either prison or death. I have a kid to think about so...

[My kid was born] November 5th, 2011. Yes, ma'am. I've got to do good for him. That's why I want to go to college. My expectations are for him to go to college. He's going to say, 'Well, if you didn't go to college, why should I go?' So that's not going to look good on my part, so I have to go to college and give him a good example.

Give my son a better life than I had. My parents did everything they could, but I didn't take advantage of that. So...that's not good on my part.

Well, I really don't know what classes there are right now because, like I said, I haven't been there for two years. I don't know what to expect. But I'm pretty sure I'm going to take [Community College] classes to get a little extra credits because I need electives.

Yeah, that's my plan. I'm going to play for the high school teams, because that's one of my dad's like dreams. Soccer, yeah, because he's had me playing since I was six years old. He's had me here and there. Like, he wouldn't go to work just to take me to a soccer game. So on my part, I just messed up what I did. I took advantage of that. I'm

going to try to play soccer. I know, I know I could make it, so I'm going to give him that wish so he can be happy with me.

Try to go to college. Well, first of all, I want to clear my record because I have a felony. So, I want to go to college and study for something in the law. I'm trying to be like a police or something.

Yeah, law enforcement, yeah. Or I would like to work in Juvenile Hall. Cause like the guy, the offers told me there that you don't have to go to college but you just need to have a clean record. And they gave good money and they don't do nothing much. They just tell the guys to like...what to do

If you want to be a supervisor then, yeah, you have to go to college. But if you just want to be a probation officer like inside there you don't have to go to college. It's not necessary.

Yeah, I would like to go to college, be the second member of my family to go to college.

Yeah, I'm pretty sure I can. From what I've heard, it's not that hard. It's just a lot of work. You've just got to hang in there. But, I'm pretty sure I can do it.

That's about it.

Shortly after his interviews, Eddie was arrested for violating his probation by hanging around his brother and fellow gang members. He spent several weeks in a juvenile detention facility. His probation officer decided that he no longer could have his summer off. He returned to his original CCS site until his residential school started the school year. However, when the high school found out about the arrest he was denied readmission, effectively expelling him permanently. He is currently attending CCS.

**Jacob's story**<sup>11</sup>. Jacob was a White young man of slight build and shoulder length hair, combed most of the time to hide his eyes. He had just turned 16 at the time of his interview and had been with CCS for about 6 months. As you will hear in his story, doctors have diagnosed Jacob with ADHD, depression, several anxiety disorders, and bipolar disorder. He refused to take medication and did not feel he needed once he began to attend CCS. This placement seemed to suit him. He was, however, worried about having a place to live. Here is Jacob's story:

I was at [name deleted] Community Day School, and before that I was at several other schools, which I got kicked out of, and, I don't know, it was like a couple of days of each...Like I went to each school for a couple of days, and then I got kicked out. All for just random reasons, all of them were different reasons, but they are all like really bad reasons, and I have that is why I am ended up here.

[In elementary school] I got like all As in everything. I was a good kid up to middle school. Elementary was perfectly fine, got As, Bs and Cs. And, yeah, and then when I started middle school, I think the first year of middle school, it was all right, and then I started hanging out with the wrong people. And then the next year, I started doing more drugs, and then, and then I started getting in fights, and then getting kicked out of places, and classes, and getting suspended and expelled.

Yeah, I, I was, uh, sort of, I don't really want to say, but like in a gang involvement, and then, and then I left it, and I tried to bring up my grades, cause I didn't want to be like a bad kid and kicked out of schools, but then it happened anyways. And my first time getting expelled and arrested was seventh grade, and I brought a knife to school, and it was like, I didn't even know I had the knife on me. I just went to school, and I was going for my stuff, and it fell out and a kid found a assistant principal and they told on me, and then I got arrested for that. And then he said that he was going to press charges for some reason, I don't know how but, he said he was, but he didn't, and then yeah...

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<sup>11</sup> Audio files are "Jacob's story.mp3" and "Jacob's Story.wav".

The day before, I had bought a whole bunch of BB guns, and me, my brother and a whole bunch of my friends were playing like army in the back of my house, cause we were bored. So, we just started shooting, we just started shooting each other, and then like I just had the knife on me for props. And like, I guess, like I was using my backpack to hold all my BB guns, and the knives, and like the pellets and everything, and I guess, I left the knife in there, and I had no clue when I brought it to school.

Yeup, [this was the first] major trouble, yes. The other times it was just because I like said stuff to the teacher and just got suspended, but that was my first time being arrested and expelled.

When I got arrested and expelled, what happened was, is I guess it was a suspension. They said I was expelled, and it was like two weeks later, they called the house and they said that I am allowed to come back. So, I finished up my time there, and when I was arrested, it was under the, it was under the school's arrest, so I didn't get in to like lot of trouble. I didn't have to go to juvie, no tickets, nothing. I was just arrested in that school. And then I had to serve community service for 24 hours.

After that, I started to do my work cause I didn't want to get in to trouble. Cause, they said if I get in trouble one more time, I'm going to get locked up, and I didn't want to have to do that. So, I started to do my work, and then, I finish up seventh grade, and then I went on to eighth grade. Eighth grade, I just remembered, but I did get arrested in eighth grade too

[laughing] Two of my friends, we were, we were in, uh, science class and there was a substitute, and she was being really mean to both of us, so what we did was we went in to her purse and I stole 100 bucks off of her. And the next day I went to school. The police officers came in to the classroom. They took me out, they put me in handcuffs, and they said, we found your fingerprints on her purse.

And I didn't know that they can like look for fingerprints on a purse cause I just figured I am just going to take this 100 bucks and go buy some stuff. I didn't know that they would call some CIA stuff and check for fingerprints, but they did, and I then got arrested. And then they said, that they are not going to do anything if I pay them back half, and then my other friend has to pay back half. So, we paid 50\_50, and yeah...

I was suspended for, I think, a week, and that was about it. A week, and then we just had to pay back the money, and I worked with my dad

for that money. I went to his construction job when he had, and then I made back the 50 bucks and I had to pay them back.

My grades ranged from Cs and let's say Bs to Fs. I wasn't [passing all my classes]. I didn't have any As from seventh to eighth. I had no As at all. All were Cs, Bs, Fs, and Ds.

[I failed] math, all my math classes from middle school were all Fs. Never passed any math classes, never passed any science. PE, I never dressed out, so I never got any credits for PE. And basically PE, science, and math I got all Fs. Everything else I had Dc and Cs.

And then when I went to high school from my freshman year, I made it through the whole freshman year at [high school name deleted].

And well I had to do some, I had to fill out some paperwork, like a behavior contract to make sure that I am not gonna go to [high school name deleted] and then start messing around and do all the bad stuff. And I signed it, and then I ended up breaking it.

I broke the...it was like a tardy contract, sort of, cause I never liked to go to school. And I think I ditched 60 days I think, like more than 60 days. And then they just got fed up, and they said, you're not allowed back at the school next year.

Well I was, I was at [high school name deleted] for my freshman year, and then halfway through, I decided to go try another school, and so I went to Charter, and then in a whole month I showed up two days, and so, they sent me out of there, and then I went back to [high school name deleted], and then they said that I am allowed to stay there, but next year, I can't come back.

I used to do ecstasy every day. I was basically addicted. That was when I ran away from home, and I was living with a drug dealer for two, maybe like one and one-half months. That was during the time that I didn't go to school. And I was living with them. My mom didn't know where I was at. And then, she started to call the cops, and then she found me at a park. Where, she knew I always go there every Friday to hang out with all my friends, because that's the gathering place where we all go and smoke weed and have fun and whatever, and then she came, and then she picked me up, and then she took me home.

And then, that's when I finished up. I forget when that even happened, because I can't really remember because of the drugs.

So, I finished my year there, and then when I went there, because I just wanted to double check if I can go back and they said no. and then I went to [school name deleted], the Community Day School, and then I had an incident with a teacher, when I told him I was going to kill him, and then I got kicked out, and then they sent me here.

When I went to the Community Day School, I was there, let's say three days, and then one of my homies was over there, and the teacher kept talking smack to him, so, I told him that I was going to go to his house and kill him, and then I thought, I thought that, that was nothing. I thought it was just like a joke. I didn't know I could get in trouble for it. And then, my mom comes. And I am like, 'Why you're here?' And she is like, 'You got in to trouble for something.' And I was like, 'What did I get in to trouble for?'

And then the teacher sends her to the office, and my mom is talking to the principal, and they leave the door cracked. And then, the first thing my mom says is, 'Did you call the cop yet?' And then when I heard that, I got mad. So, I ran. [laughs] and as I was running, there was a cop around the corner, but he didn't get the description of me, so he didn't stop me. So, I just kept running, and they didn't catch me, but my mom caught me a mile or two away. And then she said, 'You've got to go back,' and I said, 'No.' So, we just went home, and then they said that I have to have a meeting with the counsel of like schools and something, I don't know, and I went...

Yeah, [it was] the school board, and then they basically said, I am not allowed in any [city name deleted] High School Districts, and if I even go into one, I can be, uh, think arrested, I don't know. Because I think supposedly I am a threat to the teachers, because of that one incident, when I was jokingly saying that I was going to kill him.

Yeah, that's the reason why I am referred here.

I like this school too much. And I am actually going to try to graduate here. And what I am probably going to do is, since there are no breaks and I have had a break for a long, long, long time, what I was thinking is...When I'm a junior, I think, I'm going to drop out for a couple months and then come back and finish it up. I don't know if you can do that. But that's what I'm going to try to do. I was just going to drop out for like a month or two, take a little break and then come back, finish up my work and then graduate, and then college.

Yes, [here] I have, I think, maybe like an 80 percent increase on my grades and everything. I do more work than I've ever done in any other school. The teachers here, I'm actually nice with. I don't talk back to

them or anything. I don't try to start anything with any kids. I'm doing good here so.

This place, they actually understand where the people are coming from, so then they know how to deal with the people better. They actually take their time to understand their situation to find out different ways to teach them. Instead of just saying, 'Hey, everybody inside this whole entire class has to do the same thing and then next period you go here and next period you go here.' The main reason why I didn't like high schools is because I have anxiety, ADHD, depression and, and I forget.

Doctors diagnosed all of it. It's just, they prescribed me medicine, and then I basically said, cause all those medicines can make you hallucinate, and all this weird stuff, and basically I just said, 'I am not going to take something what's not herbal.' because I don't like pills. I don't like anything like that. Cause I just, I don't like that. I like to stay actually healthy instead of like...pills are healthy, but it's still, you're pumping your body with a whole bunch of chemicals. And that's in my opinion, I don't like it at all. So, that's why I just don't do it.

I haven't taken medicine for it. Well, I used to take medicine and then it started making me worse, so I just decided not to. I don't know why I don't want to, because I don't like it. But I'm doing perfectly fine now. I just didn't like it, cause I had too much stress over having to deal with all those different classes, all those different teachers. I just couldn't keep track with all of them, and the homework and all that.

Then when I came here...It's just one teacher. Everyone does the same thing. There's no periods, different classes, nothing. It's just one teacher, one classroom and that's the way I like it. It's a better learning environment than other schools.

I've learned way more than I've ever learned at any other school. Here, every time I come, I at least pay attention. I learn a lot here rather than other schools where I show up and I don't even listen, because I can't keep track with anything. So I never learned anything. That's why I didn't care and that's why I started ditching. Because I was like, 'I'm not learning anything, so what's the point of going.'

[I plan to] graduate, umm, take a couple months off and then go to culinary arts. Because I want to be able to cook, and then...get my masters, I don't know what it's called, but I want, I want to start a restaurant or something. Because that's always been my dream, to go out and cook, because I love cooking. I'm a great cook. I cook for my mom all the time.

I'm learning a lot here so I'm pretty sure if I stay here for another two years, I'd be ready for college.

I'm shocked, because I've actually seen a couple of A's. Cause we got a report card...I think I had a D, like two days ago. And then I stayed after for an hour...actually, two. One hour one day and then an hour the other day. Now I'm up to a C. I'm actually doing pretty good here, instead of having all F's. I actually have a lot of A's here.

[I'm] more focused. I can actually keep up with what they're doing and teaching. It's a good environment, so I can actually pay attention here.

It's usually just the teachers [that make it work for me], because I am actually really shocked that I haven't cussed out any teachers here yet. I am really shocked. Because whenever I get annoyed with the teacher, I just fight down my tongue, which I am so not used to doing. I am used to just walking up to them and just cussing them out and then walking out. But I don't want to do that here, because this is my favorite schools ever so.

In case you say weed's a drug. Well obviously it is [laughing], but yes, that's about it [for drug use]. No definitely not [anything else]! I hate all those drugs.

Umm, [I use marijuana] once every week...well I never have any. I just randomly, I'll just meet up with a friend, and then he might have some, and then that's when I'll do it. But I never need it. It's just, it's just there.

It's actually helping me to study, cause, I've been trying to get my medical card, because that does help with anxiety. It's proven to help with anxiety, stress, and bipolar. And there are certain kinds because, I basically went online for like five hours looking everything up and checking everything out.

Well I, I get sick a lot, and they don't really believe it. My mom sort of believes it, but sometimes like I'll be sick, and then I'll be like, 'OK, I am just going to stay home today.' And then right when my mom comes home, I'll be perfectly fine, because I have had soup and everything. She will come home and she will be like, 'Why are you playing video games?' I will be like, 'I am not sick any more. I feel good.' And she will be like, 'You're lying.' And then I'll have to stay in for detention cause then she, cause then she'll call the school and like 'Well he just ditched. And blah, blah, blah, blah...' and yeah!

[I play] everyday, I love video games. It's one of my favorite things to do. Sort of say a hobby, but it's not really hobby, cause all I'm doing is just moving my fingers, but still I love video games, yes it's fun.

It was fair [how the other schools treated me], but it wasn't like...it was fair in their opinion, but in my opinion, it's not fair because they didn't know what I was going through. Like, they had no clue about how we were really poor, and all this stuff, because I think, yeah, last year, we were homeless, and we were living in a homeless shelter for six months or so, and then they helped us out with an apartment which we're living in right now. And they used to pay half the rent, but now they are not paying anything. And my mom only has one job, so it's kind of hard to keep it. And my mom's thinking that we might get kicked out and move back to the homeless shelter some time soon. We are not sure, because my brother is just graduating today. So, that's why he's going to go out and get a job to help pay rent. So, I am pretty sure we're going to stay there.

Yeah, it is [tough], but at least I hang in there. Try to make the best of every little situation. Yeah [I'm worried], just about my mom, because she stresses out about everything

I just try to just say like, what's there to stress about life is, life's a bitch, just whatever happens, happens. At least you'll always have family.

That's about it.

At the time of this writing, Jacob was still attending CCS. He was listed as an 11<sup>th</sup> grader but he only had 42 credits. By credit count, he was still completing his freshman year. His MAP test scores show a slow steady improvement while he was at CCS. His latest scores placed him at the 30% level for beginning ninth graders in reading and language arts and at the 5% level in math. Shortly after his final interview Jacob was placed on a short term independent study contract because his family had become homeless and had yet to find a stable residence.

### Cluster #3 (High BPNS)

**Raul's story**<sup>12</sup>. Raul's story stands out because he was pulled out of his honor classes in seventh grade, which began a downward spiral of disengagement with school and deeper engagement with a gang and trouble. Still, he sees CCS as the best thing that ever happened to him, and is grateful to the teachers and staff for helping him see the value of education. Raul was expelled twice in middle school and is about to attend a traditional high school for the first time as a senior. Heartbreaking and reaffirming, here is Raul's story:

I've been at [name deleted] CCS for almost four, five years.

Well, in seventh grade I got expelled from [name deleted] Middle School for some, for sexual battery at school. So then, they sent me to [name deleted] CCS and I came here for a year at this site and then, I went back. And then, I got into a fight there again in eighth grade cause I went back in eighth grade and then, I came back in eighth grade. And then um, well, here I am. I've been here ever since. And I'm, I'm trying to get back to the district cause I don't know, I really wanted to graduate from [name deleted] CCS, but I guess all the staff is saying that I should just go back just to get that high school experience, you know.

I kinda learned a lot in elementary school, but then once, in elementary school, I was actually smart. I had, um, I forget what they call it, it was like honors in a way. But I got to middle school and I had honors for one year, but then like, I had my the first, my first day of seventh grade, I had honors and some teacher just came in and said, 'Oh, you're in the wrong class. You're not supposed to be in honors anymore.' And they just took me to the regular class.

I was just like, 'What the...?', you know like, I thought I was in honors, you know. Like, I was supposed to be in honors and I think that was like one of the biggest downturns, you know. I was like, like 'What? Like they, can they actually just do that?' Like, I was just sitting there

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<sup>12</sup> Audio files are "Raul's story.mp3" and "Raul's Story.wav".

in my class and it was honors everything and like they just changed my whole schedule. They're like, 'No, you're not in honors.'

I've gotten, I have gotten good grades [in sixth grade honor classes] like not all A's, but I've gotten C's and B's you know. And then, yeah, I just got to seventh grade and that's when they just told me, 'Oh, yeah, you're not in honors you, you.' They like switched my whole schedule.

Yeah. It kinda, really frustrated me cause I was practically taking the math class I was taking the year before. And then I was learning the English I was learning, um, learning the year before you know. And then it was like, it was kinda different. It wasn't really a challenge you know. So, I wasn't really taking it serious.

Well, I've lived in the neighborhood all my life so...

[I started hanging out in the gang] like fifth grade, sixth grade. Yeah and I think I got more, the more deeper and deeper hanging with them.

I started. I didn't really take it to school until [name deleted] Middle School because there's a bunch of like gang activity there, well, little kid gang activity you know. It's not like big gang activity.

Not really, [I didn't hang out at school], not as much. Not at school you know, not at school. But then, in seventh grade is when it kinda like, you know, it all started. It came from the streets into school.

Oh, I was at PE and like, we were, like, messing around and like I, I touched a girl's behind and like she got, she got mad. Cause I thought she was just going to take it playing around and she went and she told like the principal on me. And the principal, I got arrested that day. And since I had a record, like the principal told me, like he kinda actually kinda straight up told me oh like 'Finally we have a reason to kick you out.' you know like.

Yeah, and he didn't like me cause I always disrespected him. So, like he practically told me, you know 'Finally, this is it. You're out of our school.'

I think certain kids got treated differently, you know. The kids that like the kids that really like that kept on getting in trouble, those are the kids, I think, that the principals like kinda had like a personal issue against, you know like, like, 'This kid's making my school look bad you know. Like, they don't want to listen. They're causing trouble in my school.' You know, and I think that's why. Well, like compare, let's say something. Like the straight A student and then like me, like

the little kid that messes around. If that straight A student would have went and grabbed the girl's behind, I don't think he would have gotten expelled, you know. He would of, might have gotten arrested, you know. He might have gotten like that, but I think they would have just suspended him for a couple of days, and then, just brought him back, like nothing happened, you know. But for me, I think since they already had an anger towards me, in a way, they just like, they, they saw it as the chance, [claps] 'Let's boot him!' you know.

I already had a record at that school, you know. I wasn't on a contract or anything, but I think when they took me to my board meeting, they showed everything, you know, all my suspensions, all my...

I had a, I had several [suspensions]. I've also had in school suspension, as well.

I never really had no one to tell me like, oh like, every time I went to the office, they'd be like, 'Again?!' Like they'll be, 'Again?!' Like they wouldn't sit down and say like, 'Oh, you know like you really need to make a change.' They didn't tell me how it was going to affect me long-term. They just sat down and told me like, 'Again? You're doing this. You're doing that.' Like, they sat down and practically screamed at me. They didn't tell me like, 'Oh, the things you're doing now, is really going to affect you long-term you know, you really got to think about it.' They didn't sit down and talk to me that way.

And then when I came back, they just didn't want, they just. They, I was on a zero tolerance, I guess. I got in a fight. Then, I came [back here].

They usually just suspend you for five days and then, the second fight you get in, that's the, that's either... It depends on the person you know. Cause I heard of, it used to be three fights, three fights and you're out, but I guess now its two fights. But for me, it was just that one fight and they just suspended me for five days. And I thought it was just going to be a suspension for five days. But they're like, 'No, you're getting expelled.'

It's been pretty good [at CCS]. Well, I thought when I first came here I thought it was going to be bad. Like my school made it seem like it was going to be bad that I was just going to turn bad, when I came here. And for a little bit, yeah, like I was goofing off, but then, after a while I met a couple people from the staff at [name deleted] CCS that actually helped me realize, that education was going to be what was going to get me out of the life I was living, you know. Then, so I started taking education serious and [name deleted] CCS helped me a lot. I don't

think, if I would have came, if I would have never came to [name deleted] CCS, I don't even, I don't think I would have ever taken school serious. Cause at a normal high school, you're just, you see people, your teachers like 45 minutes once a day, you know. And at [name deleted] CCS you're with your teacher all day, so your teacher knows where you need to grow and what your strengths are. So I think [name deleted] CCS really helped me learn what I was, what I needed in life, what I needed to make some changes, so I could be successful. So [name deleted] CCS has been a great experience for me.

Never been to a traditional high school, but from middle school, I remember middle school. All they really wanted to do was practically get me out of there. Like, if you make them look bad... Like, yeah, there are a couple people that might try to help you, but what they're really trying to do is just kick you out. Cause they have so many kids to deal with that I think they're just, they try to kick you out. And it's harder, it's harder over there for like someone to help you. Well, for me, that's what I thought. Cause I never got any help from like from the teachers I got here, like from education. They never told me, 'Oh, come after school to come and learn,' like, you know if you don't understand something. And here, at [name deleted] CCS, when I don't understand something, they actually tell me you can come before school or after school and all that. They don't, like at normal high schools I think it's just like they don't really help you as much. Well, that's what my experience was.

Mostly when they send you back, you're on a zero tolerance you know. So I didn't, I didn't really learn anything in eighth grade cause all that thing, but then, after I came, I came to [name deleted] CCS, I started like actually learning stuff again. Cause right here you know, I went to different kinds of sites. I went to the [name deleted] site, to the [name deleted] site, to the, um, independent study. I actually, I actually dropped out for a little bit, for like a couple months. And like [name deleted] CCS, like they actually kept on calling me you know, like they just didn't leave me alone. They kept on calling, you know, like 'Why isn't your son going to school?' and this and that. And then I think that's why, that's what's one of the reasons, you know. They don't, they don't just let you go like, 'Oh, yeah, let's let him drop out.' They chase you down, you know, in a way. They talk to your parents. And they, cause I went to [name of site deleted] and after that, I went to independent studies and practically, after independent studies, I only did one of the assignments and ever after that I stopped going to school for like six, seven months. But the thing that kinda like really helped me out. Well cause it was in eighth grade, you know, so when I came

back I had only missed a couple of months from ninth grade, so I wasn't really that behind [or] credit deficient.

[I] seriously thought like I wasn't going to graduate high school. I was just going to drop out and just go to juvenile hall. But then I, like there came a point in my life, where I just realized it's not all that. All those stupid things aren't going to take me nowhere in life, the gangs, the drugs, the fooling around in class you know. So yeah, it was a lot of help, when I came back over here. Everybody gave me the support I needed, you know, not only educational, but about life, too you know. So I think this program has been the best thing that ever happened to me in my life.

I think I was going through that whole little stage of like messing around in class and everything. And after a while like, it wasn't even about that, it was just like I never went to school or nothing, cause it was, it was like kind of far, you know? But then, um, I stopped going to the [name deleted] site, and that's when I got accepted to Ms. [name deleted] class and I was like, 'Hey, why not?' You know, it's local. And I started coming here, and they went great. Ever since, I think ever since I started Ms. [name deleted] class, ever since then I started doing way better in school.

Cause Ms. [name deleted] pressured, like pressured you to come to school, you know? Like she never let you give up you know. She wasn't the type of teacher that, just cause you don't go to school or just cause you do something like this, she's just going to release you like that. She tries to work with you to improve, you know? And like that's why like ever since I came back to [name deleted], this site, it helped me a lot. I've been getting good grades.

Cause you got, you got people that actually care about you, you know, that are calling your house when you don't go to school. Like you know, if they see you're doing something bad, they actually catch your attention, you know? They just don't let you, let you slide you know. They actually try to talk to you to improve, not to...they don't just give you the boot when they get tired of you. Sometimes [other CCS sites] they're just like, you know, they're just like 'Oh, just let this kid go' You know? But right here they work with you to improve, you know? I don't think you get released here until they see that you're not going to change, you know? unless they didn't try. Unless they didn't try to help you improve, they're not going to let you go just like that.

[Name deleted] doesn't take crap, but if you're serious about school he'll try to work with you, you know? Because [name deleted] is a good teacher. I've seen him help...my family have gone, other family has

gone to his class too, and he's helped them go to college. He helped them sign up for college and everything. But that's only if you're serious about school.

And with Ms. [name deleted] right now, she's trying to, her class is all about improvement. Not only, not only academically and all that, but also like with your habits you have out of school you know. She tries to get you help, not only by helping you out during class, but what you're doing after school, too.

The very best things about [name deleted] CCS was I think that its like the teachers don't just, like they're not like a regular high school. The teachers they, they have more time to help you, since it's just a one classroom environment. And like at a regular high school, the teachers have hundreds of kids going in and out of their class each day. And here, it's just like 22 class student, and the teacher has time to actually sit down and talk to you. And they, they see you all day and they see like, you know, what you're struggling with. They actually have the time to come and help you. I think the personal help is the best thing about this school, especially, like the staff. They don't, they don't let you. They don't really let you drop. Like, if you don't go to this school, they call you. They hunt you down, you know. And if you're failing a class, they don't just let you fail classes. That's what I like about [name deleted] CCS. They don't fail you. You can't fail. They're going to try their best to raise your grade up, if you have a failing grade. And I think that's what I like about this school. They don't let you fail.

I went [to juvenile hall] twice. But it was nothing to do with school. It was just me messing around in the streets. I got locked up last summer, exactly a year ago, the summer going from tenth grade to eleventh grade. And I got locked up when I was a freshman, the last months of being a freshman. And I, I just, I got locked up. Umm, the first time was for tagging, vandalism and the second time was for beating someone up like real bad. And they pressed charges on me.

Being locked up for me wasn't bad. It was just like that you're sitting there while everybody outside, their life is going, and you're practically...your life is just there, you know? You're not doing anything, you're not hanging out with your friends. You're just there, you know? Everybody's life keeps going, and yours is just like on a pause. It's like playing, press, pressing pause in your life.

Naw, I don't do any of that anymore. I quit all that. I'm just focusing on going to church, and then going to school. Like, I don't do none of that anymore. I try to separate myself from everybody else, and I think that's one of the reasons why I think all the staff from [name deleted]

CCS is trying to get me out of here, since the majority of the kids here are like, well, not all of them. But some of them, that's what they do, you know? Like, in a way they're trying to say that I need to get myself out of this environment. Cause it's a good learning environment, but sometimes, you know, the kids don't take it serious. They just go into class and they practically just, they try to make it a show, you know. Like instead of, they don't let the teacher learn, they try to be the class clown, or they just try to do stupid things and they don't let the people that are actually serious about learning actually learn. But I think that's one of the reasons why they're trying to get me back.

It [gangs] just a dumb stage that everybody goes, you know. And I, I'm lucky and I thank God that it didn't take me to be a 40 year old man coming out of prison to learn that that wasn't the life I wanted. I'm glad that I'm 17 years old. I'm getting off probation in August that I'm still going to be a minor. When I turn 18, my record could be sealed. I could go to college and do what I really want to do without having to worry that I barely got out of prison and I have adult charges. Cause adult charges, once you're an adult, they never go anywhere, you know. I'm excited of getting out of all that, probation, the system. I'm

Yes, I'm pretty sure [I'll be accepted back to the district]. I had my board meeting yesterday, and you know how they show your transcript? They show like all kind of bad grades, bad grades, bad grades. And now recently, since I started going [here] this last time, my grades went up. They were all good. They were As, they were straight As.

Well, maybe [it will be harder in traditional high school]. I can't say. I'm thinking possibly yes, since they're like a traditional school and they try to like, get you. Cause here at [name deleted] CCS the work is challenging, they give you a challenge. You learn stuff, but you don't get homework, you know? That's the thing. I think that's the major thing that's going to challenge me, the homework, to sit down at home and study.

But right...I kind of got that habit, because I would take the independent study book home. And that independent study book, you could finish it in one quarter and you get a lot of credits for it. So I would sit at home and just do hours and hours of work, and work, and work. And I would finish that book and give it to the teacher, and I would get my credit. Its, it's going to be kind of the same.

Here [the school day] it's four hours and 15 minutes. Over there it's going to be like eight hours.

I want to go to college. Well, I really want to be like a probation officer. But I don't know if my background is really going to affect me, I don't know that. And my probation officer now, she's really trying, cause she sees my improvement. She goes...I'm on the gang suppression unit, they go to your house and they check up on you and she goes, she sees me there, they know that I'm not out there on the streets. They don't see me out there anymore. And she told me, she really talked to me serious. She's like, 'I know you're not out doing anything bad now. You're doing your thing. You're not out there doing drugs or hanging out with bad friends, you're really doing good in school. I hear great things about you in school, you get perfect attendance and all that. And you have a 4.0.'

She told me you never really see that on a kid who's on the gang suppression unit. So she told me she's trying to help me out with anything. She's encouraging me to go back to [name deleted] too. So that's why I'm trying to. I really wanted to stay at [name deleted] CCS, but since everybody, all of the adults are encouraging me, I think I should just give it a try, you know.

She's really trying to help me out, clear my record, when I go back to court. She's going to give the best word I've got. [Name of a teacher deleted] told me that anything I need like in the future, even after graduating from high school, like getting a job or anything I want to be that she has my back, too, to say that I've really improved in school.

I think I've learned, I've built the maturity enough not to give in to what people tell me, you know, even if they call me names or try to like punk you. Like I think I've built enough strength to just walk away and laugh. Like 'You're not going to fool me any more!', you know.

I want to be a probation officer of some kind and work with kids that went through the system. And I want to be a probation officer for juveniles because once you turn 18. I want to be a probation officer that stops them before going into jail and into prison you know, before they get into the serious things. Cause juvenile hall and all that, yeah, you're locked up, but you have a chance. You have a chance to get your record sealed, when you turn 18, if you start doing good. You could just forget about what you did in your past and move on into your future, you know. Go to college, get a career. Cause a lot of people that go to prison and that are in jail, they are mostly high school dropouts. Maybe they didn't have a person that tried to counsel them or guided them like I did. Maybe they didn't go to a school, where the teachers sat down with them and talked to them.

CCS is one of the best things that ever happened to me in my life. Cause I think if I wouldn't have ever come to [name deleted] CCS, I wouldn't have met the people that really helped me out in life, you know. Like all the staff here, if I wouldn't have gotten kicked out, I never would have met them you know. I would have never had someone to try to help me out to improve.

I've been on a long journey around schools, but now, I'm ready just to go back to high school and finish it off.

Raul entered a traditional comprehensive high school for his senior year. He was by all accounts doing well and staying out of trouble. His first quarter report card showed all As.

**Kyle's story<sup>13</sup>.** CCS serves an area of over 2,000 square miles, ranging from urban to suburban to rural. Kyle lived in a rural corner of the area, tucked in between two small American Indian reservations. He was a tall lanky White young man with short disheveled, sand-colored hair and an infectious laugh. Kyle had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that states his primary disability was "deficits in attention". Kyle's story highlighted the difficulty many White CSS students have adjusting to a classroom in which they are a minority:

Started in kindergarten. Elementary school, a long time ago, elementary school, you know, the work wasn't hard, it was all about recess and hanging with your friends. Chasing around girls and all that, I don't know.

Since third grade, I went to [name deleted] High School, I mean, Elementary School, in [name deleted]. And I transferred over to [name deleted] Elementary, and then when into [name deleted] Middle School.

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<sup>13</sup> Audio files are "Kyle's Story.mp3" and "Kyle's Story.wav"

Um, I have, I have ADD and in class I cannot concentrate. I'll sit there and I'll sleep. I'll just sleep all the time, every class, just sleep [laughs]. It just gets too boring for me. I just fall asleep. I've gotten, I've gotten some Saturday schools for sleeping [laughs].

Elementary school, yeah I was, I was given, I had to take Adderall and all this stuff. I can't, I did not like Adderall. No, I just can't take that stuff.

Um, it made me really skinny. I couldn't eat.

I just, I was, I just didn't eat and I was lethargic and all this stuff. And actually, I see people out there just like selling those drugs on the street and all that.

I visited a whole bunch of doctors. It was like psychological doctors, and all this stuff, and computer essays.

Just didn't concentrate. I got off task. Mom would just notice me just looking at the wall, and just not [concentrating] towards her and all that. But I kind of grew out of it.

Like, seventh grade, my grandparents used to make me take it, and all this stuff, and I was just like 'no.' Like, I would, like I would pretend to take a pill, and then like I would spit it out and throw it away. I would hide it in my mouth. I just couldn't take them. They just didn't make me the person I was. I just never took it again.

Middle school, that was kind of tough, cause I started to learn a lot. Like, I didn't really like math. My mom started getting on me about math and all that. I just kind of failed some of my classes in middle school.

Equations, fractions, I can't do fractions, can't do it if my life depended on it. I can't do fractions.

I did everything good just...and I was lazy. I was really lazy. I always just wanted to hang out with friends and not do my homework.

[Ninth grade], uh, that was a really big change, you know. You see kids walking around with goatees, and you're just like, 'Whoa, man.' [laughter] and it's, it's a really big change.

[High school name deleted], the worst school, naw, the second worst school I've ever been.

You think you're so cool, but yep, ninth grade was pretty, pretty, pretty crazy. But, you know, I got used to it. And then I just, and then I, that's when I, the ninth grade summer after my freshman year, I, I decided to go live with my dad. And that's where I uh, decided to go to [name deleted] High School. And that was the best, best, best place I've ever been. Yeah, I would go there any day.

Like I felt, I just, I loved it out there. The teachers were so awesome. They just, you know, I had, I had this one teacher, Mr. [name deleted]. He was so cool, I did, I did some work but, you know, he's, he, what he says is he says, 'If I don't feel like you should pass, I'm not going to pass you. But if I feel like you should pass, I'm going to pass you even if you don't do any work.' He was like the coolest teacher ever and you know. When I, when I left I uh, I didn't get to do my workbook for him, and get to turn that in. And if I didn't do it, I would get an F. And I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to, I 'm going to fail World History.' Like no, well yeah, World History, no, it was US History I was like, 'I'm going to fail US History.' And I see him the day after I got expelled because they had to do meetings and stuff with the principal. And he was like, 'I hope to let you know that I gave you a B in my class.' And I was like, 'Oh, yes!' And he gave me a big hug [laughs]. He was so awesome, best teacher I've ever had.

Learned a lot, learned a lot in that high school. Best high school I've ever been to. Football games were cool, people were cool. It was just awesome there. I miss it. I miss it so much [sighs]. Whatever, you know? Life goes on. I still get my diploma. I still see a lot of my friends up there. I actually just hung out with some last night, with some from up there at my high school. Yeah, I still know a lot of people up there.

The best thing [in high school]. Going to homecoming with a girl [laughs]. That was pretty fun, um, my sophomore year.

Um, my thing was, was don't turn in the homework and do well on the tests and you'll be good [laughs]. I did good on the tests it's just I never turned in my homework. See, if you did one or the other you're still going to get like a C or a B. Like if I didn't turn in my homework, I'd do well on the tests. If I didn't do well on the tests, I'd turn in my homework

I was a junior. Three days before school got out for summer. Three days before school [got out].

I had, I had a pellet gun in my car that um, that I forgot was in there. And I was, um, I was doing a like a speech that day, and I didn't know.

And my, the vice principal came in, and someone said something, that there was something in my car. And the um vice principal came down, searched my car, and I had a pellet gun in there. So that was kind of the main reason why I got expelled.

Yeah, the, the night before I was out target shooting with my buddy, and I put it in my car and went home, and I forgot it was in my car. I went to school and it was in my car, and I was like...he was, the vice principal was like, 'Is there anything in your car I should know about?' And I was like, 'Oh, I think I have a pellet gun in my car' [laughs]. And he was like, 'Oh you're going to have...' And then he took it from me, and all this stuff. Yeah. Yeah, that sucked. Cause I guess they thought I was going to go Columbine on the high school or something with the pellet gun, I don't know. But you know? Their rules, right? I knew them.

It was, um, it was a cultural foods in class. And I brought in a food dish I made for the class, and we did that. And that was like my last day, so I kinda, I got expelled when I was in my uh...like a nice suit, and all this [laughter].

I had, I [also] had some cigarettes in my car, and then that was it.<sup>14</sup>

That sucked so bad. I didn't even think I was going to get expelled but I did.

See if I was a junior, if I was a sophomore and I got expelled for all of junior year, I could go back my senior year.

And I was gone, yeah [laughter]. It bums me out, you know? I don't graduate with my friends up in [name deleted]. It sucks.

[I still] felt like I needed to finish school. I still had people in my life that were just like, you know, 'Do it. You know, you, you, you need, you know you only have a year left. Come on now.' This year went by fast, like honestly. It went by so fast.

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<sup>14</sup> Kyle's school record told a different story. It indicated that the assistant principal received an anonymous letter stating that Kyle had marijuana in his car. Upon searching the car, the assistant principal found marijuana, paraphernalia, lighters, cigarettes and the pellet gun.

Yeah. At least I'm going to get my diploma. I know people who just drop out right as soon as they get expelled. And they just drop out and they're just like, 'Oh, I don't care.' But I had just a year and I was like, you know what? I'll just do it. I'm not going to get anywhere if I don't have a high school diploma. I was thinking about getting my GED, but I was like no, I'm just going to get my diploma.

Um, I didn't even think, like I didn't even know when I was going to graduate when I first started my school this year. They're like, 'Oh, we don't even know when you're going to graduate.' But I'm graduating like on time, like June. I thought I was going to graduate in August. Like first [name of independent study teacher deleted] said if I took my [community college] class, I wouldn't graduate until November. So long, like, but, like, I just did it and got all my classes done. So I'm graduating in June.

I took the summer off cause I didn't really have that much credits. I was like, 'I'll make it up in there.' went to uh, [name of CCS site deleted], the worst school I've ever been to.

I just, I felt, I felt like there was racial tensions, racial tensions in there. Not only I was the only white kid in that class. I felt, I felt like intimidated, kind of, by students and all that, like trying to you know. They always they always used to just gang up on me and all that and they used to always tell me like, 'Oh, you know, you little...' like call me like 'white boy' and all this stuff.

Yeah, yeah I'm just like, I just didn't feel like I needed to be there. I was just I literally was the only white kid in that class.

All Latino, all Latino.

No [I didn't learn anything there], so much talking. Just talking and then the students were so immature, and all this crap. I, I almost got into a fight and all this stuff cause they just, they pushed my buttons, and all that. And like, I hated that class so much. I just wanted to just like. I was, I hated every person in that class except Miss [teacher's name deleted] Miss [name deleted] loved me. Yeah, she was, I was the only person she loved. She was like, 'Kyle, you're so cool.' I was like, 'That's right.'

I would have more order in the class. I'd have order, like, keep kids in check, you know, if they're not, you know if they're not gonna...and phones and stuff. Yeah, kids are just like, man, do your work [laughs]. Kids will be talking on the phone in class, and all this.

I earned a lot of credits in there, yeah, a lot. No [I didn't learn a lot]. I did it. I already knew all the work she was giving me. It was something I already learned cause I went to a, I went to a normal high school and then I went to there. I'm like, 'I already know all this.' It was below, below what I had already learned. So I was just like, all right you know. I still, I still know quite, quite a bit of work. I just don't know fractions. Fractions are my demise.

The class, the class was all like gangbangers, a bunch of gangbangers in there. It was just like, [laughs] you're looking at them, you're just like, 'Dude, what are you doing with your life? Like I understand why I'm in here but you know, you could at least try to get your, to get out of here and all of this stuff.' You know It's...their life [laughing].

I just wanted to get out of that class. I just wanted to do, I was just like, I was just like 'Look, I just want to do my work and get out of here and graduate. That's all I want to do. I'm not here for fun. I'm not here to meet girls. I just want to graduate.' That's all I wanted to do. That was it.

I went, I requested it [independent study] before I went into Miss [name deleted]'s class at [CCS site name deleted]. But, um they didn't think I scored well on the tests because the tests, I just kind of went through it. I was just like, whatever. The ones you do on the computer. I just kind of went through it. I didn't care. I was guessing and all this stuff.

And then they're like, 'All right, all right, you can't, you can't go to independent study because your test scores are low and we don't even know if you could do it.' So after that, um, semester, I went and did the test again and I was like, 'All right. I'm going to try on this.' And I passed it and that's when I got independent study.

Um, December, uh yeah, no, I started late December.

I was behind in credits and so I, I was supposed to go to [community college name deleted] but I decided to do the Security Academy. That was going to qualify me for my credits. And so I did that, too. So I have a security certification. I've got all these CPR certifications and I can get a better job and also get it for my credits. So it all works out.

I was, I was behind like 10 credits, but I made them up like that, in, in this school that I'm in right now. So I'm basically on track. I was supposed to be graduating late August, but I went to school, I did a um, I went to my Security Academy. Uh, about a couple weeks ago I went, I did over 30 hours of, uh, class. And I did, I did, I got my guard card for security. I got my taser certification, I got my baton certification.

Got my CPR and AAD certification and I got my chemical agent certification.

I think it's easier in independent study [than in a traditional high school]. I think its way easier.

I could still do it in class you know. But I think I would lag way more in regular school than in this school. Cause now that I'm on independent study I uh, I'm more consistent with my work, and I get it done, cause I know there's a deadline. If I don't do it, I don't graduate you know.

No, I don't really do it right away you know. I do it; I'm more of like a last second kind of guy. I meet with her [the teacher] once, once a week, or once every two weeks.

I get it done. Some of the work's hard. But I do it. I just do it. Yeah, I just use my own knowledge, watch the History Channel. Actually, I don't [use the Internet a lot], I don't, I'm not really a kinda computer guy. I mean, I have like an email and all that, but I just don't use the Internet as much you know.

I'll do it like a day before I meet her. Like, or an hour before I'll finish it up.

No kid really likes school, but you know, you get through it, you do it. And then you realize when you're a senior, you've got to continue your education to get, to make more money and have more, better financial standards.

I uh, I kinda, I want to work for the [state name deleted] Department of Fish and Game. It's something I want to do.

Um, I did want to do border patrol but, um, and I wanted to join the military. But um, I just, I just, I got, I got a genetic disorder from my mom. It's called Reiter's Syndrome, and what it does is I get...like if I have a cold, my body will get rid of that cold and then my body will still attack itself. And it attacks, and then my whole right side of my body gets inflamed, and I can't walk. Yeah and I can't join the military because I got this disorder.

I'm going to, I going to have to go into like a, like a police academy, and then apply and all this stuff.

No, you don't need any four-year college. You have to be 21 to join, I think. Yeah.

Um, immediately after I graduate I want to get a security job. And then maybe I'm going to move to Portland, Oregon with my uh, friends, three of my buddies, up to a house up there. And then, cause my mom, my mom, I'm 18, and my mom wants me out.

I'm a, I'm a dreamer. I feel like I'm a dreamer. I feel, I feel like I could win the lottery. I'm gonna, gonna win like \$500 million. Gonna happen, I already know it's gonna happen. [I am going to] build a house and build a house for my mom. And I would have the highest living standards and I wouldn't work for the rest of my life. If I had that much money, I wouldn't do anything. I just don't want to work. I'd travel the world hunt. Hunting, hunting is one of the things I really love doing. Yeah, I love hunting. Hunting is like my passion. Just getting game and all that, that's why I want to do [state deleted] Fish and Game.

I'm set to graduate. I've just got to do my portfolio.

My, my, I want to follow with my bud... my two buddies, um one is going to be an EMT and one is actually in the police academy right now. I kind of want to do that.

Got to enforce some laws, I want to carry a gun.

Kyle graduated from CCS about a month after his final interview. He got a security job working the graveyard shift at a local library. He must be 20 years old before he can apply to the police academy.

#### **Cluster #4 (Low Autonomy)**

**Leo's story**<sup>15</sup>. Leo was 14 and in eighth grade when he was interviewed. He was an attractive Latino young man who looked older and was bigger than the typical eighth grader at CCS. He entered CCS at the beginning of the second semester in his seventh grade year with an academic GPA of 1.0. Even though, as you will hear in his story, he believed he was expelled for a single fight, his records show that he

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<sup>15</sup> Audio files are "Leo's story.mp3" and "Leo's Story.wav"

accumulated seven discipline events in sixth grade and seven more the first half of seventh grade. They were all for “typical” eighth grade behavior such as making farting noises in class, physical playing around with classmates, talking in class, and joining a group of boys who “dropped their shorts” in PE. Leo had trouble getting back into middle school. He was expecting to be accepted back to the district in time to begin his high school experience. Perhaps because he was less mature or had spent less time in school, Leo’s story is short (less than eight minutes) and required more prompting. The following is Leo’s story:

Yeah, in elementary school it was, it was way better. Yeah, I don't know, I just had, I don't know, I guess I had better grades. My behavior was better and stuff, but I don't know why I was...I've been acting different.

Uh, seventh, uh, I got in a fight with one of my friends, and both of us got expelled.

Yeah, [I liked going to school]. Yeah, it was, it was pretty fun sometimes.

Um, well yeah [I was doing good in school]. My grades were good and I had good behavior, but I think I just messed up on that once, just I couldn't control my anger. I was doing good, but just that one day I messed up.

I've never done any [thing] like that [before]. Yeah, [I passed all my classes].

Uh well, it wasn't really like um, like a fight. Uh well we were, I, I was going to PE and he was gonna go to lunch, and I was going to the locker rooms and my friend asked me if I wanted some gum. And I said ‘no’, and my other friend, the one that I got in a fight with said uh ‘yeah’, but I took the gum away from my other friend, and he got mad. So he twisted my arm around uh, my back and he pushed me down to the floor, and I got up and I got mad and I just punched him, and then we just started, and the fight just started, and the supervisors came and they broke us up.

Yeah, [if I could] I'd change, like, I wouldn't, I would of changed, uh like, my behavior, especially my behavior because that's what got me in, got me in here [sigh] um yeah.

Yeah [the fight got me expelled], I think so, cause before, I wasn't really doing anything bad. I was like, behaving myself. Like I, I used to like talk in class to my friends and stuff, and my, my teachers would, would, would tell me to, to sit down and be quiet but that's pretty much it. But, yeah, just the fight was the thing that happened.

[Expelled for] a year, yeah, messed up.

Um, oh, yes [the expulsion was fair] and no [it wasn't]. Yes because I understand the rules, there's no fighting, no tolerance. And no, cause I wasn't really the one that started the fight, cause I wasn't really, um, being physical with him when I was playing around. He was the one that started getting physical with me, and I just got mad and I responded.

Well, uh, I've heard from my other school that well, um, I'm, I'm a Hispanic and my, and I've heard fights with, um, uh Amer... with uh, how do, with wh, White kids in my school, and they haven't gotten expelled, they've just gotten suspended. And I don't think that's right, cause uh, I think just, they're, they're just looking at Hispanics differently than they are in, as White people, and something. I think they just treat us differently.

[I been here] uh, a year or so, like a year and a couple days, yeah. Yeah, I've been here more than I should be. Uh, cause I didn't turn in my counseling stuff, and I had to be here a year, uh, six months more.

[I will be entering] ninth [grade] Yeah, [name deleted] High School. Um, yeah [I think I'm prepared] but I'm kind of nervous. Cause I've been here for a year and I'm kinda just used to here and not really used to, don't really remember what regular school's like and stuff.

Here I like that we, I get to like um, be with new people, get to meet new people. And it's not as hard um, as, as subjects and stuff, like the assignments aren't as hard. And then what I don't like is how they, I don't know. I really don't like any, wait, I, how do I say this? Um, I, I kinda like everything about this school, but at the same time I like regular school better. Um, [I miss] my old friends uh, and I just feel different in class than when I do here, just, yeah, different environment in regular school than here.

I think when I go back to regular school, I think they'll be watching me more since of what happened. But uh yeah, I just um, yeah I just like regular school better, more people.

I'll probably just like, uh, with the friends that, um that have, uh, my mom says I've had friends that are bad influences, and I'll probably just separate myself from them, and meet new friends with like that are good influences. And I don't think I'll have trouble in regular school. In high school.

Yeah, I think I'm prepared. No [homework], not really. Not homework, I do work in this school, but not really as much homework. Yeah, a lot more homework there. Because we have more classes, we have a lot more stuff than here.

A typical day here, uh we, I walk in, get my notebook and my textbook and start working. We uh turn it in, we put it away, then we get our other textbook and our other notebook, and then when we're finished with that assignment, we put that stuff away and then we go out to break. And then from there we go into a different class. And then from there, we oh, in the other class we do different kinds of stuff, but mostly we just go in, we get out our notebooks, we start taking history notes and then when we're done with that we just put it away, we get out our language arts textbook and notebook and just do an assignment on that. And we just go out to lunch, then we go home. [We start at] 7:45 [and leave at] 12:15. I like the time here it's shorter than a regular school.

Yeah, I think it will, the day will seem longer [in regular school], seven [periods].

I think it's, this is smaller, way smaller than a regular school. I would uh, make more uh, periods, more classes. I think that would uh, wouldn't hold us back as much as we are. And I would make uh, I wouldn't, I would take out break and just have a longer lunch, and more teachers.

I recently had my meeting with [name of district assistant superintendent deleted], and he said that if I got accepted back to my regular school, they would, I wouldn't have to stay here the summer.

I don't know [what I'll do during the summer], just be with my family, with my friends. Just be free, and then when school starts just do better, and don't do bad things, don't...just behave myself.

Yeah, [I plan to graduate high school]. Um, I don't know [what I will do after I graduate high school], probably get a job and then see what happens from there, probably. Yeah, just get a job and see what happens.

Um yeah, I want to go to college. Yeah, I'll probably go to college. But I probably would want to get a job first to help my mom out with for like stuff, with stuff you know with. And then I'll probably go try to get into college and yeah.

Well, I've kinda always wanted to like be a police officer. It just seems kinda fun. When I've seen like shows with like police officers and stuff, I was like really thought it was interesting what they did.

Leo took the summer off, then started his ninth grade year at a traditional high school. So far, he has not been suspended or expelled.

**Güero's story<sup>16</sup>.** Güero was a sixteen year-old Latino with a slight mustache and a faraway look in his eyes. He spent over two years in Mexico after his eighth grade year. His school records indicate he is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade but he only had 40 credits, locating him on the path to graduation about half way through his freshman year. His test scores when he enrolled with CCS placed him in the 56<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading, 34<sup>th</sup> percentile in language, and 26<sup>st</sup> percentile in math for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Güero was referred to CCS by his probation officer, who noted that he had a past gang affiliation. As he told us in his story, Güero was determined to graduate high school:

Yeah, I did go to kindergarten in [school name deleted] Elementary School in [city name deleted].

Um, I had these two teachers, Miss [name deleted] and Mrs. [name deleted]. They were really good teachers. They, I saw that they were try, I saw that they helped out everybody as much as possible, late activities here and there, and doing work, stuff like that.

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<sup>16</sup> Audio files are "Güero's story.mp3" and "Güero's Story.wav".

All of my elementary was good.

I was actually in a, in a video club, after school in elementary. We used to make videos for like, for like the whole school to see, and edit them, and put like all these cool little designs, and stuff.

Elementary, those were the good times until I actually started seeing how the world really works.

Reality, I thought everything was fine. No problems, nothing. Just go to school, do work, have recess, go home, and be with your family.

Well, in sixth and seventh I was doing good, still.

Um, in 8th grade I was like, I was in, in this type of school, but for middle school. And, I mean I was doing all right there, other than like ditching and stuff.

Well I was in, I went to the bathroom, to the restroom um, after lunch, and some kids were smoking pot in there. And well I went in at the wrong time, and they, they smoked and they left. And then the staff, she passed by and she smelled the weed. And they, she, she, she took me into the principal's office. And they were like searching me and asking me all these questions and stuff like that. And they thought I did it. And like because of that, I had violated my um, my contract, because I was on a contract for fighting and tardies all the time. Well they, they finally decided like at, well yet um I couldn't go to a middle school for the 8th grade. I had to go to um like a community school.

[This happened in] Seventh. And for my entire 8th grade, I went to, to a [district community school name deleted]. And well that's when I really started messing up because the students right there, I really didn't like them. And I would fight like every day um, cuss out the teachers cause they, they didn't understand what I was going through, family um reasons and like with the students, too. So I started ditching, um, doing bad things.

At that time, I was, I was doing good. I didn't do my homework because I knew what everything I was doing. I knew all of that stuff, so I didn't do my homework. But in class, I'd pay attention, do my schoolwork, and stuff.

I wasn't behind, or anything. I was average and at times, above average. And, well I mean I was good. Not behind, doing my work and stuff. But then, when I switched to alternative school um, I started flipping, cause for the reason I saw students that I didn't want to see. And the

teachers, they didn't see what I was going through. And I started ditching, not doing my work, skipping class.

In middle school, it was because I liked to fight. I still do, but I don't do it as often. And then, um, after the year seventh grade, that's when it became gang related, because...

The summer I joined a gang. And well, I had to do my work. And I well, that's the reason I fight almost every day.

Well it's kinda like work. It was just like I wanted respect at the time because I was like, I felt like I was nobody. The reason like no school and the family type of thing and I needed somebody like look up to me or me, somebody, for me to look , um, up to somebody else. And that's why I joined the gang. Respect, friends.

Um, I had friends, um, friends from there. And they didn't peer pressure me, me into it, I asked 'Hey what, what do you, what do you got to do, to do what you do?' And they started explaining to me and that's when I got convinced and I eventually joined it.

Um, the first one [incarceration] was because...I don't remember why, but it was something bad and I got out on probation. And the second time was because I was, I had a marijuana plant in my house. And uh they, the um gang unit raided my house and they found my, my, my pot plant, my bong and a huge knife.

The second time that I got out they wanted me to go to the [police department name deleted], to sign all these papers to sign me up for GSU [Gang Suppression Unit], but I never went because I didn't want to be on that. Since then they haven't told me nothing.

I had, um, multiple warrants for like at basically being on the run because we are in Mexico for two years.

Well, after that, that school year was finished [8th grade], um while we were on summer vacation my dad he took us to Mexico for emergency reason. And he said we only can last for a month. And, well after the month, I kept on asking like um, 'When are we going to come back?' and he's like, 'Sooner or later then.' I kept on asking, asking until I stopped, until two years passed, basically two years. And then we came back here.

And I lasted like four months without school after I came back. And after that, I turned myself in to Juvenile Hall. I stayed a month. And then I got out and I enrolled myself into school. I was looking for other

schools, but they didn't want me for some reasons, and then I eventually came to this school. And well I'm doing here so far, um, just catching up on my credits.

My dad, he had some family emergencies and that's when we went there for like two years. And well while I was over there, he got really sick. And I started working. I mean I actually found out what hard work actually is. I started working for his medication and all that stuff, food.

I started talking to him like 'Hey, when are we going to come back? What about my little sister?' She, because she was in elementary. She barely, she was, I mean, she is in sixth grade. 'Like, what is she going to do? Her English is going to be like really poor and stuff.' I started talking to him like school related topics because when cause you know school really is important, it's just that some don't look at it that way.

I'm the first generation here in the U.S. Everybody, all my brothers and sisters are born here. It's three, three boys in total including me, and two sisters. I am the third youngest. My oldest sister, she's 21, my brother he's 19, I'm 16. My little sister she's 11, my little brother is 3.

Before I turned myself in, I started thinking like, I mean, like, 'What am I going to do later on in life? I'm not just going to be some kid on the streets or nothing.' So I thought it out, 'I'm going to turn myself in. I'm going to do good. I'm going to go to school every day if I can.' And well that's what I'm doing right now. I'm hoping to graduate soon, like, maybe like at least 2015 cause I'm, I'm class of '14.

I talked to my sister and my dad about it. Um, we, um we supposedly went out to take a walk, but we went out somewhere else. So like, everybody else wants to try not to make a scene, we went to this parking lot and stuff. And they call them, my sister actually talked to them. And she told them 'Hey, my brother [name deleted] he wants to turn himself in. Well, yeah like I have my brother right here. Um, he wants to turn himself in.' That's all I heard and the officer on the line he or she was asking her questions. Then ten minutes later they got there. The police officers got to where we were at, they handcuffed me, they put me into the car and they took me straight to Juvenile Hall. And and they took me to [town name deleted] I did um two weeks right then, and then they transferred me all the way to [name deleted]. And I did the rest of my time right there.

The three times [I was arrested] was, was a month, the first time a month, second time a month, and this time a month.

[The schools in the detention facilities], they don't look at what you need to work on or nothing. They just give you a book and you follow the directions on what the teacher has to teach you. Like little work sheet, vocabulary things like that. They don't look at what you need to work on.

I was trying to sign myself at a regular high school and they said they can't accept me because, I could, like I guess all those things on the computer I can't go to a normal school?

Well I went to go sign up at some other ones they were community schools already. But, they didn't want me for the reason that I was going to be getting into fights.

No [I wasn't a gang member], but they thought I was one.

Um [I got out of the gang] like eight months ago. I left it because I wanted to do good and I need to take care of my dad, too, because he's a single parent.

I used to consume drugs, a lot. Here in the U.S., and in Mexico. And I've actually dealt drugs, for a month, but I didn't like the business, so I stopped.

I've changed a lot, like I've turned my whole life around. Um, my dad actually sees that I'm actually doing something. Back then, he'd tell me all these things, like 'You're going to be nothing in life.' Well, because of what I did. Then sometimes, he's always telling me 'Good job. I see that you're doing good, going to school every day and not hang out with the wrong people, the wrong crowd.'

[I have been at this school] since November of last year. Well, everything's good so far. It's just that a certain teacher he's always trying to put me down for some reason. But I don't let him get in the way, I just do my work and ignore him. I don't know. He's always picking on me for no reason. He must think I'm crazy or something.

I'm going to stay in the classroom because, I don't know, independent study seems a little hard for me, because there's no teacher to teach you, or like, 'Hey, can you help me on this or that?' I'd rather stay in a classroom with the teacher, cause they can help you out whenever you need help with stuff.

There's nothing I would change about this school. And I'd rather stay at this school than go to a regular school, because, um, students come and go, here at this school. In a regular school, I'm going to make friends,

and then I'm going to see them every day, and I'm going to get distracted. It's not going to pull me back into my old life, but I might get distracted on my schoolwork. Sometimes I do get distracted. But when I do do my work, I try my hardest.

At times, its, well now I don't, I don't want to say it's rare that I take my books home, but when I need to I take my books home and catch up on what I need to do, mostly on independent study. Or my work packets, my history packets or my language packets, stuff like that.

Well I mean, I'm a junior, I'm going to be a senior next year. I'm assuming I have around 60 to 80 credits. A little bit, but.

Well, I've never been to a regular high school, but what I think is that they're not going to waste their time holding the rest of the class back for what you need to learn about. I mean they probably have afterschool classes to teach you, and stuff, but I really don't like staying after school, having the rest of the day free.

My vocabulary, it's actually improved a bit. Better words for the proper situation, and stuff. And well, my math, too. I've learned, I've actually learned a lot of math.

I did pass one [of the state exit exams]<sup>17</sup>. I think it was English. Well, the math, no one knows how the math is going to go, but I'm not worried about it, because I still have this year and next year. I think I'll be good, for the [state exit exam].

Well, the schools that I've been too, they were all fine. It's just that there were teachers and students that I didn't like that held me back from, from learning. I mean all the schools that I've been to, they've been good schools, except for the alternative one middle school.

I think it's important [to like your teacher]. Because, I mean, if you don't like them, obviously you're going to ignore him or her and you're not going to be paying attention. And if you do um like them or, or yeah like them um you're going to be willing to pay attention, and actually call the teacher over to help you work, like help you on a problem, or something. That's why I think it's important that you like your teacher, to learn.

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<sup>17</sup> Güero actually failed to pass the English/language arts section of the state exit exam by a single point.

If they see that you're not trying, or you just, you just don't try, they're not going to help you out as much as they would if they saw that you were trying.

I prefer to watch more videos on my math, actually, cause like they, they show you the steps in big, like in baby, you can actually pay attention and see and hear. And the computer work, I really don't like the computer work, cause like this, you really can't ask it questions or nothing. It just shows you, do this and do that, do that, and then take you to a problem. I prefer to watch more videos on math.

I don't know if I should go into [community college name deleted] and study um the subject I want to cause I mean I want to be a Border Patrol. Um, but I heard that, well I mean I actually read online that at least four years of that um specific thing, for your, the job that you're looking for, you get paid more. Like I don't know, like more pay basically if I study four years at Palomar, and then go join the Border Patrol thing. But before that, I'm going to try like work for security or something, so I can have experience in some type of security type of thing and then go to the Border Patrol thing.

I like watching out for things. I like, I like the thrill I like, cause I want to be out in the field in the ATVs, or in the trucks, just watching. Well yeah, just basically the thrill. And that's what I want to be. Naw, it's probably, it's not for like, 'Oh, yeah. I'm going, I'm going to pass you.' Like, 'Oh just pass by,' nothing. I'm going to do my job. If you have documents, go ahead. If you don't, well, then, go back. I'm not into the drug things, too.

Um, yeah, I think I'll leave, I'll, I'll leave this school with enough knowledge, I guess I would say, um, to go into, um, [community college name deleted], and just get a hold of everything, right then and then, I guess, learn.

Güero was still attending CCS. He was very rarely absent but was often late.

Güero only had 48 credits toward graduation. If he continued to attend regularly, he could expect to graduate in about 3 years. Six months after his last interview Güero stop coming to school and his probation officer was attempting to locate him.

### **Analysis of Narratives**

After the researcher assembled the stories, each was analyzed for tone and structure, to identify any similarities within and between clusters. Within case and cross-case displays were used to identify and illustrate the cluster patterns. Once the patterns had been recorded, the researcher used In Vivo coding to “preserve participants’ views and actions” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 55) and help “crystallize and condense” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) meanings. The researcher grouped the codes into themes. In Chapter Five the themes are discussed along with relevant literature in terms of how they answer the research questions driving this study.

### **Cluster Demographics**

As Table 4.5 illustrates a comparison of the participants with their cluster descriptions showed a good match between participant grade, total BPNS and instructional assignment and cluster demographics. Every participant was from a predominant grade for that cluster and had a total BPNS within one standard deviation of the cluster mean. Clusters with a majority of students enrolled in the classroom had both participants from the classroom. Cluster #3, which had only 43% of its members in a classroom, had one participant from a classroom and one from independent study.

*Table 4.5* Comparison of Cluster Description with Participant Characteristics

| Cluster | Predominant Grades           | Percent in Classroom | Mean BPNS Total | Participant Grades/<br>Placement |                             | BPNS Total |    |
|---------|------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|----|
| 1       | 9th , 12th                   | 76%                  | 36              | 12 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class      | 12 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class | 38         | 35 |
| 2       | MS , 10 <sup>th</sup> , 11th | 87%                  | 29              | 11 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class      | 10 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class | 31         | 31 |
| 3       | 12th                         | 43%                  | 43              | 11 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class      | 12 <sup>th</sup> /<br>IS    | 44         | 43 |
| 4       | MS, 11th                     | 92%                  | 22              | 8 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class       | 11 <sup>th</sup> /<br>class | 20         | 21 |

### Sequential Event-State Analysis

In order to extract typical transitions in each narrative and identify patterns across the participant stories without destroying the meaningful individual sequences, the researcher created a composite sequential analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in the form of an event-state diagram. The diagram, presented in Figure 4.4, shows the transitions from elementary school, middle school, alternative school, and high school indicating the states between these transitions. Each participant is identified with his first initial (RM is used for Rainman to distinguish him from Raul), so the individual paths are traceable but the composite diagram illuminates common patterns. Initials placed inside an event note the ending event for each participant.

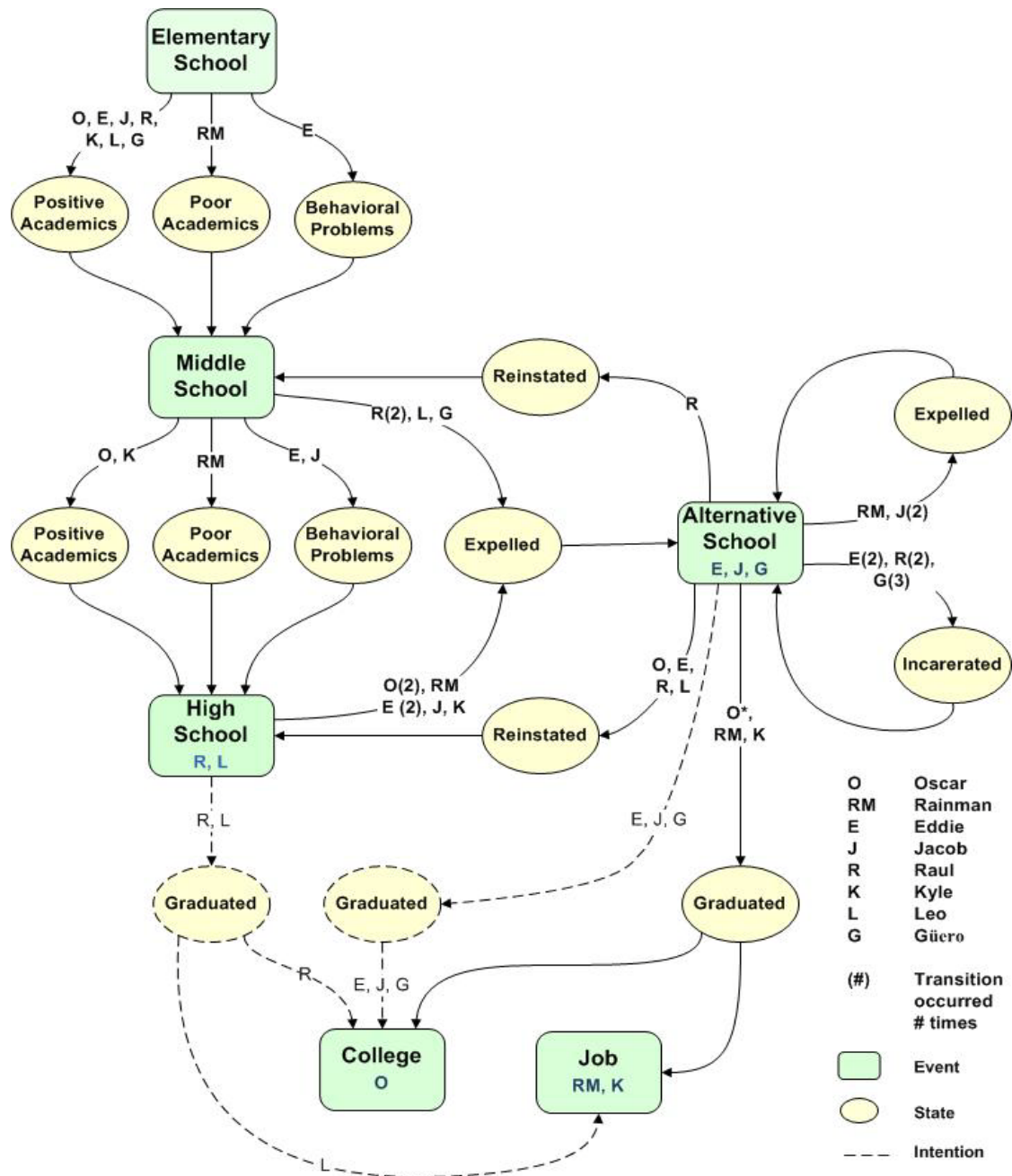


Figure 4.4 Composite sequential analysis, using an event-state diagram showing transitions described in each student narrative. An initial represents each participant. Each event is a time in school or working. The states describe the transition(s).

**Loops.** Each story traced through the diagram illustrated that most of the participants made multiple loops, in which they transition away and return to the same event. These conceptual loops take away instructional time and continuity, and therefore create conditions that contribute to the dropout risk.

**Pass through events.** Some students arrived and exited middle school through the same state. This is desirable if students arrived and exited while maintaining a positive academic record. However, when poor academics or behavioral problems are not addressed, it is a lost opportunity and should be a cause for concern. The same logic applies to the loops that run through the alternative school.

**Cluster pairs.** Three of the four cluster pairs travel similar routes. With the exception of Kyle and Raul, the cluster members appear on segments of their routes together.

### **Cluster Member Comparisons**

The researcher compared the stories for each cluster pair, identifying similarities that were unique to the cluster, as compared to the other six stories. This process identified a different set of traits for Cluster #1 and Cluster #3 compared with Clusters#2 and Cluster#4. These differences are interesting because Cluster #1 and Cluster #3 had BPNS means higher than the average means for the whole sample while Cluster #2 and Cluster #4 had BPNS means lower than the sample mean. Referencing Figure 4.2, the researcher refers to these groups of clusters as “above the line” and “below the line”.

**Clusters #1 and #3.** The stories for the participants in the above the line clusters have characteristics consistent with SDT. These students are optimistic and

they take responsibility for their past decisions. All four stories reference specific teachers by name who the students built a relationship with, and developed strong positive feelings. None of the below the line stories contain a reference to specific teachers with whom the student felt connected. Oscar from Cluster #1 (High Average) described his ROTC teacher:

My colonel, because that's what we called our teacher, he was our colonel, and he was a great guy. For me, he saved me a lot because I was going to go to [name deleted] for other credits that I was missing, but he saved me. He told the principal, 'He's a great kid, let me work with him, let me give him extra credits and I can work things out with him.'

He'd always have me in his drill teams. I would be the first. I was always be the first like sergeant to be there.

From the same cluster, Rainman talked about a specific teacher from the district's alternative school and about the teachers in general:

Mrs. [name deleted], she was just telling me this school's really easy, teachers, you get along with them. Every teacher there knew you. You knew every teacher there, not like in the regular high schools. They only know the smart kids there.

Kyle in Cluster #3 (High BPNS) described a teacher from his high school:

I had this one teacher, Mr. [name deleted]. He was so cool, I did, I did some work but, you know, he's, he, what he says is he says, 'If I don't feel like you should pass, I'm not going to pass you. But if I feel like you should pass, I'm going to pass you even if you don't do any work.' He was like the coolest teacher ever and you know. When I, when I left I uh, I didn't get to do my workbook for him, and get to turn that in. And if I didn't do it, I would get an F. And I was like, 'Oh, I'm going to, I 'm going to fail World History.' Like no, well yeah, World History, no, it was US History I was like, 'I'm going to fail US History.' And I see him the day after I got expelled because they had to do meetings and stuff with the principal. And he was like, 'I hope to let you know that I gave you a B in my class.' And I was like, 'Oh, yes!' And he gave me a big hug [laughs]. He was so awesome, best teacher I've ever had.

Raul, also in Cluster #3, spent so much time talking about the CCS teachers that many of his comments were edited out in order to keep his story to a reasonable length.

Here is just one of his comments:

And with Ms. [name deleted] right now, she's trying to, her class is all about improvement. Not only, not only academically and all that, but also like with your habits you have out of school you know. She tries to get you help, not only by helping you out during class, but what you're doing after school, too.

The above quotations illustrate another common story trait for the *above the line* clusters. They all had very positive school experiences. Oscar, Rainman, and Kyle spoke affirmatively about their experiences at schools they attended prior to CCS. Oscar established strong relationships with all his teachers:

My teachers, man, they loved me you know. I got bonds with my teachers. Even in high school, also, they would be like, 'Oh, [name deleted] this and that. Let's go to a baseball game.' ... You know, for me, the teachers saw me like a, like an athlete, you know, somebody good, like somebody that was going to make it in high school, someone, you know, someone who was going to go right up through high school to go to university, do something good in their lives.

When referring the district's alternative school he attended before coming to CCS

Rainman said:

It was the best year of my high school

Kyle indicated the strong feeling for his high school:

That was the best, best, best place I've ever been. Yeah, I would go there any day. Like I felt, I just, I loved it out there. The teachers were so awesome.

Raul was reluctantly leaving CCS to complete his senior year at a comprehensive high school. However, he expressed confidence in his CCS education and was optimistic about his future.

All the above the line cluster members were successful academically, and were well on their way to accomplishing their educational goals. Two have graduated, one fulfilled all his graduation requirements and needed only to pass the state exit exam, and the fourth was returning for his senior year with a 3.8 grade point average and enough credits to allow for a reduced class load.

**Clusters #2 and #4.** Most notable about the below the line stories is their lack of positive, specific personal educational experiences. This was consistent with their low relatedness scores, which were not significantly different between the two clusters. The students in the below the line clusters were behind academically.

In contrast to the above the line clusters, the members of the below the line clusters did not take personal responsibility, or expressed regret, for past decisions. They painted themselves as victims. Below is one of the multiple examples for each below the line participant.

Eddie:

One point in time in my life, like, I think it was 9th grade; I behaved good like for two months. Like, they wouldn't call my parents. None of that. I told my parents, 'Are you guys happy now? They're not calling you no more.' They're like, 'No. That's your job. You're not supposed to be disruptive in class.' Then that disappointed me. I thought they were going to be happy like, 'That's well done son. That's what I'm expecting from you.' Like, they didn't tell me nothing so I was like, screw this and I went to behaving bad again.

Jacob:

In my opinion, it's not fair because they didn't know what I was going through. Like, they had no clue about how we were really poor, and all this stuff.

Leo:

No [ I should have been expelled] cause I wasn't really the one that started the fight, cause I wasn't really, um, being physical with him when I was playing around. He was the one that started getting physical with me, and I just got mad and I responded.

Güero:

But then, when I switched to alternative school um, I started flipping, cause for the reason I saw students that I didn't want to see. And the teachers, they didn't see what I was going through. And I started ditching, not doing my work, skipping class.

**Cluster Descriptions.** The researcher built the following CCS cluster descriptions, guided by SDT research and generalizing from the data presented.

***Cluster #1 (High Average).*** Most Cluster #1 students were in ninth or twelfth grade and are generally close to grade level in their academic progress. They had positive academic experiences probably at a school other than CCS. They were social individuals who often believed it was difficult to focus on their learning in a CCS classroom.

***Cluster #2 (Low Average).*** Most students were either in middle school, tenth grade or eleventh grade. They were behind academically, both in their progress towards graduation and their learning as measured in the MAP tests. The students often did not have a positive view of their educational experience thus far, but were responding positively to the individual attention they received in a CCS classroom. They were less certain about their educational goals.

***Cluster #3 (High BPNS).*** Cluster #3 had most of the students in the current Independent Study (IS) program. All members of Cluster #3 had the best academic records at CCS and were satisfied with their placement. MAP tests indicate that they

are at grade level. They focused on attaining their educational goals and took initiative to extend their learning beyond the structured CCS program. They responded well to challenges.

**Cluster #4 (Low Autonomy).** Approximately 25% of this cluster was in middle school grades while 40% were eleventh graders. Most (92%) were in a classroom. Most of the cluster members in tenth through twelfth grades<sup>18</sup> were significantly behind academically. Cluster members often tested below grade level and had trouble with the state exit exam.

The participants from Cluster #4 had a tendency for self-deception. Leo indicated:

Um, well yeah [I was doing good in school]. My grades were good and I had good behavior, but I think I just messed up on that once, just I couldn't control my anger. I was doing good, but just that one day I messed up.

I've never done any [thing] like that [before]. Yeah, [I passed all my classes].

However, in just that year, he had had seven discipline referrals, a D in math, and was failing both science and social studies. In his story, Güero stated, “Well, in sixth and seventh I was doing good, still.” His school records indicate over 20 discipline events, 6 suspensions, and 4 different behavioral contracts in sixth and seventh grade.

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<sup>18</sup> Middle school students are automatically promoted to the next grade level and therefore start out even with all students when they enter ninth grade.

## Establishing Themes

In Vivo codes were identified and collected for each story. The researcher grouped the codes based on frequency of use and similarities between the eight stories. As shown in Table 4.6, the researcher identified common plot characteristics from the event-state analysis and the In Vivo coding.

*Table 4.6 Comparing Plot Characteristics of the Narratives*

| Participant | Number of expulsions | Reason(s) for expulsion       | 7th grade                                              | Issues                                             | Education Goal      | Career(s)                   |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Oscar       | 2                    | drugs                         | increased drug use, began using ecstasy                | drugs                                              | Bachelor Degree     | Air Force, business, health |
| Rainman     | 2                    | poor academics, drugs         | teacher told him to “drop out”, more drug use          | drugs, attention problems                          | High School Diploma | Marines                     |
| Eddie       | 2                    | drugs, gangs, firearm         | gang activity began, increased discipline              | gang, drugs, attention problems                    | Some College        | probation officer           |
| Jacob       | 2                    | truancy, threatened a teacher | gang activity began, drugs, increased discipline       | attention problems, truancy, gang, drugs, homeless | High School Diploma | cook, restaurant owner      |
| Raul        | 2                    | sexual harassment, fighting   | removal from honors, increased gang activity, expelled | gang                                               | Some College        | probation officer           |
| Kyle        | 1                    | pellet gun, drugs             | stopped taking ADHD medications                        | attention problems                                 | High School Diploma | game warden, police officer |
| Leo         | 1                    | fighting                      | increased discipline, expelled                         | class disruption                                   | High School Diploma | police officer              |
| Güero       | 2                    | drug use, truancy, fighting   | gang activity began, increased discipline, expelled    | gangs, truancy, attention problems                 | Some College        | Border Patrol               |

Two themes emerged from this analysis. The first arose from a question asked by the researcher, “What happened in seventh grade?” Clearly major turning points or escalations of undesirable behavior occurred in seventh grade, often starting students down a road that would ultimately take them to alternative education. The recognition of this pattern became a theme, titled “Middle school – the beginning”. The next question that arose was, “Why are the career choices so limited?” There was a very narrow range of options these students considered for their future after high school, suggesting a need for these students to build their social capital. This theme became “Intended destinations – building social capital”.

The other frequent In Vivo codes coalesced into two themes about the students’ experiences in alternative school. “Alternative school – individual attention” grouped together two interwoven characteristics, the individual academic attention students received, and the personal relationship students built with teachers. The last theme combined the In Vivo codes and recent alternative education research to establish, “Alternative school – academic expectations”.

The following sections describe each theme. Chapter Five discusses the themes in more detail, incorporating relevant existing literature. For both chapters, the presented order is consistent with the chronological narratives from which they emerged. The descriptions start with “Middle school – the beginning” followed by “Alternative school – individual attention” and “Alternative school – academic expectations”, ending with “Intended destinations – building social capital”.

**Middle school – the beginning.** Each story identified a critical turning point that happened during in the seventh grade year. Perhaps seventh grade was so

significant because, for these students seventh grade was the middle year at their middle schools. There are certainly also examples of problems in eighth grade. Seventh grade, however, stands out in these narratives as a turning point, and unfortunately, all of the turns were in the wrong direction.

Raul, Leo, and Güero were first expelled in seventh grade. Typical of the critical transitions was Oscar's account of increased drug use:

Well, my first time I ever smoked weed was when I was 10 years old. And after that, when I was doing really heavy, like doing on a lot of times it was when I actually started, you know, the beginning of, the beginning of seventh grade. That's when I was doing a little bit big, and that's when, at the end of seventh grade, that's when I got introduced to crystal meth, cocaine and ecstasy. But I mean that's what killed me the most right there, the crystal, because, for that, I would do it every day.

The number of discipline issues increased for Eddie:

I think seventh. Yeah, middle school. They would just send me to the office. They know me a lot. They'd just be like, 'Oh, you again [name deleted]? You don't understand your lesson, huh?' I'm like, 'Nope.' In middle school, I would have to stay Friday night school and all that stuff. At times, I would lie to my parents. I would tell them, 'I'm going to stay after school and get extra help.' In reality, I was in Friday night school detention.

The discipline issues for Jacob became more severe:

My first time getting expelled and arrested was seventh grade, and I brought a knife to school, and it was like, I didn't even know I had the knife on me. I just went to school, and I was going for my stuff, and it fell out and a kid found an assistant principal and they told on me, and then I got arrested for that... Yep, [this was the first] major trouble, yes. The other times it was just because I like said stuff to the teacher and just got suspended, but that was my first time being arrested and expelled.

There were real emotional episodes that left scars. Here is an example in Rainman's story:

Seventh grade, I was like...I'm going to forget seventh grade because my English teacher, he told me to just drop out. No. I'm not kidding. I teared up, but I didn't really cry because I held it in. It was in front of the class. In front of the class, yeah, she told me to drop out, and I was like, 'No, I'm not. I just can't.' you know and like, she was being serious about it. I'm going to be nothing in life and all this stuff. It really got to me.

Raul's event was one of the most striking:

But I got to middle school and I had honors for one year, but then like, I had my the first, my first day of seventh grade, I had honors and some teacher just came in and said, 'Oh, you're in the wrong class. You're not supposed to be in honors anymore.' And they just took me to the regular class.

I was just like, 'What the...?', you know like, I thought I was in honors, you know. Like, I was supposed to be in honors and I think that was like one of the biggest downturns, you know. I was like, like 'What? Like they, can they actually just do that?' Like, I was just sitting there in my class and it was honors everything and like they just changed my whole schedule. They're like, 'No, you're not in honors.'

I've gotten, I have gotten good grades [in sixth grade honor classes] like not all A's, but I've gotten C's and B's you know. And then, yeah, I just got to seventh grade and that's when they just told me, 'Oh, yeah, you're not in honors you, you.' They like switched my whole schedule.

Yeah. It kinda, really frustrated me cause I was practically taking the math class I was taking the year before. And then I was learning the English I was learning, um, learning the year before you know. And then it was like, it was kinda different. It wasn't really a challenge you know. So, I wasn't really taking it serious.

To compensate, he brought his gang life "from the streets into school".

**Alternative school – individual attention.** The most frequently used codes fell into this theme. It includes variations of the word "help", when referring to a teacher at an alternative school, such as "they really help you" or "personal help". Also included were "individual attention" and "more attention", when used in the

same context. Also incorporated into this theme was “independent study”, when applied to schoolwork at an alternative school.

Only Leo did not have multiple occurrences of this theme in his story. It is apparent that the smaller number of students per class, and the fewer classes for each teacher, provided more opportunity for the teachers to not only help individual students academically but sometimes also build supportive student-teacher relationships.

There were many references to independent study. This terminology was associated with individual courses or assignments that were self-paced. Oscar provides an example that illustrates individual academic help and independent study:

In a traditional school, there's, there's a bunch of kids, and there's only one teacher, and they don't give you the same uh attention that you need. Right here, you can ask for individual help, you know, because you're doing your own thing, and they can help you, you know.

This excerpt from Raul's story provided evidence for both individual help and establishing a caring student-teacher relationship:

The very best things about [name deleted] CCS was I think that its like the teachers don't just, like they're not like a regular high school. The teachers they, they have more time to help you, since it's just a one classroom environment. And like at a regular high school, the teachers have hundreds of kids going in and out of their class each day. And here, it's just like 22 class students, and the teacher has time to actually sit down and talk to you. And they, they see you all day and they see like, you know, what you're struggling with. They actually have the time to come and help you. I think the personal help is the best thing about this school.

It is clear from the narratives that the students believed this increase in personal attention was the most important academic asset for CCS, and that it contributed significantly to their success.

**Alternative school – academic expectations.** Each of the participants hints that the work at CCS, especially in the classrooms, was less demanding than their traditional schools. Kyle, as a senior in a self-contained sixth through twelfth grade classroom, explained:

I earned a lot of credits in there, yeah, a lot. No [I didn't learn a lot]. I did it. I already knew all the work she was giving me. It was something I already learned cause I went to a, I went to a normal high school and then I went to there. I'm like, 'I already know all this.' It was below, below what I had already learned.

This seemed also to be true for different district alternative schools. Eddie pointed out that fewer credits were needed to graduate:

I had the choice to go to [district continuation school] and graduate there because you only need 200 credits, I think. And then I could take the easier way and just graduate there but, naw, I want to go and give my parents the happiness and graduate at [regular high school name deleted] High.

And Rainman reveled in the ease he was able to get passing grades after 11 years of failing academically:

I was passing every class – 3.0. The teacher can talk to everybody, and like goes through the class with everybody, so everybody can understand. It was really easy, cause the teachers knew how to like put the work in front of you, and make it look easy. It was easy there. I did very well at it.

At CCS Leo acknowledged the work was easier:

It's not as hard um, as, as subjects and stuff, like the assignments aren't as hard.

Several students mentioned the shortened school days and that no homework was required. Raul told us:

Here at [name deleted] CCS the work is challenging, they give you a challenge. You learn stuff, but you don't get homework, you know... Here [the school day] it's four hours and 15 minutes. Over there it's going to be like eight hours.

Returning to Kyle's assessment, he does leave the door open to an interpretation that to some extent his schoolwork at CCS seemed easier because it is individualized and to some degree self-paced:

I think it's easier in independent study [than in a traditional high school]. I think its way easier.

I could still do it in class you know. But I think I would lag way more in regular school than in this school. Cause now that I'm on independent study I uh, I'm more consistent with my work, and I get it done, cause I know there's a deadline. If I don't do it, I don't graduate you know.

**Intended destinations – building social capital.** Almost all of the chosen careers involved carrying a gun. Two of the three students incarcerated at some time wanted to be Probation Officers, the other a Border Patrol agent. Oscar and Rainman both wanted to join the military. Oscar's dreams were dashed when he was expelled for a second time:

And I remember that the second time I got expelled, because I was in my uniform. Because I was in the ROTC. I was going to join the Air Force and I had that all planned out, everything great. I was, I was going to learn, I mean, enlist early at 17. And then I would go to uhh. Right when, when I got off from school in June, I was supposed to be, the plan was to get uhh, to go to boot camp in August. So I like had maybe a couple weeks free, and then I would get shipped.

Where they were telling me they were going to take me was up by Georgia or South Carolina but, sadly, no that never happened. They didn't let me in at all.

And, I mean, when they found out. I was actually, when I got expelled, I was in my uniform and I was like, 'Damn.'

Kyle and Leo wanted to be police officers. Leo thought "it just seems kinda fun."

Moreover, Kyle said, "got to enforce some laws, I want to carry a gun." Only Jacob broke the mold, wanting to be a cook. These students were not aware of many career

options, other than their fathers, most of whom were landscapers, their mothers, most of whom were house cleaners, or law enforcement officials. With the exception of Kyle, each of the participants had had multiple documented encounters with law enforcement.

### **Summary of Results**

This study identified, documented, and analyzed students' lived educational experiences before, during, and after attending alternative school. Using critical theory as the theoretical framework, the researcher employed a two-phased mixed methods design. The first quantitative phase drew upon SDT, using student surveys, to answer the question: Who attends alternative schools? A narrative inquiry grounded in student voice followed in the second phase, to answer the central research question: What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school? Finally, an analysis of narratives combined the results of both phases.

**Quantitative Results.** The data collected in this phase were obtained from student records and a student survey that utilized a Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) as its central component. One hundred and eighty-three students who attended a geographically dispersed alternative school operated by a state county office of education (CCS) completed surveys. This represented about 54% of the student enrollment. Although disproportionate to district and county enrollment, the demographics of the survey participants were consistent with the school's demographics (see Table 4.1).

The reliability of the instrument was substantiated, and a principal component analysis of the subscales confirmed the theoretical subscale structure. Correlational analysis on student demographics showed a strong correlation between age and grade and a medium correlation between age and instructional assignment, indicating that students assigned to independent study (IS) were older. There was also a significant association with a medium effect size between students classified as English learners and special education status. A medium correlation also existed between reduced or free lunch qualification and instructional assignment. There were no other significant associations established between demographic factors.

As expected, all the subscales and the total for the BPNS were highly correlated. Using the BPNS subscales, a cluster analysis established four significantly different groups within the sample. As shown in Figure 4.1, Cluster #1 (High Average) had means for the subscale scores above the sample means but within .5 standard deviation (SD). Cluster #2 (Low Average) had subscale scores below the sample mean. The autonomy mean was within .5 SD but the means for competency and relatedness were slightly more than .5 SD below the sample mean. Cluster #3 (High BPNS) had all means for all three sub scores more than 1.0 SD from the sample mean. Cluster #4 (Low Autonomy) had a relatedness mean not significantly different from Cluster #2, a competency mean more than 1.0 SD below the sample mean, and an autonomy mean more than 1.5 SD below the sample mean. Cluster membership had significant associations with grade level, instructional assignment, and how students responded to the question: “Do you learn more or less at this school compared to other schools?”

Cluster membership also had a significant association with educational goals. Over 50% of Cluster #3 (High BPNS) indicated they intended to pursue post secondary education. There was also a significant association with a small effect size between gender and educational goals. A larger percentage of females (52%) than males (37%) indicated they planned to pursue post secondary education.

**Narrative Analysis.** The clusters facilitated a maximal variation sampling of the survey respondents. The researcher selected two students with subscale totals closest to the means for each cluster to interview. Narratives telling each participant's educational story in their own voice were assembled from the interview audio tapes. This chapter presents the transcripts for each story. A brief recap follows:

***Cluster#1 (High Average).*** *Oscar* loved doing homework and working individually. He was expelled twice from high school, each time for possession of drugs with intent to sell. The second time had consequences that included ending his planned career in the Air Force, and losing a close relationship with the ROTC colonel. He has completed all his graduation requirements, but still must pass the state exit exam in English/language arts. He is currently attending a local community college, with the hopes of transferring to a four year university.

*Rainman* never performed well academically in traditional schools. His seventh grade English teacher told him he should just drop out. After social promotion each preceding year, he was sent to the district's alternative school in tenth grade for academic remediation. His academic work improved greatly at this school, but he was expelled his senior year for possession of drug paraphernalia. He achieved his goal to graduate and get a job. He ultimately intends to become a Marine.

**Cluster #2 (Low Average).** *Eddie* was always a good student. His classroom behavior, however, was very problematic. He followed his brother into a gang in his seventh grade year. Eddie collected a long record of discipline events. Eventually his residential high school expelled him for “slanging drugs”. While at CCS, he was arrested twice, once for having a gun, and once for a probation violation when he was out after curfew holding marijuana he intended to sell. Eddie is a father. He was accepted to go back to his traditional school for his senior year, where he intended to play soccer and graduate. In the summer, the GSU (Gang Suppression Unit) arrested Eddie for affiliating with a known gang member (his brother). His traditional school revoked his permission to return, and he remains at CCS.

*Jacob* had numerous problems. Diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), he refused to take medication. He was involved with gangs and drugs. He continued to use marijuana, and had a record of truancy due, in part, to his family’s constant fight against homelessness. Although he received multiple long suspensions in middle school, he was not formally expelled until high school. His expulsions were for truancy at the end of his ninth grade year, and from an alternative school for threatening a teacher early in tenth grade. He is comfortable at CCS, is doing his schoolwork, and maintaining a positive academic record. His transcript reveals that he is two grades behind in graduation progress.

**Cluster #3 (High BPNS).** *Raul* was an honors student. In seventh grade, he was inexplicitly pulled from the honors curriculum and placed in remedial classes. As a result, he became frustrated and unmotivated in school. He disengaged from his academics and ramped up his connection with a gang. He accumulated a discipline

record, which contributed to his two expulsions from middle school, one for sexual harassment, and one for fighting. When Raul came to CCS, he had difficulties at first. He was arrested twice for gang related activities. Upon his second return to CCS from Juvenile Hall, he began, with the help of teachers and his probation officer, to correct his behavior. He was no longer a gang member, was a straight A student, and had gotten off probation. Currently enrolled at a traditional high school for his senior year, Raul plans to go to college after graduation.

*Kyle's story differs somewhat from the patterns found in the other narratives.* He was expelled from his rural high school at the end of his junior year. Because of his special education status and his MAP test scores when he entered CCS, he was denied independent study (IS) and placed in the closest CCS classroom to where he lived. In this class, he was the only White student. He found the classroom environment hostile and the class work remedial. After about four months, Kyle's test scores had improved enough for him to earn an IS assignment. In IS, Kyle excelled. On his own initiative, he went to a security academy and earned extra elective credits. This allowed Kyle to both graduate on time and obtain a security job after graduation.

***Cluster # 4 (Low Autonomy).*** *Leo* was the only middle school student in the narrative inquiry. His educational story is shorter, mostly because much of it remains to be lived. *Leo* was expelled in the middle of seventh grade for a fight. The summer after his interview, he entered ninth grade at a traditional high school. *Leo* believes that he was discriminated against because of his ethnicity. He was also worried about whether CCS has properly prepared him for a regular high school, and knew that when he got back he would be under more scrutiny because of his expulsion.

*Güero* did fine academically until middle school. In middle school he accumulated a discipline record, mainly due to tardiness and fighting. When he was expelled at the end of seventh grade for smoking marijuana in the school bathroom he joined a gang. This gang involvement led to fighting and truancy at school and several arrests. After being expelled at the end of eighth grade, his father took *Güero* and his siblings to Mexico for two years. When his family returned, *Güero* still had outstanding warrants for missing court dates. He turned himself in to the authorities and after one month of incarceration, he was referred to CCS. At the time of the interviews, he was almost 17. His record indicated that he attended every day and was slowly making progress, but remained several years away from graduation.

**Analysis of narrative.** After completing the narrative analysis, the researcher compared participant and cluster demographics, performed a sequential event-state analysis on the narratives, and used commonalities and differences in the stories to integrate the results of Phase One and Phase Two to form profiles of each cluster. Using plot analysis and In Vivo coding, the researcher identified four themes:

***Middle school – the beginning.*** Each story had a critical turning point that occurred in middle school. Three participants were expelled in middle school. The participants also described disengagement from school, increased drug use, and gang involvement in middle school.

***Alternative school – individual attention.*** The most significant attributes of the alternative schools that benefited students were personalized instruction and individual attention. Every participant mentioned an increase in one-on-one help they received from teachers and attributed this to their success.

***Alternative school – academic expectations.*** Participants described learning environment characteristics that denoted academic instruction at the alternative schools as being less rigorous than that found at their traditional schools. These descriptions included receiving better grades, having no homework, and indicating the schoolwork was easier or remedial. However, there is also evidence that the personalized learning and individual help contributed to making schoolwork easier to complete.

***Intended destinations – building social capital.*** The chosen professions for the narrative analysis participants indicated inadequate social capital for these students. Law enforcement and the military dominated the career choices.

In the Phase Two portion of the Chapter Five conclusions, these themes are explored further and related to existing literature to address the research question “What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school?” The quantitative results from Phase One are discussed in connection to the research question “Who attends alternative school?”

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The final chapter presents a summary of the previous chapters, the conclusions drawn from the results, and the implications of this research study. The summary reviews the problem, theoretical framework, methodology, and results for this study. Following the summary, the conclusion presents the research questions, and discusses how existing literature informs the results from each phase. A description of this study's limitations, and implications for practice, policy, and research conclude this dissertation, ending with a brief explanation of this research's contribution to the overarching questions.

### **Summary**

#### **Overview of the Problem**

The public education system rewards conformance to cultural norms aligned with white middle class culture (Kelly, 1993). Poor students, students of color, or students with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined and disenfranchised (APA, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Most of these students either drop out or end up in alternative schools (Arcia, 2006). Alternative schools can be supportive places where students and adults develop positive relationships (Darling & Price, 2004; de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; May & Copeland, 1998; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008). However, many of these programs lack academic rigor. Graduation is achieved through easy grades and generous credits, making success in post secondary education or careers less likely (Atkins et al., 2005; Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Washington, 2008).

All aspects of alternative education deserve additional research, but research concerning student outcomes is especially needed (Atkins et al., 2005; Brown, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006; Warren, 2007). This study described and analyzed student experiences in an alternative school. The overarching questions that guided this study are: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? The specific questions this research explored in order to address the larger questions are:

- 1) Who attends alternative school?
- 2) What is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Critical theory provided a foundation for this study and informed the overarching questions: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? Although interrelated, the two specific research questions are each associated with a separate theoretical framework, distinct supporting methodology, and specific methods.

Phase One, the quantitative phase, drew upon Self Determination Theory (SDT), using student surveys, to answer the question: Who attends alternative schools? Student voice provided a framework for Phase Two in order to answer the central research question: What is the lived student educational experience before,

during, and after attending alternative school? The second phase was a narrative inquiry, which used a narrative analysis to construct student stories in their own voice, and an analysis of narratives to combine the results of both phases.

### **Methodology**

The study was a participant-selection variant of an explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Figure 3.1 shows the methodology design. The first phase was a quantitative exploration of student characteristics, basic psychological needs satisfaction, goals, and academic achievement using extant data and student surveys. Phase One established distinct, generalizable student profiles that served as descriptors of the types of students who attend alternative schools. The second phase was a narrative inquiry into student lived experiences before, during and after attending the school. Accomplishments, consequences, development, attitudes, values, and beliefs that students acquire while attending school were identified in Phase Two, as well as structural and cultural aspects that contributed to or hindered academic achievement.

In the first phase, students completed a survey composed of a modified Basic Physiological Needs Scale (BPNS), and open-ended questions. Student demographic data, school records, and survey results established a typology of student characteristics. Cluster analysis was used to create statistically distinct groups. Profiles for each group formed the basis for purposeful selection of individuals for the second phase.

Maximal variation sampling was achieved by selecting two individuals from each group. Qualitative data collection consisted of multiple taped interviews with

each participant over a six-month period. The researcher constructed each participant's story from the audio interview tapes. In this phase, narrative was the form of inquiry, reasoning, and presentation. The result captured each student's unique account of his school experiences, told in his own words. The student biographical narratives provided information that explained and expanded on the results of the first phase.

## Results

In Phase One descriptive statistics were gathered. Correlational analysis determined the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Cluster Analysis was used to group participants, based on the BPNS subscale scores in autonomy, competency, and relatedness. The analysis produced a four-cluster solution, organized into two groups. Cluster #1 High Average and Cluster #3 High BPNS, referred to as *above the line*, had BPNS means higher than the average means for the whole sample, while Cluster #2 Below Average and Cluster #4 Low Autonomy had BPNS means lower than the sample mean, and were labeled *below the line*.

Narrative analysis in Phase Two produced audio stories, told in the student's own words, for eight participants:

### Cluster#1

- Oscar completed the graduation requirements for CCS but still must pass the English portion of the state exit exam in order to graduate.
- Rainman graduated from CCS two months after completing his interviews.

#### Cluster # 2

- Jacob was homeless and continued to attend CCS.
- Eddie, a documented gang member and father, was arrested and reenrolled in CCS shortly after the completion of his interviews.

#### Cluster #3

- Kyle was an Independent Study (IS) student who graduated from CCS two months after his interviews.
- Raul returned to his traditional high school for his senior year, after attending middle school and high school at CCS.

#### Cluster #4

- Leo was an eighth grader when interviewed, and returned to a traditional high school for his ninth grade year.
- Güero was technically in eleventh grade, but had only ninth grade credits, and remained enrolled at CCS.

The analysis of narratives generated four themes: middle school – the beginning, alternative school – individual attention, alternative school – academic expectations, and intended destinations – building social capital.

### **Conclusions**

Each phase of this study's methodology focused on one of the two research questions. Phase One focused on who attends alternative school, while Phase Two explored what is the lived student educational experience before, during, and after attending alternative school? The questions framed the presentation of the results. In

the discussion, results from both phases are connected and related to existing literature.

### **Phase One: Who attends Alternative School?**

Students who attended alternative school were disproportionately students from groups who are traditionally underserved. They were mostly male students of color (in this study Latinos) who qualified for free or reduced cost federal lunch. A disproportionate number needed special education services. They had extensive discipline records. They were not a homogenous group. A profile of their basic psychological needs satisfaction showed a normal distribution, with some motivated, academically successful, and possessing a positive sense of well being, while others felt controlled, unable to determine their own destiny, and disengaged from school. They all, however, had a goal of high school graduation, and many dreamed of education after high school.

**Disproportionality and discipline.** As with most alternative programs, the students studied in this research were disproportionately students of color, students with low SES, (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Loutzenheiser, 2002; May & Copeland, 1998; Smith, 2003), and students with disabilities (Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Smith, 2003). They were also disproportionately male, which is consistent with research showing males are more likely to be expelled than females (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; U.S. Department Of Education, Office Of Civil Rights, 2012).

The stories told by this study's participants highlight the systemic marginalization of students through the discipline process within the educational system. This process disproportionately impacts students of African American, Latino, or Native American descent (APA, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Kewalramani et al., 2007; Krezmien et al., 2006; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Wallace et al., 2008), students with disabilities (APA, 2008; Brown, 2007; Edmonds-Cady & Hock, 2008; Krezmien et al., 2006; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), students with low SES (Kelly, 1993; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), and students with low academic achievement (Arcia, 2006; Gregory et al., 2010).

Starting in middle school, the discipline record for each narrative inquiry participant traveled with them from school to school, including the schools in the correctional facilities. For seven of them (all except Kyle), the records showed a gradual escalation, as disciplinary actions begat more severe disciplinary actions.

Eddie describes an example of this:

Yeah, I guess someone snitched on me so. During break, I was delivering a sack. I looked suspicious and they just stopped me and searched me. They found a 50 sack of marijuana on me. Plus I already, I was on two behavior contracts already so that was my last chance.

Even when Rainman was finally performing well academically, his record caught up with him:

School, yeah, every day I was doing good at school. Just go home and after, smoke. Then, I got expelled because they saw my record. I got suspended once in freshman year for going high to school, and I said, 'No.' They looked me up. They originally suspended me, but they found that and they sent me over here.

When these students returned to their traditional schools they felt they had a bull's-eye on their backs. Leo told us "I think when I go back to regular school, I think they'll be watching me more since of what happened." Raul's story displays this pattern clearly:

Yeah, and he didn't like me cause I always disrespected him. So, like he practically told me, you know 'Finally, this is it. You're out of our school'...

I already had a record at that school, you know. I wasn't on a contract or anything, but I think when they took me to my board meeting, they showed everything, you know, all my suspensions, all my...

I had a, I had several [suspensions]. I've also had in school suspension, as well...

And then when I came back, they just didn't want, they just. They, I was on a zero tolerance, I guess. I got in a fight. Then, I came [back here].

The loops found in the sequential event analysis and shown on the event state diagram (Figure 4.4) document this cyclical discipline pattern. Other researchers have documented aspects of the discipline cycle. Suspensions and expulsions have increased dramatically since the 1970s (Arcia, 2006; Krezmien, Leone, & Achilles, 2006). Researchers attribute this growth in part to the misuse and extension of zero-tolerance policies and assert that some schools and districts use these policies to abandon responsibility for students with behavioral problems (APA, 2008; Martinez, 2009; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). There is a growing use of discretionary suspensions and expulsions to remove students with disruptive behavior from their regular schools and warehouse them in alternative schools (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Lehr et al., 2009). Booker and Mitchell (2011) found that "minority students were significantly more likely than Caucasian students to be placed in disciplinary alternative education

for discretionary reasons, and that they were more likely to return to the alternative programs once they had been accepted back to their regular school.

As this study showed, suspensions and expulsions have a detrimental impact on academic achievement and increase the likelihood of further disciplinary actions. This is consistent with Arcia's (2006) study, which found the more suspensions a student had, the more likely he or she was to receive another suspension. Arcia also found that frequent suspensions significantly lowered academic achievement and increased the chance of the student dropping out of school. Kravovich et al. (2010) found that the severity of disciplinary actions negatively correlated with student achievement.

Discipline increases sharply in middle school (Mendez & Knoff, 2003) and these issues have significant long-term repercussions. Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) conducted a longitudinal study of middle school students in the School District of Philadelphia. They found that only 36% of students who received one or more suspensions in the beginning year of middle school graduated within one year of their expected graduation. This was also true for students who received an unsatisfactory behavior mark on a final report card but had not received a suspension. This means that one event significant enough to earn a suspension, or sustained minor behavioral issues in one class, can target a student for being at risk of not graduating.

**Basic psychological needs satisfaction.** As reported in Chapter Four, all the BPNS total means were slightly above the neutral point on the scales and had a normal distribution. There was no correlation to time enrolled, so one can assume that at any one time there are students enrolled that span the BPNS. When the above the line

students, those with BPNS totals above the sample mean, were analyzed, their outcomes substantiated other SDT research. Three of the four above the line students graduated, and the fourth was at grade level in credits accumulated and test scores. This was a noteworthy difference from the academic standing of the below the line students, who ranged from slightly to significantly below grade level in progress toward graduation and test scores. Researchers have shown a connection between the satisfaction of basic psychological need and academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009; Jang et al., 2009; Miserandino, 1996) and persistence (Lavigne et al., 2007).

The clustering profiles generated in the quantitative phase of this study were supported by the narrative inquiry. There were discernible differences between the clusters that were consistent with SDT. Several studies have successfully used SDT with cluster analysis to conduct person-centered research on student motivation. Vansteenkiste et al. (2009) identified four distinct groups of students, based on combinations of autonomous and controlled motivation, and successfully correlated these groups to qualitative learning outcomes. Using a different instrument to measure autonomous and controlled motivation, Hayenga and Corpus (2010) established similar profiles for four distinct clusters and correlated them to GPA, finding that in the middle school students they studied, “the ratio of intrinsic to extrinsic motivation is far more predictive of academic achievement than the sheer amount of motivation present” (p.379). Hayenga’s and Corpus’s (2010) study also found that assessing the type and quantity of motivation is analogous to political polling. It is a snap shot that looks at an instant in time within a fluid environment. It has short term but not necessarily long term predictive potential. About 50% of the studied students were

stable in their cluster assignment from fall to spring of the school year. The authors speculate that the changes in motivational profile could be related to changes in students' perceived competence (Ntoumanis, Barkoukis, & Thogersen-Ntoumani, 2009), autonomy support (Vansteenkiste et al., 2009), or sense of belonging, as described by Deci and Ryan (2002).

The research suggests that student perceived basic physiological needs satisfaction can predict well being, engagement, and academic achievement directly or predict their motivational profile, which correlates to engagement and academic achievement. Additionally, these perceived satisfactions are not stagnant and respond to environmental factors. Person-centered analysis of perceived basic psychological needs has the potential to identify students whose current learning environment needs improvement in order to maximize the student's full potential. Niemiec and Ryan (2009) summarized why this is important:

In classroom contexts that support satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, students tend to be more intrinsically motivated and more willing to engage in less interesting tasks, and to value academic activities. With higher volition, learners demonstrate higher-quality learning outcomes, enhance wellness, and a greater value for what school has to offer. (p. 140)

Strategies for enhancing autonomy, competency, and relatedness have been identified (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009) and have been successfully introduced to classrooms (Su & Reeve, 2010). SDT research has also supported the importance of the type and content of student goals (Mouratidis & Michou, 2011; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004; Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Soenens, et al., 2004).

**Goals.** CCS reports a dropout rate of about 25%. However, more than 95% of the survey respondents included a high school diploma among their goals. This is very much what Michelle Fine (1991) found in her critical ethnographic study of students who left an urban, comprehensive public high school.

When asked by the attendance coordinator or by me, “What are you going to do now that you have been discharged?” the most popular response was, “Get me a GED,” followed by an expressed interest in attending a proprietary, business, computer, or beauty school, getting work, or applying to the military. These students’ plans were not dissimilar from those expressed nationally (Kolstad & Ownings, 1986). (p. 83)

The students enrolled at CCS intend to graduate. Many, about 40% in this study, plan to attend college. These are not students who “do not want to learn” or do not care about graduating.

In their grounded theory study of students at risk for dropping out, Knesting and Waldron (2006) identified three factors critical to student persistence in school. The first was “goal orientation – student’s belief they will benefit from graduation” (p.599). The participants’ narratives make it clear that each student believed they needed to graduate and will benefit from graduating. Rainman and Raul admit to considering dropping out. Raul actually dropped out. However, at the time of this study, all the narrative inquiry participants had set graduation as a goal, and were committed to it.

Oscar:

I would always know that school, I had to do it because I had no choice and that school is going to get me to somewhere... I set my goal already to go to [community college], do a transfer. Do the two years in [community college] and then hopefully transfer to a university.

Rainman:

I found out that you needed to graduate in order to get a job in the real world. You need an education to be somebody, not a nobody.

Eddie:

[My kid was born] November 5th, 2011. Yes, ma'am. I've got to do good for him. That's why I want to go to college. My expectations are for him to go to college. He's going to say, 'Well, if you didn't go to college, why should I go?' So that's not going to look good on my part, so I have to go to college and give him a good example.

Jacob:

[I plan to] graduate, umm, take a couple months off and then go to culinary arts.

Raul:

I want to go to college... I've been on a long journey around schools, but now, I'm ready just to go back to high school and finish it off.

Kyle:

No kid really likes school, but you know, you get through it, you do it. And then you realize when you're a senior, you've got to continue your education to get, to make more money and have more, better financial standards.

Leo:

Yeah, [I plan to graduate high school]. Um, I don't know [what I will do after I graduate high school], probably get a job and then see what happens from there, probably. Yeah, just get a job and see what happens.

Güero:

So I thought it out, 'I'm going to turn myself in. I'm going to do good. I'm going to go to school every day if I can.' And well that's what I'm doing right now. I'm hoping to graduate soon, like, maybe like at least 2015 cause I'm, I'm class of '14...

Um, yeah, I think I'll leave, I'll, I'll leave this school with enough knowledge, I guess I would say, um, to go into, um, [community

college name deleted], and just get a hold of everything, right then and then, I guess, learn.

## **Phase Two: What is the Lived Student Experience?**

Each student's story was unique and provided valuable insight into the alternative school experience. By examining all the stories together, the qualitative phase of this study established four themes found in the students' lived educational experiences. For most, if not all, of the participants, their journey to alternative school began in middle school, even though many did not arrive until high school. While attending alternative school, they experienced individual attention from teachers. The small classrooms and independent study options allowed students to participate, to some degree, in individualized, differentiated instruction. This environment also enabled some students to build supportive relationships with teachers. However, there was evidence the alternative schools lacked the academic rigor of their traditional counterparts. For example, Rainman, Kyle, Eddie, and Leo all described the schoolwork as easier, providing a quicker path to graduation. This finding is similar to many alternative programs previously researched. Additionally, the career destination for the narrative inquiry participants converged on military and law enforcement, indicating limited social capital development. The students showed little exposure to a range of career options and did not understand how their educational record might preclude them from achieving career goals.

**Middle school – the beginning.** This study provided student stories that illustrate what a growing body of research has established. Middle school is a fork in the academic road traveled by adolescents. It is where students either engage or

disengage from the educational system (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Eccles et al., 1993; Schwerdt & West, 2011). During adolescence, school experiences influence all aspects of development, physical, emotional, social, and cultural (Wigfield, Eccles, Schiefele, Roeser, & Davis-Kean, 2006). As Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) documented, “For some children, the early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and school dropout” (p.521).

The middle schools attended by this study’s participant seem incapable of providing effective interventions. Raul explained:

I never really had no one to tell me like, oh like, every time I went to the office, they'd be like, ‘Again?!’ Like they'll be, ‘Again?!’ Like they wouldn't sit down and say like, ‘Oh, you know like you really need to make a change.’ They didn't tell me how it was going to affect me long-term. They just sat down and told me like, ‘Again? You're doing this. You're doing that.’ Like, they sat down and practically screamed at me. They didn't tell me like, ‘Oh, the things you're doing now, is really going to affect you long-term you know, you really got to think about it.’ They didn't sit down and talk to me that way.

Eddie’s description was similar:

I think seventh. Yeah, middle school. They would just send me to the office. They know me a lot. They'd just be like, ‘Oh, you again [name deleted]? You don't understand your lesson, huh?’ I'm like, ‘Nope.’ In middle school, I would have to stay Friday night school and all that stuff. At times, I would lie to my parents. I would tell them, ‘I'm going to stay after school and get extra help.’ In reality, I was in Friday night school detention.

Eventually, they either expelled the student or passed them on to the high school without addressing any behavioral or academic problems. Barr and Parrett (2001) established that disengaged middle school students have a greater than average need for positive relationships with adults at school. Based on the students’ experiences in

this study, positive relationships with adult educators seemed to be precisely what was missing in the middle schools they attended.

**Alternative school – individual attention.** At CCS, students experienced both individualized academic attention and an environment that supported establishing relationships with caring and supportive teachers. Eddie describes the individual academic attention he received at CCS, compared to his traditional school:

Right here in [CCS], they pay more attention to you. They help you more out. Like in a regular high school, because they have a lot of students so, they really don't focus, focus on you just at once. Cause there's a lot of students so they've got to pay attention to all of them. On the other hand, over here, like if I ask for help, they help me out because there's not that many students here. Right here because I got more attention. They helped me more out. Meanwhile at [my regular high school] the classroom was about 24 students so the teacher couldn't just focus on me. I was falling behind.

Raul gives us an example of a supportive teacher-student relationship:

And with Ms. [name deleted] right now, she's trying to, her class is all about improvement. Not only, not only academically and all that, but also like with your habits you have out of school you know. She tries to get you help, not only by helping you out during class, but what you're doing after school, too.

Both aspects of individual attention and the related literature are discussed in the following two sections.

***Individualized instruction.*** Personalized learning plans and individual instruction have been identified as necessary attributes of effective alternative programs (Aron, 2006; Barr & Parrett, 2001; Lange & Sletten, 2002). The results of this study support this conclusion. Individual academic help was the most frequently mentioned reason for success at CCS. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology's (2010) National Education Technology Plan (NETP)

presents the following definitions for individualization, differentiation, and personalization of instruction:

**Individualization** refers to instruction that is paced to the learning needs of different learners. Learning goals are the same for all students, but students can progress through the material at different speeds according to their learning needs. For example, students might take longer to progress through a given topic, skip topics that cover information they already know, or repeat topics they need more help on.

**Differentiation** refers to instruction that is tailored to the learning preferences of different learners. Learning goals are the same for all students, but the method or approach of instruction varies according to the preferences of each student or what research has found works best for students like them.

**Personalization** refers to instruction that is paced to learning needs, tailored to learning preferences, and tailored to the specific interests of different learners. In an environment that is fully personalized, the learning objectives and content as well as the method and pace may all vary (so personalization encompasses differentiation and individualization). (p. 12)

Personalized learning, under these definitions, encompasses both individualization and differentiation. Inherent in these definitions is the move from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered instruction. Students in this study provide examples of this movement when they describe their experience in alternative schools. Oscar provided an excellent example of student versus teacher centered instruction:

Your teacher, like here it's mostly, independent. You do your own thing, right? Over there, it was the whole class. The teacher would be up. And there would be different lectures every day. They would be teaching you.

Raul explains the difficulty of accessing help at his traditional middle school as compared to CCS:

Cause they have so many kids to deal with that I think they're just, they try to kick you out. And it's harder, it's harder over there for like someone to help you. Well, for me, that's what I thought. Cause I never

got any help from like from the teachers I got here, like from education. They never told me, 'Oh, come after school to come and learn,' like, you know if you don't understand something. And here, at [name deleted] CCS, when I don't understand something, they actually tell me you can come before school or after school and all that. They don't, like at normal high schools I think it's just like they don't really help you as much. Well, that's what my experience was.

These comments are consistent with other studies of alternative programs showing that some type of personalized instruction existed in effective alternative programs (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Watson, 2011).

Clearly, not all the schoolwork at CCS is individualized. Jacob explained that it is the small school environment, not necessarily personalized instruction, which helps him:

Then when I came here...It's just one teacher. Everyone does the same thing. There's no periods, different classes, nothing. It's just one teacher, one classroom and that's the way I like it. It's a better learning environment than other schools.

The American Psychological Association (APA) Work Group of the Board of Education Affairs (1997) established a framework for school reform that was based on "learner-centered psychological principles" derived from psychological and educational research. It essentially established practices that supported the education of all students by focusing on the learner and learning process. They enumerated fourteen principles organized into four areas:

1. *Cognitive and metacognitive factors* that relate to the constructive nature of the learning process and the value of helping learners to become more aware of their thinking and learning.
2. *Motivational and affective factors* that relate to the influence of emotions and the interest of the student in learning.

3. *Developmental and social factors* that emphasize positive learning climates and relationships in establishing a social context that facilitates meaningful learning, and also focus on identifying developmental differences within and among learners.

4. *Individual differences* that relate to basic principles of learning and the identification of unique individual attributes that determine effective learning modes for different learners.

Personalized learning incorporates these principles, which research has shown to increase academic achievement (Alfassi, 2004; Salinas & Garr, 2009; Weinberger & McCombs, 2001) and motivation (Daniels, Kalkman, & McCombs, 2001; Weinberger & McCombs, 2001).

***Caring and supportive relationships with teachers.*** The narrative inquiry participants who were successful academically were members of clusters whose BPNS means were higher than the sample mean. The above the line participants were able to establish positive relationships with teachers in alternative schools that they felt were important to their success. Rainman offered an example from the district's alternative school:

Every teacher there knew you. You knew every teacher there, not like in the regular high schools. They only know the smart kids there.

Oscar had supportive relationships with teachers in every school he attended including CCS:

I mean they're preparing me for right now for to go to [community college]. They're telling me, 'All right, all your courses you've got to take. What do you want to take in [community college]? What do you want to do after [community college], your two years? What university would you like to go?' I believe they're striving me for, you know, for that success. I know they're trying really hard to push me there.

Even though he "hated" the class, Kyle said:

Miss [teacher's name deleted] Miss [name deleted] loved me. Yeah, she was, I was the only person she loved. She was like, 'Kyle, you're so cool.' I was like, 'That's right.'

Raul described a direct link between a relationship with a teacher and his schoolwork improving:

Ms. [name deleted] pressured, like pressured you to come to school, you know? Like she never let you give up you know. She wasn't the type of teacher that, just cause you don't go to school or just cause you do something like this, she's just going to release you like that. She tries to work with you to improve, you know? And like that's why like ever since I came back to [name deleted], this site, it helped me a lot. I've been getting good grades.

This is consistent with SDT research which showed students' perceived BPNS directly linked to satisfying learning experiences and academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009; Jang et al., 2009; Miserandino, 1996) or correlated to intrinsic motivation, which is connected to student engagement and academic achievement (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Ryzin et al., 2007). Specifically, students' perceived relatedness satisfaction predicts learning experiences that are more satisfying (Jang et al., 2009) and academic achievement (Brokelman, 2009).

The results from this study concur with research showing effective alternative schools are successful in creating caring and supportive environments, which nurture positive student-teacher relationships (Darling & Price, 2004; de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; May & Copeland, 1998; Poyrazli et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008). These schools increase a student's sense of belonging (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Swaminathan, 2004). The student- teacher relationship is critical to student engagement and academic achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Ryan, Stiller, &

Lynch, 1994; Sewell & Hauser, 1980). This is especially true for alternative education students (Barr & Parrett, 2001; Kennedy, 2011).

Not all the participants liked the small school environment or developed supportive relationships with their teachers. Leo felt constrained and “held back” by CCS:

I think it’s, this is smaller, way smaller than a regular school. I would uh, make more uh, periods, more classes. I think that would uh, wouldn’t hold us back as much as we are.

Eddie developed respect for his teachers while at CCS:

I wouldn’t listen to the teacher. I would just get up and do my own thing, like command myself. Like, I kinda wouldn’t listen to my own parents at the house, so I’m like, ‘Who are you to tell me what to do in school? You’re a nobody. You’re just a teacher.’ But, now, I see things different, because they’re the ones trying to teach me, trying to make my future better, and I got to respect that.

However, Eddie did not develop an individual student-teacher relationship. Jacob also did not mention a special relationship with a teacher, but he liked the teachers at CCS and he appreciated the supportive environment CCS had created:

The teachers here, I’m actually nice with. I don’t talk back to them or anything...

This place, they actually understand where the people are coming from, so then they know how to deal with the people better. They actually take their time to understand their situation to find out different ways to teach them. Instead of just saying, ‘Hey, everybody inside this whole entire class has to do the same thing and then next period you go here and next period you go here.’

Consistent with past research, this study established that a caring, supportive environment focused on individualized instruction and positive student-teacher relationships is essential but not always sufficient for alternative schools to be

successful (Atkins et al., 2005; Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Kennedy, 2011; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Washington, 2008).

**Alternative school – academic expectations.** Even though the majority of the students surveyed indicated they learned more at the alternative school than at their traditional school, all the students interviewed suggested it was easier at the alternative school. All of the interview participants had experienced the classroom environment at CCS, where one or two teachers teach grades 6-12 in four core subjects (English/Language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). The teachers are often deemed “highly qualified” by alternative means, but very few hold high school level subject credentials in all the subjects they teach. It is unlikely the academic excellence found at a highly regarded traditional secondary school<sup>19</sup> could be matched by CCS, given such a diverse set of students, a shortened school day (four or five hours) and less qualified teachers. Leo’s description of a typical day does not paint a challenging, engaging learning environment:

A typical day here, uh we, I walk in, get my notebook and my textbook and start working. We uh turn it in, we put it away, then we get our other textbook and our other notebook, and then when we're finished with that assignment, we put that stuff away and then we go out to break. And then from there we go into a different class. And then from there, we oh, in the other class we do different kinds of stuff, but mostly we just go in, we get out our notebooks, we start taking history notes and then when we're done with that we just put it away, we get out our language arts textbook and notebook and just do an assignment on that. And we just go out to lunch, then we go home. [We start at]

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<sup>19</sup> The high school that supplies at least 20% of CCS enrollment was ranked in the top 20 public high schools nationally by US News & World Report in 2012.

7:45 [and leave at] 12:15. I like the time here it's shorter than a regular school.

Concluding that CCS was not academically challenging and lacked rigor is consistent with the existing research on alternative schools. Essentially, the students and staff accepted a quicker, easier route to graduation at the expense of not challenging the students intellectually or academically (Darling & Price, 2004; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004; Nichols & Steffy, 1999; Washington, 2008). As Fairbrother (2008), in her qualitative study of three alternative programs, observed:

Giving disaffected students easy routes to graduation, the measure of success in our school system, does not do them justice, as they are not challenged intellectually or academically and so are shortchanged and rendered unfit for real academic expectations in classes or in college. Everybody in the study – counselors, teachers, and students – knew the bargains that were made, but no one recognized the tragic folly of underestimating and under challenging these students. These students deserve better. (p.609)

Fairbrother's observation that everybody including the students "knew the bargains that were made" is support by Warren's (2007) speculation that alternative education students may prefer their schools to their traditional counterparts because the schools have reduced hours of attendance and require less effort. Likewise, Kelly (1993) reported that some alternative school students feel they have "tricked the system" because they get a diploma with less work.

Some students who do not graduate from CCS return to their traditional schools. Only time will tell if Raul and Leo graduate. Do they have the knowledge and skills to negotiate a comprehensive high school? As measured by his MAP scores Leo's skills grew at CCS, but he entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade just slightly above the 30<sup>th</sup>

percentile in reading, language arts, and math. Raul's MAP tests also indicated growth and had him entering his senior year in the 78th, 66th, and 30th percentiles for reading, language arts, and math respectively.

There is no research showing that alternative school students outperform their counterparts in traditional schools academically. In fact, Beken, Williams, Combs, and Slate (2009) found that at-risk students in traditional schools out performed at-risk students in Texas alternative education campuses, in a study of two years of state standardized tests. The few studies that have measured academic outcomes of students attending alternative schools using standardized tests have shown little to no change, or a decline (Carruthers, 1999; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Lange & Lehr, 1999). Cox (1999) and Nichols and Steffy (1999) found that even students who showed academic improvement in alternative schools did not carry that improvement into their academics when they returned to traditional schools. Research on alternative school student outcomes has shown some evidence of improved attitude, attendance, and behavior, but no consistent academic improvement (Carruthers, 1999; Lange & Lehr, 1999; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Gurantz (2010), who studied the transition of students from alternative education programs into traditional high schools within one large California school district for three years, found that the students "exhibited worse academic outcomes" (p. 5).

In a study examining the relationship between academic achievement and duration of placement in an alternative program in Pennsylvania, Elias (2011) found "The respondents [alternative program staff] did want the students to improve in academic and social/behavioral skills while in an alternative setting. However if they

had to choose between academic success and behavior success, they chose behavioral success” (p. viii). This priority on behavioral success, which is often measured in attendance, punctuality, and productivity, is consistent with past studies (Kelly, 1993).

Many of this study’s participants may have felt they learned more at their alternative school because traditional school wasn’t working for them. This was the case for Jacob:

I’ve learned way more than I’ve ever learned at any other school. Here, every time I come, I at least pay attention. I learn a lot here rather than other schools where I show up and I don’t even listen, because I can’t keep track with anything. So I never learned anything. That’s why I didn’t care and that’s why I started ditching. Because I was like, ‘I’m not learning anything, so what’s the point of going.’

Test scores indicate that many students at CCS are not learning as much as their counterparts in traditional school. Transcripts show numerous students are also not making the academic progress towards graduation as quickly as their counterparts. However, for some students like Jacob, alternative school is still working out better for them than traditional schooling did. The question is, could the alternative schools do even better by raising expectations. Maintaining high expectations has been found to be an important contributor to academic achievement at alternative schools (Aron, 2006; Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Quinn et al., 2006; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Washington, 2008).

**Intended destinations – building social capital.** Students living in poverty, especially ethnic minorities, are less likely to acquire the social capital valued by the educational system (Oseguera, Conchas, & Mosqueda, 2010). Social capital is comprised of the resources gained through social relationships and social networks. It

can include direct or indirect emotional support, information, guidance, and assistance in completing tasks. Both the quantity (number of relationships) and the quality (amount of interconnectedness) can affect educational outcomes (Coleman, 1988).

The participants in this study demonstrate a lack of social capital. All of the students intended to pursue a post secondary school education. Most planned to enter law enforcement, while others plan to join their relatives in landscaping businesses. Their limited view of the options available to them illustrates the need for alternative schools to facilitate access to a more diverse set of role models and mentors, who can provide information and opportunities to these students analogous to the successful programs researched by Conchas and Vigil (2012).

Students of color or with low socioeconomic status are particularly dependent on schools for social capital development (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Teachers are an important source of social capital (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Sewell & Hauser, 1980). Teacher-based social capital is a significant factor in dropout prevention, particularly for traditionally underserved students and students with academic difficulties (Croninger & Lee, 2001). Raul offered evidence supporting this finding:

[I] seriously thought like I wasn't going to graduate high school. I was just going to drop out and just go to juvenile hall...But right here they work with you to improve, you know? I don't think you get released here until they see that you're not going to change, you know? unless they didn't try. Unless they didn't try to help you improve, they're not going to let you go just like that.

[Name deleted] doesn't take crap, but if you're serious about school he'll try to work with you, you know? Because [name deleted] is a good teacher. I've seen him help...my family have gone, other family has gone to his class too, and he's helped them go to college. He helped them sign up for college and everything. But that's only if you're serious about school.

However, Güero's only comment about either of his two teachers was to complain:

Well, everything's good so far. It's just that a certain teacher he's always trying to put me down for some reason. But I don't let him get in the way, I just do my work and ignore him. I don't know. He's always picking on me for no reason. He must think I'm crazy or something.

Given that Güero is significantly behind academically, research suggests that CCS needs to consider an intervention. Güero's comment shows a lack of connection with his teacher. He does not feel respected. Respectful student-teacher interactions are essential to improving student outcomes (Hamre et al., 2012; Rodríguez, 2005; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). Güero's comments signal a need for intervention.

Interventions with urban adolescents in school need to focus on the development of social capital and networks in order to have long-term success (Kahne & Bailey, 1999). While establishing the centrality of teacher support to academic achievement, Rosenfeld, Richman, and Bowen (2000) found it was necessary for teachers to collaborate with others in the student's environment, including parents, peers, other educators, and community members, to produce desired educational outcomes. The students who told their stories for this research would have benefitted from a concerted effort by teachers to engage their networks and community members for the purpose of providing career exploration and identifying educational options.

### **Study Limitations**

In this section, the discussion on limitations at the end of Chapter Three is revisited. This allowed for reflection on the research process and an acknowledgment of its limitations.

#### **Generalizability**

This research studied only one alternative school in one southwestern state. Since policy and procedures in alternative education vary widely between districts within a state, and between states, the results are limited in their context generalizability. Eight student stories are presented. Each is unique, told by the student in his own voice. These educational stories allow researchers and educators to understand the experiences of these students in detail. They are small windows into the world of alternative education, opened so that practitioners might gain valuable insight into the strengths and weakness contained within. Although this study intentionally provided a maximal variation in the participants for the narrative inquiry, the stories certainly did not exhaust the possibilities within this context. However, each narrative was significant, providing insight into the context of alternative education, and illuminating what is possible.

Critical research does not seek to render results indefinite or unspecific. Its goals do not align with generalizability. This research chooses instead to value enlightenment, emancipation, and immanence. Enlightenment required that, during the data collection and analysis, the researcher remained open to identifying the meaning the students made from their experiences and be attentive to processes that create and maintain inequalities. Emancipation asked the researcher to recognize how

to provide agency and voice to those who are traditionally silenced. Critical immanence acknowledged the need to construct practical knowledge for critical social action. It moved the research beyond what exists to what should exist. Rigor and transparency in method and analysis are what countered the traditional notion of generalizability.

### **Positionality**

The researcher is a former Head Teacher at the research site. This position brought a wealth of experience and context knowledge, but also had the potential to influence the information students provided in their surveys and interviews. Research is interpretation, and in interpretation it is impossible to separate the knower and the known. The researcher came to this work with a contextual understanding built from years of experience and extensive literature review. This understanding informed the design and conduct of the research effort. There were procedures, member checking, and triangulation of data put in place to mitigate risk and minimize bias while still providing for the pragmatic bridging of research and practice.

### **Implications**

This study's findings have implications for practitioners, policy makers, and researchers. A discussion of these implications occurs in the following three sections: implications for educators in alternative schools, implications for educational leaders, and implications for future research.

## Implications for Educators in Alternative Schools

**Personalized learning.** Educational reform is moving to personalized instruction, facilitated by a deep integration of educational technology. As stated in the NETP:

The challenge for our education system is to leverage the learning sciences and modern technology to create engaging, relevant, and personalized learning experiences for all learners that mirror students' daily lives and the reality of their futures. In contrast to traditional classroom instruction, this requires that we put students at the center and empower them to take control of their own learning by providing flexibility on several dimensions (U.S. Department Of Education, Office Of Educational Technology, 2010, p. x)

Alternative education needs to be at the forefront of this transformation. This research and several other studies (Dugger & Dugger, 1998; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001; Washington, 2008) support a research synthesis conducted by Aron (2006) finding that alternative programs need to:

- focus on academic learning;
- develop engaging and creative instruction;
- establish a culture of high expectations for all students;
- make learning relevant and applicable to each student's life, educational goals, and career goals;
- insist on academically rigorous curricula tied to standards and accountability systems;
- ensure students have personalized learning plans and set learning goals based on their individual plans;

- provide opportunities for students to catch up and accelerate knowledge and skills;
- make available instructional approaches to help students achieve academic objectives.

Personalized learning environments encompass these attributes. Educators working in alternative education need to embrace the vision. This requires reimagining both the concept of independent study and classroom instruction. It embraces a learner-centered rather than teacher-centered approach and puts a premium on student flexibility. Researchers have documented that learner-centered, or personalized learning approaches, that customize instruction for every individual learner and create environments where learners take control of their own learning, are successful for at-risk students (Alfassi, 2004; McCombs & Quait, 2002; Weinberger & McCombs, 2001). Models of alternative schools successfully employing a personalized learning approach exist (Rubenstein, 2007; Smyth & McInerney, 2007; Steinberg & Almeida, 2010; Watson, 2011).

Examining student basic psychological needs satisfaction and teacher support for intrinsic and autonomous types of extrinsic motivation can help implement a personalized learning approach. Assessing student basic psychological needs satisfaction can help identify opportunities for program improvement and aid in student placement. As shown in this study, the three psychological needs of autonomy, competency, and relatedness are highly correlated. However, autonomy has been found to play a pivotal role in student engagement and, therefore, should receive particular focus (Hafen et al., 2012). Researchers have established

instructional strategies for enhancing autonomy, competency, and relatedness.

“Autonomy support connotes identifying, nurturing, and building students’ inner motivational resources” (Reeve & Jang H, 2006, p. 216). Autonomy supportive teachers offer choice, incorporate student interests, communicate through informational, non-controlling language, identify and explain the value and importance of tasks, listen to students and acknowledge their perspectives and provide structure (Reeve, 2006). Teachers support competency by offering challenging tasks and providing individual relevant feedback that guides a student to mastery (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Warm, caring, personal student-teacher relationships that convey mutual respect build relatedness (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Reeve, 2006). It is important to note that teachers can be trained to increase support for student basic psychological needs (Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Jeon, & Barch, 2004).

**Teacher expectations.** The key to academic rigor is maintaining high expectations. This must be more than a sentence in a mission statement. Alternative schools often have cultures that categorize their students from a deficit rather than a strength-based perspective, which leads to lower expectations and less rigorous instruction (de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Washington, 2008). Teacher expectations, communicated through verbal and nonverbal cues, instructional practices, and feedback, can influence how students perform (Rosenthal, 2002; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein, 2002). Expectations are particularly important for underserved students who suffer a systemic tendency toward lower expectations, which often produce a significant self-fulfilling prophecy effect, accompanied by learned helplessness (de Boer, Bosker, & van der

Werf, 2010; Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996; Weinstein, 2002). Disadvantaged students respond particularly well to teachers that maintain high expectations (Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Raising teacher expectations requires changing their beliefs. Professional development that focuses on instructional behaviors has been shown to be an effective way to achieve this change. Hamre et al. (2012) demonstrated that both teacher beliefs and their practice improved after training them in specific behaviors. Their “practice-focused” professional development was more successful in changing teacher beliefs than a standard information course. Darling-Hammond and Friedlaender (2008) have suggested that professional development using teacher-led professional learning communities can help transform teachers beliefs and expectations in a positive direction (see also Nir & Bogler, 2008; Rourke & Boone, 2008). Both approaches emphasize that establishing strong supportive student-teacher relationships is essential to raising teacher expectations.

**Nurturing relationships and social capital.** Conchas (2001) demonstrated that:

While schools often replicate existing social and economic inequality present in the larger society and culture, they can also circumvent inequality if students and teachers work in consort toward academic success...[and] structure learning environments that link academic rigor with strong collaborative relationships among students and teachers... establishing strong links between racial and ethnic minority youth and the institutional support necessary for academic engagement and success. (p. 502)

The student voices in this study show the heart of alternative education success lies in the development of a caring and supportive environment that nurtures positive student-

teacher relationships. These relationships need to not only support students but also to empower them with “rich social capital and resource generating networks” (Stanton-Salazar, 2010, p. 1097) that will alter their destinies.

**Reimagining alternative education.** This study suggests that an appropriate vision for alternative education was captured by the U.S. Department Of Education, Office Of Educational Technology (2010):

Schools must be more than information factories; they must be incubators of exploration and invention. Educators must be more than information experts; they must be collaborators in learning, seeking new knowledge and constantly acquiring new skills alongside their students. Students must be fully engaged in school—intellectually, socially, and emotionally. This level of engagement requires the chance to work on interesting and relevant projects, the use of technology environments and resources, and access to an extended social network of adults and peers who support their intellectual growth. (p. 1)

Intended as the desired direction for all public education, this description is particularly relevant for alternative programs and the dream of an equitable and socially just education for all students.

### **Implications for Educational Leaders**

**Social Justice Implications.** An opportunity gap exists in the US educational system (U.S. Department Of Education, Office Of Civil Rights, 2012). This gap consists of an achievement gap, a graduation gap, a discipline gap, and a data gap. The current public education system is a meritocracy, rewarding conformance to cultural norms aligned with White middle class culture. Students of color, with low SES, or with disabilities are disproportionately disciplined and disenfranchised for their failure to conform (APA, 2008; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba & Rausch, 2006;

U.S. Department Of Education, Office Of Civil Rights, 2012; Wallace et al., 2008).

These students end up either leaving school, or in alternative education.

Some alternative schools further alienate students and, unconsciously, encourage deviant behavior (Brown, 2007; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Smith, 2003). However, many are encouraging, supportive places where students and adults develop positive relationships (Darling & Price, 2004; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr and Lange, 2003; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Quinn et al., 2006; Saunders & Saunders, 2001). This study supports findings which indicate that even at the best alternative schools, students, teachers, and administrators lower academic expectations. Students often graduate without the skills and knowledge required for success in post secondary education or the workplace (de la Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Washington, 2008). This process perpetuates an unjust educational system and hides significant components of the opportunity gap. To address this injustice, educational leaders must both improve alternative education and address the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline practices.

**Discipline.** Studies have shown that schools with higher suspension rates tend to have lower ratings in terms of academic quality and school climate (Losen & Skiba, 2011). Suspensions and expulsions have not proven effective in making schools safer or improving the learning environment (APA, 2008). Suspensions and expulsion rates are positively correlated to lower schoolwide student achievement (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). These facts should lead educational leaders to examine their disciplinary policies, with an eye to reducing the total number of suspensions and expulsions, while assuring equitable treatment for all students. Local educational leaders should

review their “zero tolerance” suspension and expulsion policies and procedures, and attempt to discourage the discretionary use of suspensions and expulsions. Are disciplinary actions administered fairly and judiciously?

Gary Orfield stated the goal in his forward to “Opportunities Suspended: The Disparate Impact of Disciplinary Exclusion from School” a report for The Civil Rights Project:

It is critically important to keep students, especially those facing inequality in other parts of their lives, enrolled in school. This relates directly to the common and often highly inappropriate policy of punishing students who are already at risk of dropping out by suspending them from school. Because suspension increases a young person’s probability of both dropping out and becoming involved with the criminal justice system, it is difficult to justify, except in extreme situations where safety or the educational process of the school is directly and seriously threatened. For the vast majority of cases, however, the challenge is to find a way to address the situation with better practices, more alternatives, and more effective training of school personnel. (Losen & Gillespie, 2012, p. 4)

Research has identified some effective programs used in lieu of suspensions and expulsions to keep students in school and still promote safe schools (Balfanz et al., 2007; Gagnon & Leone, 2001; Gottfredson, 1997; Losen, 2011). It is possible.

**Accountability.** Alternative schools, which have long been free from accountability, need to be held accountable if improved student academic outcomes are to be realized. To accomplish this, it is imperative that educational leaders understand the systemic role alternative programs play. National, state, and local leaders cannot allow their fervor for increased test scores in traditional schools to sweep alternative students under the rug. They must avoid using alternative schools as off the record warehouses for disruptive and academically challenged students,

keeping them away from established interventions and reporting systems in the traditional schools (Advancement Project, 2010).

Almeida, Le, Steinberg, and Cervantes (2010) warned of “a sea change in state policy and practice” that is needed to help alternative education establish itself “as a viable, proficiency-based pathway for the millions of young people who are failing to thrive in more traditional settings” (p. v). Most states have legislative definitions for alternative education, but only six states have separate accountability measures for alternative schools (Almeida, Le, Steinberg, & Cervantes, 2010). Of those six states, one, California, is currently unfunded, resulting in no collection or reporting of data (Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). In an absence of either federal or state legislation, most alternative programs go unmonitored (Martin & Brand, 2006).

Local and state leaders also must heed the warning carried in the latest national survey of alternative schools (Carver & Lewis, 2010). One-third of the reporting school districts were unable to enroll students in alternative schools because of staffing or space limitations. What happens to suspended or expelled students unable to enroll in alternative programs? How are they being educated? Also, an increasing number of middle school students are being served by alternative schools, generally in programs serving 6<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> grade (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Lehr et al., 2009). Alternative schools have traditionally served 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. As their student population gets younger, educational leaders must examine the appropriateness of their policies, procedures, and curriculum for these students.

**Student Voice.** Studies have identified a lack of focus on student voice as contributing to disengagement in alternative school (Kim & Taylor, 2008;

Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Washington, 2008) and dropping out (Smyth, 2007) because decisions about structure and content are made independent of what the students actually want, need, and think. In the research discussed here, students have offered insight into what enhances their educational experiences, and what detracts from their success.

Students have something to say about education, what engages them and what impedes their learning. Busher (2012) provided evidence of students being “expert witnesses” of schools, teachers, and instruction, and documented implications for educational leaders. The evidence suggests that listening to a diversity of student voices improves practice and helps teachers reflect on their practice. He also asserted students will challenge school cultures that are not aligned with mutual respect and collaboration between students and teachers, and recognition of student voice requires students to be respected as stakeholders in their education. “Because of who they are, what they know, and how they are positioned, students must be recognized as having knowledge essential to the development of sound educational policies and practices”(Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 12).

### **Implications for Research**

**Alternative schools.** Virtually all aspects of alternative education need further research. National and state databases need to be examined to determine accurate enrollment numbers. Demographics of alternative school student populations need to be compared to the student populations in the traditional schools from where students are referred. State and national test score data bases should be mined for student achievement data in alternative schools.

Other studies have emphasized the need to incorporate student voice into research and education reform efforts (Brown, 2007; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; de la Ossa, 2005; Loutzenheiser, 2002; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009). This study has shown that students can help identify environmental, procedural, and instructional improvements that increase their motivation and, ultimately, their academic achievement. Past research suggests that longitudinal studies highlighting student experiences be conducted using a critical theory or social justice lens, with the hope of empowering the marginalized student population that alternative education serves (Brown, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2002; Muñoz, 2004; Poyrazli et al., 2008).

Also needed is further research measuring student outcomes in alternative schools (Atkins et al., 2005; Brown, 2007; Foley & Pang, 2006; Kelly, 1993; Kim & Taylor, 2008; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McNulty & Roseboro, 2009; Muñoz, 2004; Quinn et al., 2006; Warren, 2007). Longitudinal studies that document academic achievement, graduation rates, social effectiveness, recidivism, post-secondary education, and employment are all needed.

Research objectively measuring academic achievement and student learning is necessary to inform leaders at alternative schools. Educators need not only to create caring, supportive environments but also to guard against watered down separate and unequal academic programs, which severely limit their students' future choices. This research "requires an adaptive philosophy of inquiry that neither sacrifices rigor for sensitivity or accuracy for appearances" (Muñoz, 2004, p. 15).

**Methodology.** The methodology developed for this study, in segments or its totality, is generalizable and useful to future studies. It provides a theoretically

informed mechanism to provide rigorous maximal variation sampling for a narrative inquiry that includes both narrative analysis and an analysis of narratives. Audio files were the data source for the narrative analysis in this methodology. Creating student stories in the participants' own voice preserves the impact and meaning of their experience. Using this approach offers researchers an opportunity to document diverse experiences and identify common aspects of experience for the phenomenon being investigated. "A combination of detailed knowledge of the life of a relatively small number of individuals and quantifiable data on many people provides ideal possibilities for understanding and explaining the social world" (Haavio-Mannila & Roos, 1999, p. 242).

### **Overarching Questions**

This study started with two overarching questions: Do alternative schools provide a real alternative for the students who attend them, and how can alternative schools better serve their students? No one can listen to the students who provided their educational stories without appreciating the importance of the alternative programs they attended. Alternative schools do provide an alternative education path, without which many students' goals of a diploma and continuing education would not be attainable. It was in alternative school that the participants of this study received individual attention, and were able to chart out a path to either graduation or a return to their traditional schools. Many came to value an education for the first time in these schools. Students who had believed they were incapable of learning were able to build a relationship with caring supportive teachers. These teachers guided the students in taking responsibility for their own learning. Is it a real alternative? Does it provide an

alternative that levels the playing field for underserved, marginalized students? Does it deliver an education equivalent to what students receive in traditional schools? This study casts doubt on these assertions.

It is necessary to take a systemic view when answering the second question, how can alternative schools better serve their students? Research clearly lays out a path for building upon the strengths found in alternative education, to reach the goal of a “real” alternative - an alternative that confronts and closes the opportunity gap. The path starts with new discipline policies and procedures at the federal, state, school district, school, and even classroom level in traditional schools. Educators need to recognize the first discipline referral or poor citizenship grade as an opportunity for successful early intervention, not the beginning of a paper trail that ultimately results in removal. The menu of interventions must include alternative programs that provide an opportunity for personalized learning in an environment that supports the creation of caring, nurturing relationships with teachers. Teachers trained and practiced in behaviors that foster these relationships, establish and maintain high expectations, and support the growth and maintenance of student social-capital. Teachers, schools, districts, states, and the federal government must become accountable to each other and the students they serve, not simply with standardized test scores, but with measures of student goal attainment, autonomy support, and basic psychological needs satisfaction. It is time to let alternative education out of the closet, and focus on what it can be. When educators follow this path, then the educational system will offer a real alternative for all students.

## APPENDIX A INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

### UCSD-CSUSM JOINT DOCTORAL PROGRAMS COVER SHEET FOR IRB APPLICATION

**Instructions to Principal Investigator:**

1. Project must qualify for Joint IRB review.
2. Complete and sign this Cover Sheet.
3. Submit this Cover Sheet with the complete IRB application to the Reviewing IRB (CSUSM IRB submissions, submit an electronic copy per the IRB application instructions).
4. The Reviewing IRB will review the IRB protocol and communicate with the Relying IRB. A representative of the Reviewing IRB and Relying IRB will sign this Cover Sheet to document completion of the review process.
5. Upon completion of review and approval of the IRB protocol, the PI will receive a copy of this Cover Sheet signed by the Reviewing and Relying IRB representatives. At that time, research may commence.

Reviewing IRB: Select the IRB based on the primary affiliation of the faculty member supervising this research. Note: Projects that involve VA facilities, UCSD MRI facility, or Rady Children's Hospital must go through the UCSD IRB. Projects that involve the Center for Children and Families must go through the CSUSM IRB.

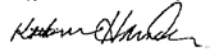
|                |                                     |       |                          |      |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|------|
| Reviewing IRB: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | CSUSM | <input type="checkbox"/> | UCSD |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------|------|

### B. Project Information

|                                                                                                                                 |                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Project Title<br><i>Real Alternative?</i><br><i>A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences in an Alternative School</i> |                                                      |
| Name of Student/Principal Investigator<br><i>Susan Glassett</i>                                                                 | Name of JDP Program<br><i>Educational Leadership</i> |
| Student e-mail Address<br><i>sglassett@ucsd.edu</i>                                                                             | Phone Number<br><i>760-533-9345</i>                  |
| Name of Responsible Faculty Member<br><i>Erika Daniels</i>                                                                      | Home Campus<br><i>CSUSM</i>                          |
| Faculty e-mail Address<br><i>edaniels@csusm.edu</i>                                                                             | Phone Number<br><i>760-750-8547</i>                  |
| Project Funding Source (if any)<br><i>N/A</i>                                                                                   |                                                      |

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

11/23/2011  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative of Reviewing IRB

11/28/11  
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Date of Approval

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Representative of Relying IRB

11-28-11  
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Date of Acceptance

|                                                                                                                      |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| For Reviewing IRB: For expedited review, please indicate approval category here (e.g., new project, amended project) | New Project |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|



California State University  
SAN MARCOS

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRB) California State University San Marcos  
Tel: 760-750-4029 irb@csusm.edu www.csusm.edu/irb

### Human Subjects Research Approval Form

**IRB #: 2011-143**

**To: Erika Daniels  
Susan Glassett**

**Project Title: Real Alternative? A Mixed Methods Examination of Student Experiences in an Alternative School**

This letter certifies that the above referenced project was reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Federal Regulations on Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46), including its relevant subparts.

#### Continuing Review

This approval is valid through the expiration date shown below. If this research project will extend beyond that date, a continuing review application must be submitted at least 30 days before this expiration using the Continuing Review form available on the IRB website. ([www.csusm.edu/irb](http://www.csusm.edu/irb))

#### Modifications to Research Protocol

Changes to this protocol (procedures, populations, locations, personnel, etc.) must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation using the Minor Modification Form available on the IRB website.

#### Unanticipated Outcomes/Events

The CSU San Marcos IRB must be notified immediately of any injuries or adverse conditions.

☒ *Approved Information Sheet or Consent Form(s) are attached. Only approved consent forms may be used to obtain participant consent.*

**Approval Date: 11/29/2011**

**Expiration Date: 11/28/2012**

Katherine Hayden, Ed.D.  
IRB Chair

#### The California State University

Bakersfield • Channel Islands • Chico • Dominguez Hills • East Bay • Fresno • Fullerton • Humboldt • Long Beach • Los Angeles • Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay  
• Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

## APPENDIX B CONSENT FORMS



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### **Consent to Participate in Research**

#### **Invitation to Participate**

Susan Glassett, a graduate student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), is conducting a study that seeks to document student experiences in alternative school. Your son/daughter is invited to participate in this study because he/she is a student at an alternative school.

#### **Purpose**

This study has three principal objectives:

1. To identify and describe the different types of students who attend alternative school.
2. To document and attempt to understand student school experiences before and while attending alternative school.
3. To identify opportunities for instructional improvement in alternative schools.

#### **Description of Procedure**

If you and your son/daughter agree to participate in the first part of the study, your student will be asked to complete a confidential 12-question survey. The survey has 9 questions that ask the students to rank their feelings about instruction and support they receive at school, 2 multiple choice questions about how much they learn and their future plans, and 1 short answer question to explain how they think the school can be improved. This survey will be administered during his/her school day and is expected to take no more than 15 minutes. Survey responses will be combined with descriptive data about your student (age, grade, ethnicity, length of enrollment) from his/her school records.

#### **Risks and Inconveniences**

There are minimal risks attached to this study. The potential risks of participation include:

1. Concerns about confidentiality and privacy
2. Loss of instructional time
3. Boredom or mental fatigue
4. Concerns about how the results will be used
5. Strong emotional reaction to the questions

#### **Safeguards**

1. The survey and associated data from school records will be kept confidential, linked only by a researcher-assigned number, and available only to the researcher for analysis purposes. No data will be linked to the student's name or address. The data will be destroyed upon completion of data analysis.
2. Participation is voluntary, and the student may skip any question or end the survey at any point with no consequences of any kind.
3. If the student starts taking the survey and decides that he/she is uncomfortable with the questions, then he/she can stop at any time. Nothing bad will happen if he/she stops taking the survey in the middle of it.



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4. Fake names for the school and district will be used to minimize the risk of identification when reporting the findings.

### **Voluntary Participation**

The student's participation is completely voluntary. Your student does not have to participate in this study if he/she does not want to. If you grant permission for your son/daughter to be in this study, you or the student can still choose to stop participating at any time. There are no consequences of any kind if you or the student decides not to participate. If your son/daughter is permitted to participate, his/her status in school will not be affected.

### **Benefits**

The student's participation will help the school and educational research community to better understand student educational needs and how to best meet those needs.

### **Questions**

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Susan Glasett, [sglasett@ucsd.edu](mailto:sglasett@ucsd.edu), (760) 761-5148, Hortensia Flores (for Spanish) (760) 201-3683 or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Erika Daniels, [edaniels@csusm.edu](mailto:edaniels@csusm.edu), (760) 750-8547. Questions about your child's rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at (760) 750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

### **Student please check the appropriate box:**

- ☐ Yes, I want to participate in the survey for this research study.
- ☐ No, I do not want to participate in the survey for this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's name (printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### **Parents please check the appropriate box:**

- ☐ Yes, my son/daughter may participate in the survey for this research study.
- ☐ No, my son/daughter may not participate in the survey for this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Legal Guardian's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This document has been approved by  
the Institutional Review Board at  
California State University San Marcos  
Expiration Date: November 20, 2012



California State University  
SAN MARCOS

### **Consentimiento para Participar en Investigación**

#### **Invitación a Participar**

Susan Glassett, estudiante graduada del programa de doctorado que imparten en conjunto la California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) y la University of California, San Diego (UCSD), está realizando un estudio que pretende documentar las experiencias de estudiantes en escuelas alternativas. Su hijo/hija está invitado a participar en este estudio porque él/ella es un/una estudiante en una escuela alternativa.

#### **Propósito**

El presente estudio tiene tres objetivos principales:

1. Identificar y describir los diferentes tipos de estudiantes que asisten a una escuela alternativa.
2. Documentar y tratar de entender las experiencias escolares de los estudiantes antes y durante su asistencia a la escuela alternativa.
3. Identificar oportunidades para mejorar la instrucción en escuelas alternativas.

#### **Descripción del Procedimiento**

Si usted y su hijo/hija aceptan participar en la primera parte del estudio, se le pedirá a su estudiante que complete una encuesta confidencial de 12 preguntas. La encuesta contiene 9 preguntas que piden a los estudiantes clasificar sus emociones acerca de la instrucción y el apoyo que reciben en la escuela; 2 de elección múltiple acerca de cómo aprender y sobre sus planes futuros; y 1 pregunta de respuesta breve para que expliquen cómo piensan ellos que la escuela puede mejorar. Esta encuesta será distribuida durante la jornada escolar de él/ella y se espera que no tome más de 15 minutos. Las respuestas a la encuesta serán combinadas con datos descriptivos acerca de su estudiante (edad, nivel educacional, etnicidad, período de permanencia en la escuela) obtenidos a partir de los registros escolares de él/ella.

#### **Riesgos e Inconveniencias**

El estudio conlleva riesgos mínimos. Entre los potenciales riesgos que supone la participación figuran:

1. Temores acerca de la confidencialidad y la privacidad
2. Pérdida de horas de clase
3. Aburrimiento o fatiga mental
4. Temores sobre el uso que se le dará a los resultados
5. Reacciones emocionales fuertes a las preguntas

#### **Salvaguardas**

1. La encuesta y los datos asociados de los registros escolares se mantendrán confidenciales, vinculados solo por un número asignado por el investigador, y disponibles solo para el investigador para fines de análisis. Ningún dato se vinculará al nombre o a la dirección del estudiante. Los datos serán destruidos una vez concluido el análisis de datos.
2. La participación es voluntaria y el estudiante podrá saltarse cualquier pregunta o terminar la encuesta en cualquier momento sin consecuencias de ningún tipo.



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3. Si el/la estudiante comienza a responder la encuesta y decide que se siente incómodo/incómoda con las preguntas, entonces puede dejar de responder en cualquier momento. No sucederá nada malo si él/ella deja de responder la encuesta a la mitad del proceso.
4. Se utilizarán nombres falsos para la escuela y el distrito a fin de minimizar el riesgo de identificación al informar sobre los hallazgos.

### Participación Voluntaria

La participación del/de la estudiante es absolutamente voluntaria. Su estudiante no tiene que participar en este estudio si él/ella no desea hacerlo. Si usted otorga permiso para su hijo/hija participe en el estudio, usted o su estudiante todavía podrán elegir no continuar en cualquier momento. No hay consecuencias de ningún tipo si usted o su estudiante deciden no participar. Si su hijo/hija tiene permiso de participar, el estatus de él/ella en el colegio no se verá afectado.

### Beneficios

La participación del estudiante ayudará a la escuela y a la comunidad que investiga el ámbito educacional para que comprendan mejor las necesidades educacionales de los estudiantes y cómo responder mejor a esas necesidades.

### Preguntas

El presente estudio ha sido aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por su sigla en inglés) de la California State University San Marcos. Si tiene preguntas acerca del estudio, puede dirigir las a la investigadora, Susan Glassett, [sglassett@ucsd.edu](mailto:sglassett@ucsd.edu), (760) 761-5148; para español, a Hortensia Flores (760) 201-3683; o bien a la consejera de investigación, Dra. Erika Daniels, [edaniels@csusm.edu](mailto:edaniels@csusm.edu), (760) 750-8547. Las preguntas acerca de los derechos de su hijo como participante de la investigación deben dirigirse a la IRB llamando al (760) 750-4029. Se le dará una copia de este formulario para sus archivos personales.

### Estudiante, por favor marque el casillero adecuado:

- ☐ Sí, quiero participar en la encuesta para este estudio de investigación.
- ☐ No, no quiero participar en la encuesta para este estudio de investigación.

Nombre del participante (letra imprenta)

Firma del participante

Fecha

### Padres, por favor marquen el casillero adecuado:

- ☐ Sí, mi hijo/hija puede participar en la encuesta para este estudio de investigación.
- ☐ No, mi hijo/hija no puede participar en la encuesta para este estudio de investigación.

Firma del Padre/Tutor Legal

Fecha

Firma de la Investigadora

Fecha

This document has been approved by  
the Institutional Review Board at  
California State University San Marcos  
Expiration Date: November 28, 2012



California State University  
SAN MARCOS

### **Consent to Participate in Research**

#### **Invitation to Participate**

Susan Glassett, a graduate student in the joint doctoral program at California State University San Marcos (CSUSM) and University of California, San Diego (UCSD), is conducting a study that seeks to document student experiences in alternative school. Your son/daughter is invited to participate in the interview portion of this study because he/she is a student at an alternative school and previously participated in the survey portion of this study.

#### **Purpose**

This study has three principal objectives:

1. To identify and describe the different types of students who attend alternative school.
2. To document and attempt to understand student school experiences before and while attending alternative school.
3. To identify opportunities for instructional improvement in alternative schools.

#### **Description of Procedure**

A small number of students who participated in the survey part of this study are being asked to participate in interviews. On the survey the students were asked to indicate if they would like to be interviewed as part of this study. Students were selected based on indicating their desire to be interviewed and their answers on the survey. Students will be interviewed two or three times about their school experience. Each of these interviews is expected to take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted one-on-one with the researcher. The interviews will be audio taped and take place at or close to their school site at a location agreed to by the student and the researcher.

#### **Risks and Inconveniences**

There are minimal risks attached to this study. The potential risks of participation include:

1. Concerns about confidentiality and privacy
2. Loss of instructional time and/or personal time
3. Boredom or mental fatigue
4. Concerns about how the results will be used
5. Strong emotional reaction to the questions

#### **Safeguards**

1. All interviews will be kept confidential and, if any reference is made to other individuals in the interview, fake names will be used to prevent any identification. To further insure confidentiality, interview transcripts tapes and related material will be kept on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home.
2. Participation is voluntary, and the student may end the interview at any time with no consequences.
3. If the student feels sad, upset, or worried at any time during the interview, we will stop immediately, and I will refer him/her to the counseling office.



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4. Fake names for the school and district will be used to minimize the risk of identification when reporting the findings.

### Voluntary Participation

The student's participation is completely voluntary. Your student does not have to participate in this part of the study if he/she does not want to. If you grant permission for your son/daughter to be interviewed for this study, you or the student can still choose to stop participating at any time. There are no consequences of any kind if you or the student decides not to participate. If your son/daughter is permitted to participate, his/her status in school will not be affected.

### Benefits

Your son's/daughter's participation will help the school and educational research community to better understand student needs and how to best meet those needs.

### Questions

This study has been approved by the California State University San Marcos Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Susan Glassett, [sglassett@ucsd.edu](mailto:sglassett@ucsd.edu), (760) 761-5148, Hortensia Flores (for Spanish) (760) 201-3683 or the researcher's advisor, Dr. Erika Daniels, [edaniels@csusm.edu](mailto:edaniels@csusm.edu), (760) 750-8547. Questions about your child's rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB at (760) 750-4029. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

### Student please check the appropriate box:

- ☐ Yes, I agree to be interviewed and audio taped for this research study.
- ☐ No, I do not want to participate in the interviews for this research study.

Participant's name (printed)

Participant's signature

Date

### Parents please check the appropriate box:

- ☐ Yes, my son/daughter may be interviewed and audiotaped for this research study
- ☐ No, my son/daughter may not participate in the interviews for this research study.

Parent/Legal Guardian's signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

This document has been approved by  
the Institutional Review Board at  
California State University San Marcos  
Expiration Date: November 28, 2012



California State University  
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### **Consentimiento para Participar en Investigación**

#### **Invitación a Participar**

Susan Glassett, estudiante graduada del programa de doctorado que imparten en conjunto la Universidad de California en San Marcos (CSUSM) y la Universidad de California en San Diego (UCSD), está realizando un estudio que busca documentar las experiencias de estudiantes en escuelas alternativas. Su hijo/hija está invitado a participar en este estudio porque él/ella es un/una estudiante de una escuela alternativa y anteriormente participó en la etapa de encuesta del presente estudio.

#### **Propósito**

Este estudio tiene tres objetivos principales:

1. Identificar y describir los diferentes tipos de estudiantes que asisten a escuelas alternativas.
2. Documentar y tratar de entender las experiencias escolares de los estudiantes antes y durante su asistencia a la escuela alternativa.
3. Identificar oportunidades para mejorar la instrucción en las escuelas alternativas.

#### **Descripción del Procedimiento**

A un pequeño número de estudiantes que participó en la encuesta, la cual forma parte de este estudio, ahora se les pide que participen en algunas entrevistas. En la encuesta, a los estudiantes se les solicitó que indicaran si les gustaría ser entrevistados como parte de este estudio. Se seleccionó a los estudiantes considerando que habían manifestado el deseo de ser entrevistados y también sus respuestas a la encuesta. Los estudiantes serán entrevistados dos o tres veces respecto de su experiencia en la escuela. Anticipamos que cada una de estas entrevistas tomará cerca de 45 minutos y se realizarán con la presencia del estudiante y la investigadora. Estas entrevistas quedarán registradas en cinta de audio y tendrán lugar en o cerca del establecimiento escolar, en un sitio acordado entre el estudiante y la investigadora.

#### **Riesgos e Inconveniencias**

El estudio conlleva riesgos mínimos. Entre los potenciales riesgos que supone la participación figuran:

1. Temores acerca de la confidencialidad y la privacidad
2. Pérdida de horas de clase y/o tiempo personal
3. Aburrimiento o fatiga mental
4. Temores sobre el uso que se le dará a los resultados
5. Reacciones emocionales fuertes a las preguntas

#### **Salvaguardas**

1. Todas las entrevistas se mantendrán confidenciales y, en caso de que haya una referencia a otros individuos durante la entrevista, se usarán nombres falsos para evitar cualquier identificación. A fin de reforzar aún más la confidencialidad, la transcripción del audio grabado de las entrevistas y el material relacionado se guardarán en una computadora protegida por contraseña y/o en un mueble bajo llave en el hogar de la investigadora.
2. La participación es voluntaria y el estudiante puede terminar la encuesta en cualquier momento sin consecuencias de ningún tipo.
3. Si el/la estudiante se siente triste, molesto(a) o preocupado(a) en cualquier momento durante la entrevista, la entrevista cesará de inmediato y lo/la referiré a la oficina del consejero escolar.



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4. Se utilizarán nombres falsos para la escuela y el distrito a fin de reducir el riesgo de identificación al informar sobre los hallazgos.

#### Participación Voluntaria

La participación del/de la estudiante es absolutamente voluntaria. Su estudiante no tiene que participar en esta parte del estudio si él/ella no desea hacerlo. Si usted otorga permiso para que su hijo/hija participe en el estudio, usted o su estudiante todavía podrán elegir no continuar en cualquier momento. No hay consecuencias de ningún tipo si usted o su estudiante deciden no participar. Si su hijo/hija tiene permiso de participar, el estatus de él/ella en el colegio no se verá afectado.

#### Beneficios

La participación del estudiante ayudará a la escuela y a la comunidad que investiga el ámbito educacional para que comprendan mejor las necesidades de los alumnos y cómo responder mejor a esas necesidades.

#### Preguntas

El presente estudio ha sido aprobado por la Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por su sigla en inglés) de la Universidad de California en San Marcos. Si tiene preguntas acerca del estudio, puede dirigir las a la investigadora, Susan Glassett, [sglassett@ucsd.edu](mailto:sglassett@ucsd.edu), (760) 761-5148; para español, a Hortensia Flores (760) 201-3683 o bien a la consejera de investigación, Dra. Erika Daniels, [edaniels@csusm.edu](mailto:edaniels@csusm.edu), (760) 750-8547. Las preguntas acerca de los derechos de su hijo como participante de la investigación deben dirigirse a la IRB llamando al (760) 750-4029. Se les dará una copia de este formulario para sus archivos personales.

#### Estudiante, por favor marque el casillero adecuado:

- ☐ Sí, acepto ser entrevistado y que el audio de la entrevista quede grabado para este estudio de investigación.  
☐ No, no quiero participar en las entrevistas para este estudio de investigación.

Nombre del participante (letra imprenta)

Firma del participante

Fecha

#### Padres, por favor marquen el casillero adecuado:

- ☐ Sí, mi hijo/hija puede ser entrevistado/a y el audio de la entrevista puede quedar grabado para este estudio de investigación.  
☐ No, mi hijo/hija no puede participar en las entrevistas para este estudio de investigación.

Firma del Padre/Tutor Legal

Fecha

Firma de la Investigadora

Fecha

This document has been approved by  
the Institutional Review Board at  
California State University San Marcos  
Expiration Date: November 28, 2012

## APPENDIX C SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey ID: \_\_\_\_\_

### My Feelings About School

We really care about how you feel about school. This survey can help us make our school better. If you want to please fill out the survey and return it to your teacher. Your feed back is confidential.

|                                                                                                                             |                                                                  | RATING                               |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Please read each question. Think about how true it is for you.<br>Put an "X" in the box that seems to match what you think. |                                                                  | 1<br>not at<br>all<br>true<br>for me | 2<br>not<br>true<br>for me | 3<br>Some-<br>what<br>true<br>for me | 4<br>true for<br>me | 5<br>very<br>true<br>for me |
|                                                                                                                             |                                                                  |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 1.                                                                                                                          | I really like the people at this school.                         |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 2.                                                                                                                          | People at this school tell me I am good at my school work.       |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 3.                                                                                                                          | I am free to express my ideas and opinions at this school.       |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 4.                                                                                                                          | I consider the people at this school to be my friends.           |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 5.                                                                                                                          | I have been able to learn interesting new things at this school. |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 6.                                                                                                                          | Most days I feel good about the work I do at this school.        |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 7.                                                                                                                          | My feelings are taken into consideration at this school.         |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 8.                                                                                                                          | I can pretty much be myself at this school.                      |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |
| 9.                                                                                                                          | People at this school are friendly towards me.                   |                                      |                            |                                      |                     |                             |

10. Do you learn more or less at this school compared to other schools? Please check one box.

☐ I learn more at this school than other schools I have attended? Why?

☐ I learn less at this school than other schools I have attended? Why?

11. What are your educational goals? Please check one box.

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate from high school with a diploma<br><input type="checkbox"/> Graduate from high school and join the military<br><input type="checkbox"/> Get out of school as fast as possible even if it means not graduating<br><input type="checkbox"/> Graduate from high school then go to college or a school after high school<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other please explain: | <input type="checkbox"/> Get a GED<br><input type="checkbox"/> Don't know |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|

12. How could we make this school better?

## APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Lead off question: *Why don't we start with how you came to be at this school?*  
(reminders....listen, listen, listen.....let them tell their story then seek any clarifications afterward)

To understand their experience it is important to get the story leading up to their being sent to CCS. This question is not complete until we understand:

- If they disengaged from school and at what point.
- What they feel and have felt in the past about school.
- How they view the process that ended up with their placement at CCS

Follow up questions might include:

*How do you feel about the process?*

*Were you treated fairly?*

*Do you want to return to the school you were at before?*

*How do you feel about school now? Did you ever feel differently?*

*When did you first start (not liking school, doing drugs, skipping classes, not going to school, hanging out with your homies.....)?*

2. *How do you feel about this school?*

Want to capture their experiences in depth here. Questions need to be guided by their response. *What do they like? Why? What don't they like? Why? Who do they think cares about them? What would make school better? How would they change the school? Describe an typical day.*

3. *What are your goals for the future?*

Does the student intend/want to return to the school or district they left? Why do they come to school (parents, PO, want to graduate, friends)? What will they do when they finish high school (college, work, hang out)?

## APPENDIX E DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

*Table E.1* Frequency Tables for Participant Demographics

| Class room or IS | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Classroom        | 138       | 69.7    | 75.4          | 75.4               |
| IS               | 45        | 22.7    | 24.6          | 100.0              |
| Total            | 183       | 92.4    | 100.0         |                    |

| Grade | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 6th   | 1         | .5      | .6            | .6                 |
| 7th   | 6         | 3.0     | 3.4           | 4.0                |
| 8th   | 23        | 11.6    | 13.1          | 17.0               |
| 9th   | 27        | 13.6    | 15.3          | 32.4               |
| 10th  | 36        | 18.2    | 20.5          | 52.8               |
| 11th  | 43        | 21.7    | 24.4          | 77.3               |
| 12th  | 40        | 20.2    | 22.7          | 100.0              |
| Total | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

| Gender | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Female | 29        | 14.6    | 16.6          | 16.6               |
| male   | 146       | 73.7    | 83.4          | 100.0              |
| Total  | 175       | 88.4    | 100.0         |                    |

| Age   | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 12    | 5         | 2.5     | 2.8           | 2.8                |
| 13    | 17        | 8.6     | 9.7           | 12.5               |
| 14    | 27        | 13.6    | 15.3          | 27.8               |
| 15    | 26        | 13.1    | 14.8          | 42.6               |
| 16    | 41        | 20.7    | 23.3          | 65.9               |
| 17    | 39        | 19.7    | 22.2          | 88.1               |
| 18    | 17        | 8.6     | 9.7           | 97.7               |
| 19    | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 98.9               |
| 20    | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 100.0              |
| Total | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

| Free/Reduced Lunch | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| yes                | 152       | 76.8    | 86.4          | 86.4               |
| no                 | 24        | 12.1    | 13.6          |                    |
| Total              | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

| Ethnicity                 | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| White (not Hispanic)      | 19        | 9.6     | 10.8          | 10.8               |
| Hispanic                  | 142       | 71.7    | 80.7          | 91.5               |
| Black or African American | 10        | 5.1     | 5.7           | 97.2               |
| Native American           | 4         | 2.0     | 2.3           | 99.4               |
| other                     | 1         | .5      | .6            | 100.0              |
| Total                     | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

| English Proficiency                    | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| English Only                           | 52        | 26.3    | 29.7          | 29.7               |
| Reclassified Fluent English Proficient | 40        | 20.2    | 22.9          | 52.6               |
| Initial Fluent English Proficient      | 4         | 2.0     | 2.3           | 54.9               |
| English Learner                        | 79        | 39.9    | 45.1          | 100.0              |
| Total                                  | 175       | 88.4    | 100.0         |                    |

| <b>Length of Enrollment<br/>in months</b> | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 0                                         | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 1.1                |
| 1                                         | 14        | 7.1     | 8.0           | 9.1                |
| 2                                         | 16        | 8.1     | 9.1           | 18.2               |
| 3                                         | 9         | 4.5     | 5.1           | 23.3               |
| 4                                         | 6         | 3.0     | 3.4           | 26.7               |
| 5                                         | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 27.8               |
| 6                                         | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 29.0               |
| 7                                         | 16        | 8.1     | 9.1           | 38.1               |
| 8                                         | 31        | 15.7    | 17.6          | 55.7               |
| 9                                         | 14        | 7.1     | 8.0           | 63.6               |
| 10                                        | 11        | 5.6     | 6.3           | 69.9               |
| 11                                        | 5         | 2.5     | 2.8           | 72.7               |
| 12                                        | 3         | 1.5     | 1.7           | 74.4               |
| 13                                        | 27        | 13.6    | 15.3          | 89.8               |
| 20                                        | 1         | .5      | .6            | 90.3               |
| 21                                        | 1         | .5      | .6            | 90.9               |
| 22                                        | 11        | 5.6     | 6.3           | 97.2               |
| 23                                        | 1         | .5      | .6            | 97.7               |
| 24                                        | 1         | .5      | .6            | 98.3               |
| 48                                        | 2         | 1.0     | 1.1           | 99.4               |
| 50                                        | 1         | .5      | .6            | 100.0              |
| Total                                     | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

| <b>Special Ed</b> | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| yes               | 31        | 15.7    | 17.6          | 17.6               |
| no                | 145       | 73.2    | 82.4          | 100.0              |
| Total             | 176       | 88.9    | 100.0         |                    |

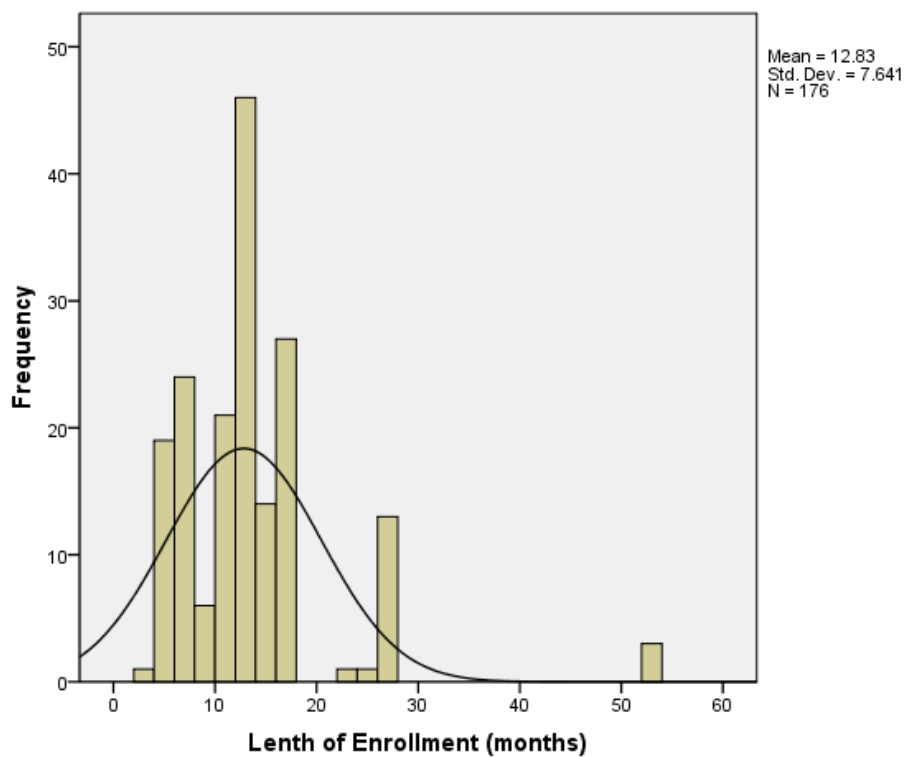
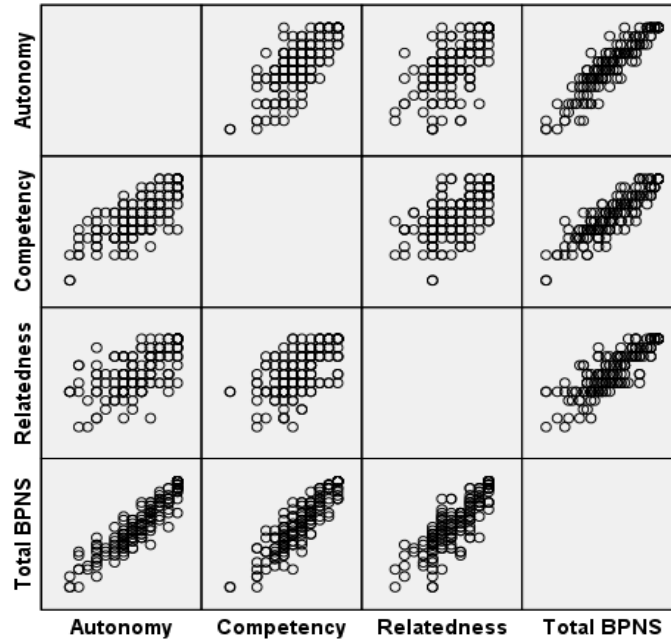


Figure E.1 Histogram for Length of Entollment



Figure E.2 Histogram for Age

## APPENDIX F CORRELATION TABLES AND GRAPHS



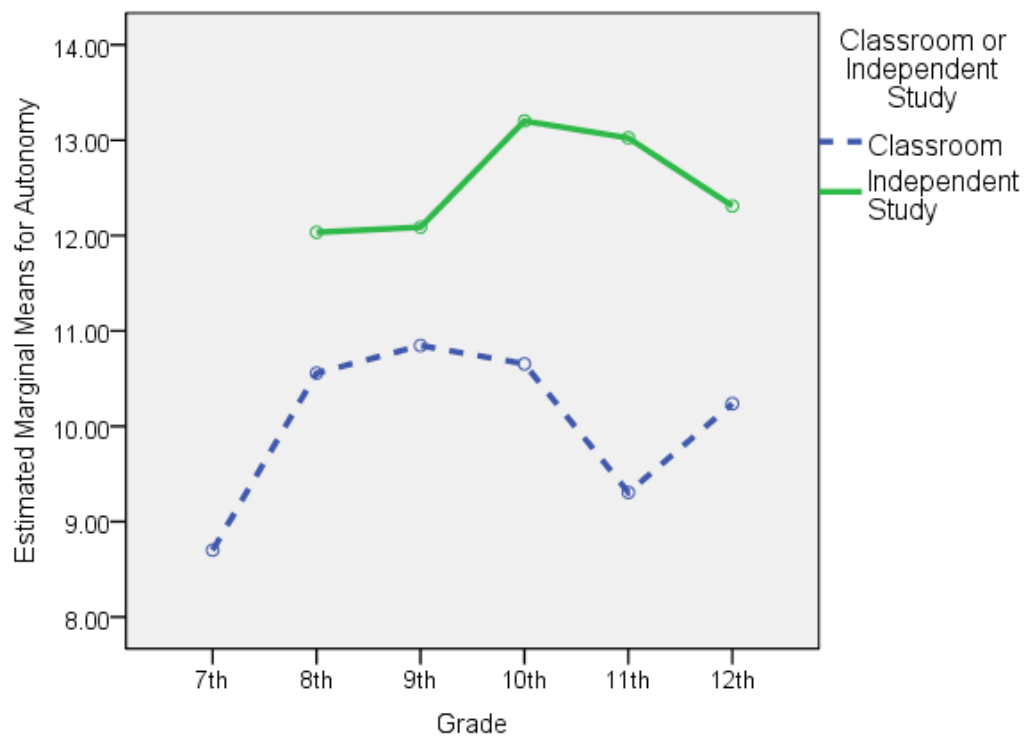
*Figure F.1* Scatterplot Showing Correlations of Subscale Totals and BPNS

*Table F.1* Correlations Between Subscales for BPNS

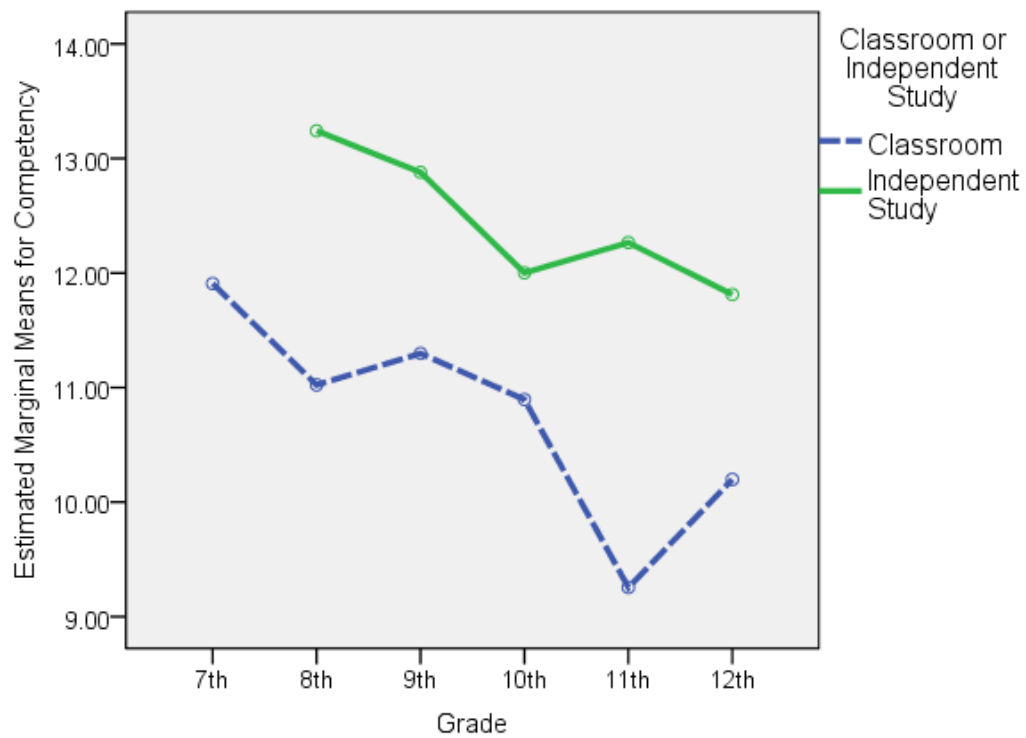
|             |                     | Correlations |            |             |            |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------|------------|-------------|------------|
|             |                     | Autonomy     | Competency | Relatedness | Total BPNS |
| Autonomy    | Pearson Correlation | 1            | .782**     | .667**      | .928**     |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     |              | .000       | .000        | .000       |
|             | N                   | 173          | 170        | 172         | 169        |
| Competency  | Pearson Correlation | .782**       | 1          | .633**      | .900**     |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000         |            | .000        | .000       |
|             | N                   | 170          | 175        | 172         | 169        |
| Relatedness | Pearson Correlation | .667**       | .633**     | 1           | .847**     |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000         | .000       |             | .000       |
|             | N                   | 172          | 172        | 175         | 169        |
| Total BPNS  | Pearson Correlation | .928**       | .900**     | .847**      | 1          |
|             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000         | .000       | .000        |            |
|             | N                   | 169          | 169        | 169         | 169        |

Note. \*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

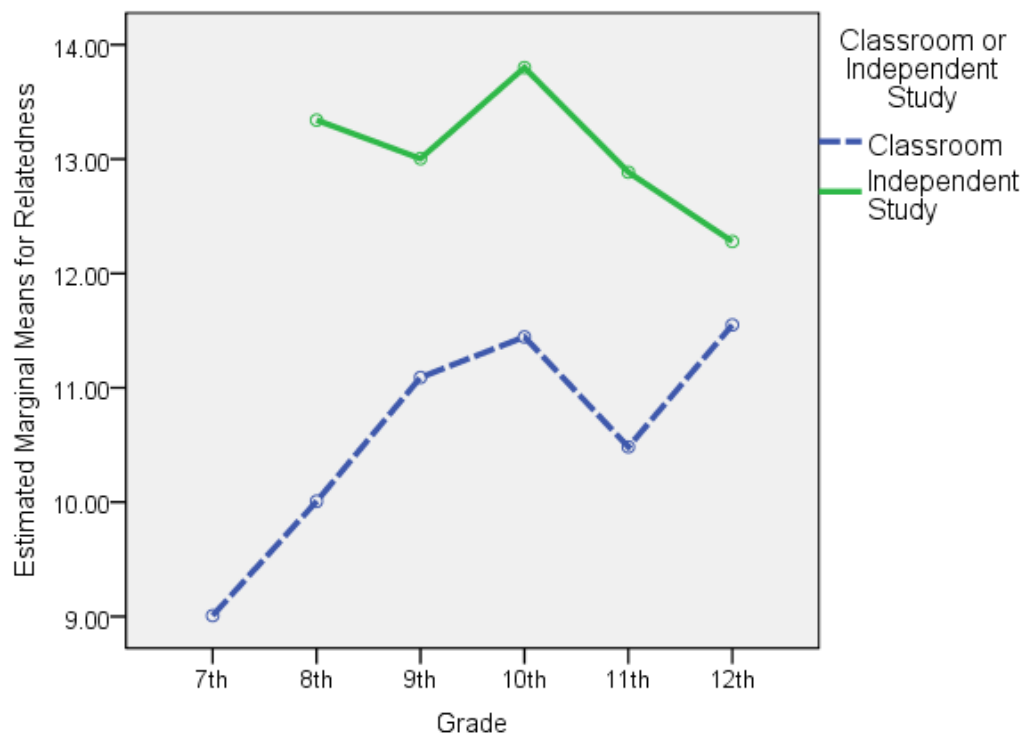
## APPENDIX G ESTIMATED CLASSROOM VS IS BPNS MEANS



*Figure G.1* Estimated marginal means for total autonomy in classroom and independent study. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Age in years = 16.2535



*Figure G.2* Estimated marginal means for total competency in classroom and independent study. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Age in years = 16.2535



*Figure G.3* Estimated marginal means for total relatedness in classroom and independent study. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Age in years = 16.2535

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