

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL CALIFORNIA CONTINUATION
HIGH SCHOOLS: EFFECTIVELY SERVING STUDENTS AT RISK

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Education Degree
in Educational Leadership

by

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August 2011

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family
Cathy Martin and our beautiful and amazing children, Liam and Taryn.
And
My parents
Colleen and Bill McClay

Acknowledgement

I have been blessed in both my personal and professional lives by having amazing mentors who have guided me and provided direction – even when I wasn't looking for it. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Debbie Leidner for seeing professional and academic potential in me that I was not ready to see. Her sage advice and prodding has never led me astray, and this dissertation is but one of many gifts that her guidance has provided me. I would like to thank my chair, Dr. Diane Gehart, for her guidance and encouragement to share this work with a broader audience. I would also like to thank my colleague and friend, Odus Caldwell, for generously giving his time on my committee and ensuring that this work stayed grounded in the real world.

I could not have done any of this without my family. I am eternally grateful for the support of my partner, Cathy, for her incredible encouragement and willingness to give me the time and space I needed to be successful in this process. I want to thank Liam and Taryn, my children, for their patience and understanding when I couldn't join them for fun and for calling me out when I was having fun instead of doing my "homework."

Finally, I want to thank the continuation high school students and staff who inspired me to do this work. To the students and staff of Cal Burke High School, you motivated me to learn more so that I could serve you better. To the staff at the schools that participated in this study, thank you for being generous with your time and expertise.

"If I have seen further it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants."
Sir Isaac Newton

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SUCCESSFUL CALIFORNIA CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS: EFFECTIVELY SERVING STUDENTS AT RISK

by

Stephanie L. McClay

Doctor of Education Degree

in Educational Leadership

No Child Left Behind dramatically increased federal and state accountabilities for schools and districts by requiring states to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. NCLB requires equal access to educational opportunities for all students. This provision, coupled with increased accountabilities related to high school graduation rates, has resulted in a significant increase in alternative school enrollments at the high school level as schools and districts seek to serve the needs of at-risk students. California continuation high schools are charged with providing alternative ways of helping at-risk students to remain in school and meet state performance standards common to all students. California continuation school enrollments disproportionately represent socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority, and disabled students, and there is consensus in the literature that, overall, these schools do not provide the same level of rigor, access, and opportunity as comprehensive high schools. To mitigate these issues of equity and access, it is critical that more attention is

given to improving the alternative education system. This multiple-case, qualitative study seeks to explore a sample of successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. The researcher believes that a better understanding of these elements would allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts.

The findings of this study indicate that a positive school culture with a focus on personalization permeates school operations and interactions with students at successful continuation high schools. These schools maintain a positive school culture supported by a clear mission, high expectations for students' success, and a safe and orderly school environment. The operational structures at each school vary; however, these schools perceive that they have a high level of district and community support, principal leadership that supports distributed leadership and collaboration, multiple pathways for students to complete graduation requirements, and class size norms below 25. The school culture emphasizes differentiation of instruction based upon individual student needs and focuses on academic as well as personal growth. The staff at all these schools articulates a commitment to never giving up on students, and they prioritize student engagement through positive adult and peer relationships. The affective qualities of staff members, both classified and certificated, are perceived to be more important to the students' and schools' success than the quantity of staff members on site.

Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

There is no single commonly accepted definition of what constitutes alternative schools and programs (Aron, 2003; Lange & Sletten, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education defines an alternative education school as

a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 55)

Given the nebulous nature of alternative education definitions, states, districts, and schools are left to their own interpretations to design and implement alternative education schools. The lack of consensus in the definition also confounds the empirical study of alternative schools and programs (Muñoz, 2004), and few national level measures exist with respect to features of enrollment in public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (NCES, 2002).

State law in California authorizes four types of alternative schools that are targeted primarily at high school students: continuation schools, community day schools, county-run community schools, and independent study (Hill, 2007, McLaughlin, Atukpawu, & Williamson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Continuation schools are operated by school districts and serve students whose needs have not or cannot be met in a traditional high school setting. Community day schools are district-operated schools that serve pre-expulsion students, students with severe disciplinary issues, and/or students who are involved with juvenile law enforcement agencies. Community schools are

county-operated schools that serve students who have been expelled from district schools for serious offenses or who are involved with juvenile law enforcement agencies. Independent study programs are programs of choice that districts operate to provide an educational alternative to regular school attendance. While independent study is considered an alternative education option, it is generally not recognized as a stand-alone school.

In California, there is currently no reliable, standardized measure for evaluating the effectiveness of alternative schools. This is likely a reflection of a lack of consensus among educators and policymakers about how to measure the effectiveness of schools that serve students with special needs (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008).

The California Department of Education (CDE) reports both state and federal accountability results for all schools under the general heading of the “Accountability Progress Reporting” (APR) system. The Academic Performance Index (API) is the cornerstone of the state’s academic accountability requirements (CDE, 2009a). Its purpose is to measure the academic performance and growth of schools. California’s accountability system measures the performance and progress of a school or Local Education Agency (LEA) based on results of statewide tests at grades two through twelve. A school's API is a composite number representing the results of these tests. Under federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements, the API is one of the indicators for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Use of the API as an accountability measure for continuation high schools is problematic because the formulas used to calculate the API become less reliable when applied to school with enrollments lower

than 200 students (CDE, 2009a). Most continuation high schools in California have enrollments under 200 students.

In an effort to address the inadequacies of the API for measuring performance at alternative schools, the California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM). The ASAM provides school-level accountability for alternative schools serving highly mobile and highly at-risk students. The ASAM accountability data provides supplemental information to NCLB, AYP, and the API requirements. The ASAM also provides important information for the majority of ASAM schools who do not meet AYP criteria or do not have valid API scores due to their difficulties in meeting the requirements of participation in NCLB (e.g., test participation rates, time in school, percent proficient in English-language arts and Mathematics, subgroup numbers, and API requirements, among others). ASAM is a voluntary program where qualifying schools select 3 of 14 reporting indicators measuring student learning readiness, transition, and academic performance (CDE, 2009b). Participating schools annually report on these three indicators. The ASAM serves community day schools, continuation schools, county community schools, county court schools, Division of Juvenile Justice schools, opportunity schools, and alternative schools of choice and charter schools that meet the eligibility requirements approved by the State Board of Education (SBE). The ASAM is not a standardized measure, as each participating school selects its own indicators. As a result, the ASAM cannot be used to compare performance among and between alternative schools. Although developed specifically for California alternative schools, the ASAM, like API and AYP, does not

provide a systemic, accurate, and standardized measure of school quality for alternative schools (Hill, 2007).

Sagor (1999) cautions that alternative programs outside of the traditional settings may marginalize at-risk students unless specific attention is directed to ensure equitable access to a rigorous educational program that will prepare students to participate in mainstream society. Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, et al. (2008) noted that “at the district level, alternative education options vary substantially in form, focus and quality” (p. 9) and provide a substantially different educational program than those offered by comprehensive high schools. As alternative schools, particularly continuation high schools, are increasingly relied upon in California to meet the needs of at-risk students, it is imperative that reliable measures of school quality for these types of schools be established. This study seeks to contribute to the research base and expand the literature related to indicators of school quality in continuation education in California.

Problem Statement

Background

NCLB dramatically increased federal and state accountabilities for schools and districts by requiring states to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students. These systems are based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all groups of students reach proficiency by the year 2014. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that all student demographic groups have access to quality instruction and are achieving

proficiency. School districts and schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state standards. Schools that meet or exceed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for State Academic Achievement Awards. NCLB requires equal access to educational opportunities for all students. This provision, coupled with increased accountabilities related to high school graduation rates, has resulted in a significant increase in alternative school enrollments at the high school level as schools and districts seek to serve the needs of at-risk students (Powell, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006).

Alternative Schools

There is general consensus in the literature that there are three categories of alternative schools (Powell, 2003; Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2002) including schools of choice (magnet schools), schools that serve students with significant disciplinary and behavior issues, and schools that focus on academic improvement that provide opportunities for students to “catch up with their peers in both academic and social skills” (Powell, 2003, p. 69). Powell (2003) concedes that many alternative schools actually represent a hybrid of all three categories. California continuation high schools tend to represent a hybrid of the latter two categories of alternative schools (Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Perez, 2008).

Alternative School Students

Alternative school populations tend to disproportionately represent low-income, minority, and disabled students (Fairbrother, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Sagor, 1999). In California, a recent study of continuation high schools found that minority populations, particularly Hispanic, African American, and English Learner populations, are disproportionately represented in the overall student populations while non-Hispanic, white, and Asian students are underrepresented (Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Perez, 2008).

Students in alternative education programs are believed to be at risk of educational failure (Quinn et al. 2006). They are highly vulnerable youth with multiple risk factors and a great deal of turbulence in their lives. The single common denominator is that most continuation students have reached age 16 lacking sufficient academic credits to remain on track to graduate with their age cohort, but the data also reveal them to be a highly vulnerable population characterized by multiple risk behaviors and other nonacademic learning barriers. For example, continuation students are more likely than students surveyed in comprehensive high schools to be in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent, are more likely to move from school to school, have significantly higher rates of regular and heavy alcohol and drug use (including use at school), are more likely to have been in physical fights at school, are more likely to be involved with gangs, and are more likely to be physically victimized in and out of school (Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Lynne Perez, 2008). Continuation schools are charged with providing alternative ways of helping at-risk students to remain in school and meet state performance standards common to all

students. But these academic efforts cannot be separated from the need to address the high level of nonacademic learning barriers that continuation students experience.

Building Resilience

Historically, alternative schools, and in particular continuation schools in California, focused on students' social and behavioral development (Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, et al, 2008; Sagor, 1999). There is a preponderance of evidence in the literature to indicate that students in alternative schools appreciate the high level of personalization, small class size, individualized academic attention, and personalized relationships with school staff (De La Osa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Quinn, et al., 2006). Gregory, Pugh, and Smith's study (as cited in De La Osa, 2005) "stated with some confidence that alternative schools come closer to satisfying student needs, as defined by Maslow's hierarchy, than do conventional schools" (p. 26).

Many students enter alternative education programs with little confidence in their abilities to be successful students (Quinn et al., 2006). Jesse et al. (2004) observed that the personal involvement of staff members with at-risk Latino students resulted in students' increased commitment and a greater attachment to school. In De La Osa's (2005) research related to students' alternative school experiences, she found compelling evidence to support that students' personal relationships with teachers definitely had a positive influence in the students' educational experience. While addressing the social and behavior needs of alternative school students should not be minimized, the implementation of No Child Left Behind has necessitated a paradigm shift in alternative

education to equally embrace high academic standards and equity in educational opportunities for at-risk students.

Indicators of Alternative School Quality

The equalization of the accountability playing field between comprehensive schools and alternative schools mandates that alternative schools incorporate the same rigorous, standards-based curriculum as their comprehensive school counterparts (Fairbrother, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Sagor, 1999). Alternative schools are easily lulled into what Muñoz (2004) has identified as a “culture of remediation” in which low expectations for both students’ abilities and expected learning results fall short of adopted standards; however, if students in alternative schools are held to a lower standard of academic achievement than comprehensive high school students, they will be less prepared to participate in post-secondary educational and vocational opportunities (Powell, 2003) which further marginalizes an already at-risk population.

In alternative schools and programs, academic achievement arguably relies on a strong school culture of high expectations for student ability and achievement (Fairbrother, 2008; Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004; Powell, 2003). School and district-level leadership are also significant indicators of alternative school quality (Perez & Johnson, 2008). Effective school leaders in California continuation high schools implement clear and consistent processes regarding the intake of students, they apply more rigorous standards to themselves and their faculties than those imposed by the state or district, and they use student performance data to guide the change process (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Purpose and Significance

This study sought to inform policy and practice in continuation education. In addition, it was the intent of this researcher to contribute to the knowledge base regarding alternative school quality as it relates to supporting the academic, social, and behavioral needs of a highly diverse at-risk student population. Alternative school enrollments disproportionately represent socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority, and disabled students, and there is consensus in the literature that, overall, alternative school programs do not provide the same level of rigor, access, and opportunity as comprehensive high schools. To mitigate these issues of equity and access, it is critical that more attention is given to improving the alternative education system in California.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore a sample of successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California, as measured by multiple, full-term accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. The researcher believes that a better understanding of these elements would allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study addressed the overarching question of: How do the services at California continuation high schools that have received multiple 6-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) support student learning and achievement? More specifically, (a) How does the structure of the school support student learning and achievement? (b) How do the academic practices of

the school support student learning and achievement? (c) How do the social emotional practices of the school build students' resilience and support student learning and achievement? (d) How does the staffing of the school support student learning and achievement?

Overview of Methodology

Methodological Approach

Culture, specifically school culture, is an abstract concept that is difficult to contextualize and define. It is composed of the collective behaviors, values, and practices of individuals within the cultural group (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Individual perspectives and experiences combine to create the whole. In order to examine these perspectives, the researcher must become embedded in the social context he/she is attempting to understand. As a trusted participant-observer, the researcher is able to actively engage research participants and observe these behaviors, values, and practices in their natural context. As a result of this interaction, a holistic view of the cultural group will be revealed through analysis of individual research participant's experiences.

It was the goal of this research study to provide a holistic, descriptive overview of the behaviors, values, and practices that exist in three successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles, California. Given the descriptive and open-ended nature of this research study, an ethnographic approach was best suited to address the research questions. The purpose of ethnographic methodologies is to describe and interpret behaviors to provide a holistic view of a select cultural group (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Ethnography's strong descriptive aspects align with the research purpose in that they support the construction of patterns of structures, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs present

in the cultures of successful continuation high schools based upon the collective experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders. Ethnographic methodologies, including, observation, survey, interviews, document reviews, focus groups and critical incidents, provided the thick, rich descriptive data required to address the research questions.

Research Setting

This multiple case study included three continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California. Each of these schools has received at least two successive full-term accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Each of these schools has earned at least two successive full-term WASC accreditations, has a student enrollment over 100 with at least fifty percent representing minority ethnic populations, and is located in Los Angeles County, CA.

Research Sample

A pilot study addressing the same research questions as this study was conducted by this researcher in October 2009 in which fifteen schools that had either received multiple full-term accreditations by WASC or that were identified as 2009 Model Continuation High Schools by the State of California were invited to complete a survey (Appendix A) describing their schools. The pilot study was descriptive in nature and focused on an aggregate representation of participating schools. Within this group of schools, a typical case sampling strategy was applied to identify the three schools selected for this study. A within case sampling strategy was applied to identify teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to participate in focus groups, interviews, and observations at each school site.

Limitations

California school districts operate 519 continuation high schools. This study samples three schools within a specifically targeted sample and is in no way representative of continuation high schools statewide. The primary criterion by which participating schools were selected is their WASC accreditation term. This accreditation term, coupled with its related self-study process, is assumed to be an accurate indicator of school quality; however, using the WASC accreditation term as indicator of school quality is not aligned to standardized measures of school accountability in California. Finally, given that there are no state guidelines for required elements of continuation high schools and very little state oversight of program components at individual schools, schools participating in this study varied widely in terms of resources, programs, staffing, and structure. This limitation was minimized in that the nature of this study is descriptive rather than comparative and its purpose was to identify common elements at these schools.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms will be used throughout the study. For the purposes of consistency and clarity, they are defined as follows:

Alternative School or Program: A public elementary/secondary school or program that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school.

At-Risk Student: Any child who is unlikely to graduate, on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal

relationships (Sagor and Cox, 2004).

Charter School: A public charter school is a publicly funded school that, in accordance with an enabling state statute, has been granted a charter exempting it from selected state or local rules and regulations. It is typically governed by a group or organization (e.g., a group of educators, a corporation, or a university) under a contract or charter with the state. In return for funding and autonomy, the charter school must meet accountability standards. A school's charter is reviewed periodically and can be revoked if guidelines on curriculum and management are not followed or the standards are not met.

Continuation High School: A type of alternative school that is a high school diploma program designed to meet the needs of students who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their educations.

Magnet School: Public schools with specialized courses or curricula. "Magnet" refers to how the schools draw students from across the normal boundaries defined by authorities (usually school boards) as school zones that feed into certain schools. Some magnet schools have a competitive entrance process, requiring an entrance examination, interview, or audition. Other magnet schools select all students who apply or use a lottery system, or a system combining some elements of competitive entrance and a lottery.

Pilot School: A Pilot school is a public school of choice that operates differently than regular public schools. Although under the control of the school

district in which they operate, Pilot schools have greater flexibility in the areas of governance, school budget, staffing, curriculum, and scheduling. Pilot schools also have greater independence in areas of professional development and teaching strategies.

Resilience: One's ability to overcome adversity.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one provided an introduction to the study, rationale for the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, a brief overview and definition of alternative education, a description of alternative education student populations, a description of educational resilience, an overview of effective schools correlates, an overview of the methods, research questions, significance of the study, and a definition of key terms. Chapter two will present a review of the literature, providing a description of alternative education nationwide as well as in California, describing at-risk students, providing a description of resilience and its application in education, providing a description of effective schools correlates, and presenting characteristics of effective alternative schools. Chapter three outlines the methodology of the research and procedures used in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Alternative Education

Alternative schools and programs have become recognized largely for their mission to educate students who are most at risk of failing in the regular public education system. Lehr, Tan, and Ysseldyke (2009), in their recent review of state-level policy and research related to alternative schools, concluded that the number of students enrolled in alternative schools and programs is rising nationwide and that trend is likely to continue as districts and schools grapple with the accountabilities of No Child Left Behind.

National Perspective

Alternative forms of education have existed in the United States since the origins of public education; however, their widespread adoption and formalized expansion did not occur until the 1960s and 1970s (Kleiner, Porch, & Farris, 2002). In the 1960s and 1970s, alternative education was grounded in the social justice agenda inherent in the Civil Rights Movement (Sagor, 1999) and associated with the Freedom Movement that embraced the notion that students learn in different ways and that children should be given “freedom to learn and freedom from restrictions” (Tissington, 2006, p. 19). Influenced by the Freedom Movement, public alternative schools began to appear. Public alternative schools were characterized as Open Schools in which parent, teacher, and student choice were emphasized in a non-competitive, child-centered teaching and learning environment. “Schools without walls, schools within a school, multicultural schools, continuation schools, learning centers, fundamental schools, and magnet schools were all the result of the open school influence” (Tissington, 2006, p. 19). While most of these types of schools have lost their broad appeal, continuation schools and magnet

schools continue to be prevalent alternative education options in the public school system.

There is no single commonly accepted definition of what constitutes alternative schools and programs (Aron, 2003; Lange & Sletten, 2002). Smith (1974) defines a public alternative school as “any school that provides alternative learning experiences to those provided by conventional schools and that is available by choice to every family within its community at no extra cost” (pp. 14-15). The U.S. Department of Education defines an alternative education school as

a public elementary/secondary school that addresses the needs of students which typically cannot be met in a regular school and provides nontraditional education which is not categorized solely as regular education, special education, vocational education, gifted and talented or magnet school programs. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 55)

Given the nebulous nature of the definitions of alternative education, states, districts, and schools are left to their own interpretations to design and implement alternative education schools. The lack of consensus in the definition also confounds the empirical study of alternative schools and programs (Muñoz, 2004), and few national level measures exist with respect to features of enrollment in public alternative schools and programs for at-risk students (NCES, 2002).

Although the definition of alternative education schools remains unclear, there has been considerable descriptive research related to these types of schools. Raywid (1994) is largely credited in the literature as identifying three types of alternative schools (Powell, 2003; Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006; U.S. Department of

Education, 2002). Raywid (1994) describes Type I schools as innovative schools that exemplify the best thinking regarding innovation and school restructuring. They are schools of choice and are usually popular and well-regarded in their communities. Magnet schools, Pilot schools, and charter schools could be considered Type I schools. Raywid (1994) categorizes Type II schools as Last Chance Programs to which students are assigned. These programs may include in-school suspension programs, and longer term placements for “chronically disruptive” (Raywid, 1994, p. 27) students. These schools and programs focus on behavioral modification with little attention to curriculum and differentiation of instruction. Type III schools have a remedial focus (Raywid, 1994). These schools focus on providing students with academic or behavioral remediation in a supportive environment with the intention of returning these students to mainstream programs. Powell (2003) concedes that many alternative schools actually represent a hybrid of all three types.

California Perspective

State law in California authorizes four types of alternative schools that are targeted primarily at high school students: continuation schools, community day schools, county-run community schools, and independent study (Hill, 2007, McLaughlin, Atukpawu, & Williamson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Figure 1 summarizes the features of each type of school. Continuation schools are operated by school districts and serve students whose academic, personal, social, and/or behavioral needs have not or cannot be met in a traditional high school setting. Community Day schools are district-operated schools that serve pre-expulsion students, students with severe disciplinary issues, and/or students who are involved with juvenile law enforcement agencies.

Community schools are county-operated schools that serve students who have been expelled from district schools for serious offenses or who are involved with juvenile law enforcement agencies. Independent study programs are programs of choice that districts operate to provide an educational alternative to regular school attendance. While independent study is considered an alternative education option, it is generally not available as a stand-alone school.

Figure 1 Features of California Alternative Education Programs

	Continuation	Community Day	Community	Independent Study
Mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete courses for graduation • Emphasize work and intensive guidance • Meet students' needs for flexible schedule or occupational goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually planned education • Emphasize occupations and guidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teach knowledge and skills of core curriculum • Provide alternative to regular attendance at traditional school
Operated By	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts or County Offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • County offices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Districts
Grades Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9-12 (generally over 16 years old) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-12
Placement Criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Suspended or expelled • Habitually truant or irregular attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Expelled • Probation referred • Referred by School Attendance Review Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers • Expelled • Referred by School Attendance Review Board • Homeless children • Probation referred • On probation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteers
Instructional Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small classes • Individual instruction • Independent study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small classes • Individual instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small classes • Individual instruction • Independent study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent study • Individual instruction • Online learning

Note: Adapted from Hill, E.G. (2007). Improving Alternative Education in California. Sacramento, CA: California Legislative Analyst's Office.

As of the 2004-2005 school year, there were 851 alternative schools in California, including 501 continuation schools, 56 community schools, and 294 district or county administered community day schools (Hill, 2007). Together, these four programs serve approximately 15 percent of California's public high school students each year (Hill, 2007). Continuation schools and independent student programs serve 85 percent of alternative program students with continuation schools serving about half of all alternative students and independent study serving approximately one-third of all alternative students (McLaughlin et al. (2008).

California Continuation High Schools

Continuation schools have existed in California since 1919, and state law requires that every district serving high school students must operate at least one continuation high school (CDE, 1987). Originally established to give working students over the age of 16 a more flexible school schedule, continuation schools now tend to serve a population of students deemed at risk for not completing high school and have a legislative mandate to focus on dropout prevention and recovery (CDE, 2010; Hill, 2007, Williamson, 2008). The CDE defines the outcomes for continuation education to include dropout prevention, recovery of out-of-school youth, increased student retention, increased graduation rates for students at risk of failure of completing high school, learning gains for students that are significantly behind in credits, educational services and support for foster youth, diversion from the criminal justice system, support for pregnant and parenting students, and other services that derive from a supportive educational environment (CDE, 2010).

Williamson (2008), in her review of the legislative context of continuation high schools in California, described continuation schools as "decoupled" (p. 2) from

mainstream schools. Meyer and Rowan (1991) describe decoupling in organizations as the creation and maintenance of gaps between formal policies and actual organizational practices that enable organizations to gain legitimacy with their external constituents while simultaneously maintaining internal flexibility to address practical considerations. The decoupled nature of continuation education, combined with an "ambiguous legislative framework" (Williamson, 2008, p. 2) allows districts significant latitude in the design and implementation of their continuation high schools to better meet the needs of their local communities. Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) noted that "at the district level, alternative education options vary substantially in form, focus and quality" (p. 9) and provide a substantially different educational program than those offered by comprehensive high schools.

In contrast to the other types of alternative education in California, continuation schools are more often designed as long-term placements for students and are obligated by statute to offer students coursework required for a high school diploma or equivalent (Hill, 2007). The CDE (1987), in its only publication related to continuation high schools, states that continuation high schools "assist students in acquiring a high school diploma by offering a broad-based curriculum that includes personalized instruction; a work-study program; and intensive counseling, guidance, placement, and follow up services" (p. 1). In apparent conflict with the CDE's depiction, recent studies of California continuation schools indicate that continuation high schools generally offer a very narrow curriculum that focuses on core courses; very few schools have any significant vocational component; and there are limited counseling, guidance, placement, and follow up services available to students because most districts use the same staffing

norms for continuation high schools as they use for comprehensive high schools (Hill, 2007; Perez & Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Williamson (2008) concludes that the decoupled nature of alternative education programs combined with limited oversight at the state level leads to the wide range in quality and availability of instructional and support resources at continuation high schools throughout the state. As a result, program quality and resources at continuation high schools is largely dependent upon the individual leadership of school-based administrators and continuation educators (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Williamson, 2008).

A Typology of California Continuation Schools.

Diedre Kelly (1993), in her seminal work on continuation high schools in California, presented a typology that identified continuation high schools as either safety valve or safety net schools. In this typology, safety valve schools provide "a mechanism to rid mainstream schools of failures and misfits without holding school administrators fully accountable for the consequences" (Kelly, 1993, p. 68). In contrast, safety net schools provide a student-centered program that is designed to meet the intellectual or social needs of those students that the mainstream schools cannot or will not help (Kelly, 1993). Recently, the John Gardner Center at Stanford University conducted case study research on continuation high schools in California in collaboration with the National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University and WestEd. The research provided a descriptive analysis of alternative education in California, most particularly, the operation and outcomes of continuation high schools in diverse regions of the state. Using the data from this research, Jorge Ruiz de Velasco (2008), built upon

Kelly's work to propose a typology of continuation high schools in California that includes three philosophical paradigms: *Fix the school to adapt to students, fix the student to adapt to school, and dumping ground*.

Schools that operate under a *fix the school* paradigm are closely aligned with what Kelly (1993) describes as safety net schools. According to Ruiz de Velasco (2008), the underlying philosophical assumption at this type of school is that the students coming to alternative schools were not well served by traditional schools. As a result, administrators and staff at this type of school work in students' best interest to individualize instruction and services and demonstrate a willingness to adapt the school and/or instructional environment to meet the unique needs of each student (McLaughlin et al., 2008).

Schools that operate under a *fix the student* paradigm align with Kelly's (1993) safety valve schools in that these schools have embraced a belief system that students who come to alternative high schools have failed to meet the expectations of traditional schools (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008). Fix the student schools seek to assist students in changing their noncompliant or maladaptive academic and/or social behaviors so that they can return to the traditional school setting. In this paradigm, the alternative school is viewed as a relatively temporary setting and clearly places the traditional comprehensive high school as the preferred and valued educational setting. McLaughlin et al. (2008) typify these schools as *benign neglect* schools in that they provide a required service, but there is little attention to program quality, resources, or student pathways.

Finally, *dumping ground* schools function as holding places for students who will eventually drop out. These schools also embrace a belief system that blames the student

for not being successful in a traditional school setting, but fails, either by design or by neglect, to provide any support for students to become successful (Ruiz de Velasco, 2008). McLaughlin et al. (2008) found district administrators viewed alternative education programs, and continuation schools in particular, as dumping grounds for disruptive students and ineffective teachers.

Accountability

NCLB dramatically increased federal and state accountabilities for schools and districts by requiring States to implement statewide accountability systems covering all public schools and students (Powell, 2003). These systems are based on challenging state standards in reading and mathematics, annual testing for all students in grades 3-8, and annual statewide progress objectives ensuring that all demographic groups of students reach proficiency by the year 2014. Assessment results and state progress objectives must be disaggregated by poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency to ensure that no demographic group is left behind. School districts and schools that fail to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) toward statewide proficiency goals will, over time, be subject to improvement, corrective action, and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course to meet state standards. Schools that meet or exceed AYP objectives or close achievement gaps will be eligible for State Academic Achievement Awards. NCLB requires equal access to educational opportunities for all students. This provision, coupled with increased accountabilities related to high school graduation rates, has resulted in a significant increase in alternative school enrollments at the high school level as schools and districts seek to serve the needs of at-risk students (Powell, 2003; Quinn et al., 2006).

The assumed equalization of the accountability playing field between comprehensive schools and alternative schools mandates that alternative schools incorporate the same rigorous, standards-based curriculum as their comprehensive school counterparts (Fairbrother, 2008; Sagor, 1999), yet continuation high schools continue to suffer from the perception that their students are incorrigible and its academic training and curriculum are substandard (Muñoz, 2004). Alternative schools are easily lulled into what Muñoz (2004) has identified as a “culture of remediation” in which low expectations for both students’ abilities and expected learning results fall short of adopted standards; however, if students in alternative schools are held to a lower standard of academic achievement than comprehensive high school students, they will be less prepared to participate in post-secondary educational and vocational opportunities (Powell, 2003) which further marginalizes an already at-risk population. Sagor (1999) cautions that alternative programs outside of the traditional settings may marginalize at-risk students unless specific attention is directed to ensure equitable access to a rigorous educational program that will prepare students to participate in mainstream society.

Historically, alternative schools, and in particular continuation schools in California, focused on students’ social and behavioral development (Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al, 2008; Sagor, 1999). Many students enter alternative education programs with little confidence in their abilities to be successful students (Quinn et al., 2006), and there is a preponderance of evidence in the literature to indicate that students in alternative schools appreciate the high level of personalization, small class size, individualized academic attention, and personalized relationships with school staff (De La Osa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Quinn, et al., 2006). Gregory, Pugh, and Smith’s study

(as cited in De La Osa, 2005) “stated with some confidence that alternative schools come closer to satisfying student needs, as defined by Maslow’s hierarchy, than do conventional schools” (p. 26). Jesse et al. (2004) observed that the personal involvement of staff members with at-risk Latino students resulted in students’ increased commitment and a greater attachment to school. While addressing the social and behavior needs of alternative school students should not be minimized, the implementation of NCLB has necessitated a paradigm shift in alternative education to equally embrace high academic standards and equity of educational opportunities for at-risk students.

Typically, alternative schools are evaluated using the same accountabilities as those of traditional schools; however, these accountabilities may not always be appropriate for alternative education (Lehr et al., 2009). Aron (2003) suggests that accountability measures for alternative schools should include "shorter-term measures and measures that track continuous added value or recognize that some youth may cycle in and out of a program before experiencing steady progress" (p. 16). The need to incorporate non-academic indicators is supported by the National Center for Educational Statistics' (2002) *District Survey of Alternative Schools and Programs* study. In this national survey of district-level administrators, respondents indicated that the two most important criteria for returning students to a regular school from an alternative school placement were “improved attitude or behavior (82 percent) and student motivation to return (81 percent)” (p. v). Only 12 percent of respondents rated “Student readiness by standardized assessment” as a “very important” criterion for return to their regular school (NCES, 2002).

In California, there is currently no reliable standardized measure for evaluating the effectiveness of alternative schools (Williamson, 2008). This is likely a reflection of a lack of consensus among educators and policymakers about how to measure the effectiveness of schools that serve students with special needs (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). The California Department of Education (CDE) reports both state and federal accountability results for all schools under the general heading of the “Accountability Progress Reporting” (APR) system. The Academic Performance Index (API) is the cornerstone of the state’s academic accountability requirements. Its purpose is to measure the academic performance and growth of schools. California’s accountability system measures the performance and progress of a school or LEA based on results of statewide tests at grades two through twelve. A school's API is a composite number representing the results of these tests. Under federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements, the API is one of the indicators for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Use of the API as an accountability measure for continuation high schools is problematic because the formulas used to calculate the API become less reliable when applied to school with enrollments lower than 200 students. Most continuation high schools in California have enrollments under 200 students.

In an effort to address the inadequacies of the API for measuring performance at alternative schools, the California Department of Education (CDE) developed the Alternative Schools Accountability Model (ASAM). The ASAM provides school-level accountability for alternative schools serving highly mobile and highly at-risk students. The ASAM accountability data provides supplemental information to NCLB, AYP, and the Academic Performance Index (API) requirements. The ASAM also provides

important information for the majority of ASAM schools who do not meet AYP criteria or do not have valid API scores due to their difficulties in meeting the requirements of participation in NCLB (e.g., test participation rates, time in school, percent proficient in English-language arts and Mathematics, subgroup numbers, and API requirements, among others). ASAM is a voluntary program where qualifying schools select 3 of 14 reporting indicators measuring student learning readiness, transition, and academic performance (CDE, 2009b). ASAM indicators include: Improved student behavior, suspension, student punctuality, sustained daily attendance, student persistence, attendance, writing achievement, promotion data, course/credit completion, high school graduation rates, and completion rates of high school equivalency exams (CDE, 2009b). Participating schools annually report on the three indicators the school selected. The ASAM applies to community day schools, continuation schools, county community schools, county court schools, Division of Juvenile Justice schools, opportunity schools, and alternative schools of choice and charter schools that meet the eligibility requirements approved by the State Board of Education (SBE). The ASAM is not a standardized measure, as each participating school selects its own indicators. As a result, the ASAM cannot be used to compare performance among and between alternative schools (Williamson, 2008). Although developed specifically for California alternative schools, the ASAM, like API and AYP, does not provide a systemic, accurate, and standardized measure of school quality for alternative schools. Hill (2007) in her review of alternative education accountabilities in California notes that

To work effectively, accountability systems must adhere to several design criteria. Input data, such as test scores, should include generally accepted measures of student

educational performance. Data must be verifiable to insure accuracy. The system must protect school scores from manipulation by districts through local policies or actions. Finally, consequences must flow from inadequate performance. All three accountability systems violate at least one of these criteria in measuring alternative school performance (p. 21).

Given the highly transient nature of alternative education students, meaningful accountability measures for California alternative schools are likely to require tracking individual student data over time (Hill, 2007). As alternative schools, particularly continuation high schools, are increasingly relied upon in California to meet the needs of at-risk students, it is imperative that reliable measures of school quality for these types of schools be established.

Alternative Education Students

Students At-Risk

Defining “At-Risk” populations is highly contextualized. Generally, the term "at-risk" encompasses a wide array of youth who either engage in negative or high-risk activities, or who are growing up with disadvantages that limit the development of their potential, compromise their health, impair their sense of self, and generally restrict their chances for successful lives (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Risk factors can come from school and community level circumstances, as well as individual and family level circumstances. Historically accepted factors associated with being at-risk include membership in a racial or ethnic minority, low socioeconomic status, being raised in a single-parent home, and low parent education levels (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Rossi & Stringfield, 1997). Additional examples of specific risk factors that interfere with success in school are poor

school attendance, failing grades, family crisis, referred to but did not qualify for special education services, social/emotional/medical issues, free/reduced lunch, below-average performance on assessments, discipline problems, drug and alcohol issues, criminal behavior, poor peer relationships, retained or considered for retention, and significant deficiencies in credits (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Lange & Sletten, 2002). At-risk factors are associated with home, community, and school characteristics, and cannot be considered in isolation from one another. At-risk factors and behaviors are also highly interactive and can have a strong cause-and-effect relationships (Rossi & Stringfield, 1997). For example, abuse or neglect of a child in the home can interfere with school attendance which, in turn, can interfere with the child's progress and academic achievement in school. Donmmoyer and Kos (1993) caution against viewing at-risk populations based upon a prescribed set of criteria and encourage educators to view students and their circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Addressing the needs of students at risk requires a holistic understanding of a child's individual circumstances. Ultimately, it is how children cope with their at-risk factors that determine whether those factors will be detrimental to their development (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Frymier & Gansneder, 1989).

Defining at-risk students in an educational context is challenging because of the causal nature of home, community, and school-based factors. In an effort to simplify the definition of at-risk students for educators, Sagor and Cox (2004) define a student at-risk as "Any child who is unlikely to graduate, on schedule, with both the skills and self-esteem necessary to exercise meaningful options in the areas of work, leisure, culture, civic affairs, and inter/intra personal relationships" (p. 1). It is difficult to determine the

number of students at risk, but various studies have estimated that 25 to over 50 percent of school-aged children are at risk (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Frymier & Gansneder, 1989; Rossi & Stringfield, 1997; Sagor & Cox, 2004).

In summarizing the findings of The Phi Delta Kappan Study of Students at Risk, the largest longitudinal study of this population ever conducted, Frymier & Gansneder (1989) reported that educators accepted responsibility for addressing at-risk students' learning and higher-order thinking skills, but felt that addressing attendance, attitude, homework completion, and general behavior issues presented by at-risk students was the responsibility of the students themselves and their parents. It is logical that educators embrace school and classroom structure and learning within their locus of control; however, the patterns of behavior (e.g. attendance, classroom participation, behavior) are what put students at risk and must be addressed in order for students to experience success (Donmoyer & Kos, 1993; Rossi & Stringfield, 1997; Sagor & Cox, 2004).

One popular intervention for students deemed at risk of educational failure or for those who are disenfranchised from the traditional school system is to place them in alternative education programs. Consequently, students in alternative education programs generally have a higher number of risk factors present in their lives as compared to student in traditional education settings (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Quinn et al. 2006; Sagor, 1999). In comparison, alternative education students have higher rates of exposure to or participation with substance abuse, suicide attempts, sexual activity, pregnancy, and domestic violence (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; NCES, 2002). Other risk factors associated with alternative school students include dropout status, history of truancy, homelessness, and disruptive behavior. In addition, alternative school

populations tend to disproportionately represent low-income, minority, foster care and disabled students (Fairbrother, 2008; Muñoz, 2004; Sagor, 1999; Williamson, 2008).

California Continuation High School Students

California continuation schools were originally established to provide a flexible educational approach for working students. In recent years, continuation schools have come to serve students whose needs have not been met in the comprehensive high schools setting (Hill, 2007). Students enroll in continuation high schools for a variety of reasons. A common characteristic for the majority of continuation high school students is that they have reached age 16 lacking sufficient academic credits to remain on track to graduate with their age cohort, but the data also reveal them to be a highly vulnerable population characterized by multiple risk behaviors and other nonacademic learning barriers (Hill, 2007; McLaughlin et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). In California, a recent study of continuation high schools found that minority populations, particularly Hispanic, African American, and English Learner populations, are disproportionately represented in the overall student populations while non-Hispanic, White and Asian students are underrepresented (McLaughlin et al., 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). For example, continuation students are more likely than students surveyed in comprehensive high schools to be in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent, are more likely to move from school to school, have significantly higher rates of regular and heavy alcohol and drug use (including use at school), are more likely to have been in physical fights at school, are more likely to be involved with gangs, and are more likely to be physically victimized in and out of school (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Continuation schools are charged with providing alternative ways of helping at-risk students to remain in school and meet state performance standards common to all students. But these academic efforts cannot be separated from the need to address the high level of nonacademic learning barriers that continuation students experience.

Resilience

Frymier and Gansneder (1989) noted that how young people cope with failure and factors that put them at risk is critically important in their success. Not all individuals exposed to risk factors are destined to fail. *Resilience* is defined as one's ability to overcome adversity (Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Thomsen, 2002; Topf, Frazier-Maiwald, & Krovetz, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). Emily Werner, a preeminent researcher in the study of resilience, is best known for her leadership of a forty year longitudinal study of 698 infants on the Hawaiian island of Kauai—the island's entire birth cohort for the year 1955. The study examined the commonly held belief that many children exposed to physical, environmental, and/or psychological risk factors in childhood (e.g. premature birth, poverty, abuse, addiction) go on to experience more problems with delinquency, mental and physical health, and family stability than children exposed to fewer such risk factors. Among the most significant findings of this study of resilience and others is that most children exposed to high risk events or circumstances during childhood overcome their adversities and achieve good developmental outcomes (Benard, 2004; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Brown, et al., 2001; Werner, 1989; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001). Werner and Smith (2001) noted, "One of the most striking findings of our two follow-ups in adulthood, at ages thirty-two and forty, was that most of the high-risk youths who did develop serious coping problems in adolescence had

staged a recovery by the time they had reached midlife" (p. 167). Overall, resiliency research suggests that from 50 to 80 percent of at-risk populations will ultimately overcome their adversities to lead positive, productive lives (Benard, 2004; Benard, 2007). Masten (2001) contends that the development of resilience "appears to be a common phenomenon arising from ordinary human adaptive processes" (p. 234), and childhood risk factors are not necessarily predictive of failure to thrive in adolescence and adulthood. Rather, risk factors are predictive for only about 20 to 49 percent of a given high-risk population (Benard, 2004; Benard, 2007; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Werner & Smith, 2001). While the understanding that most children exposed to risk factors will eventually overcome them is reassuring, Benard (2004) cautions that

resilience research should never be used to justify social and political inaction on the grounds that, *somehow*, "Most kids make it." In the face of growing global poverty, abuse, violence, and other threats to children's development, the *somehow* can no longer depend on the luck of the draw. Increasingly, healthy young development must depend on deliberate policies, practices, and interventions designed to provide young people with developmental supports and opportunities. As we are learning, young people are resilient, but they are not invincible (p. 10).

Figure 2 Protective Factors that Facilitate Resiliency

Individual Protective Factors	Environmental Protective Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Competence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ability to form and maintain positive relationships ○ Empathy and Caring ○ Service to others ○ Humor • Problem Solving Skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care and Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positive adult mentor ○ Respectful treatment ○ Mutual trust • High Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Recognition and fostering strengths ○ Belief that one can succeed

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Competence ○ Love of Learning ○ Flexibility ○ Creativity ○ Good decision-making skills • Autonomy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Independence ○ Internal locus of control ○ Self-motivation ○ Perseverance • Sense of Purpose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Positive outlook on personal future ○ Self-worth ○ Spirituality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academically ▪ Behaviorally ▪ Socially • Opportunities to Participate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Athletic ▪ Religious ▪ Social • Prosocial Bonding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provided opportunities for engagement with others and the community ○ Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clubs and Organizations ▪ Athletics ▪ Volunteering ▪ Employment ▪ Service • Clear Boundaries and Expectations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rules and expectations are clearly articulated ○ Consistent enforcement of rules and expectations ○ Opportunities to provide input and receive feedback • Life Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide opportunities to develop healthy assertiveness, conflict resolution, decision-making, problem-solving, and stress management skills ○ Explicit instruction/support in goal-setting
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Note: Compiled from the works of Benard, 2004; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Brown, 2004; Henderson, 2007a; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Thomsen, 2002; Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001

Protective Factors that Build Resilience

Resilient people draw on *protective factors* to overcome adversity (Benard, 2004; Benard, 2007; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Thomsen, 2002; Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001). Henderson (2007) defines protective factors as the internal and external supports and opportunities that are available to at-risk youth that buffer the effects of risk factors and allow for positive growth. Figure 2 summarizes commonly cited protective factors from resiliency literature. Although there

are numerous protective factors, there is consensus in the literature that positive, supportive relationships with at least one adult caregiver is the most important protective factor in predicting positive outcomes (Benard, 2004; Henderson, 2007a; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Werner & Smith, 2001). Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard (2001) assert that "the interaction between child or adolescent and caregiver, in the context of a supportive society, is what primarily provides for learning, development, and ultimately resilience" (p.17). Of particular importance is that the caregiver need not be a parent, guardian, or primary caregiver; rather, a caregiver is any adult who provides the environmental protective factors listed in Figure 2 and supports the development of one's individual protective factors (Benard, 2004; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Brown, et al., 2001; Henderson, 2007a; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Thomsen, 2002 Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001).

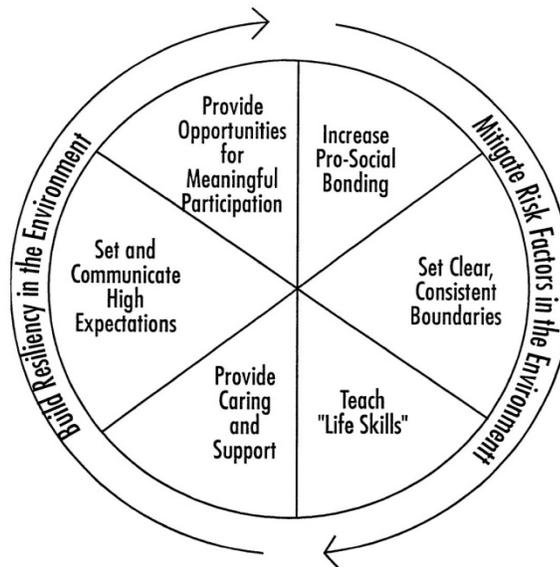
Educational Resiliency

The term *in loco parentis*, Latin for "in the place of a parent" or "instead of a parent," refers to the legal responsibility of a person or organization to take on some of the functions and responsibilities of a parent. It is the legal precedent that allows institutions such as colleges and schools to act in the best interests of the students as they see fit, although not allowing what would be considered violations of the students' civil liberties. Consequently, the concept of educators as caregivers is a universally recognized paradigm in which schools operate, and schools can aid in fostering resilience in children and can be very important environments for children who have impoverished and stressful home lives (Brown, 2004; Henderson, 2007b; Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Werner (2007) notes that it is not the structure, programs, or material resources within

schools, but the belief system of the people within those schools who hold the potential to build students' resilience.

In a school setting, educators' attitudes towards children determine whether or not students' natural resilience will be nurtured and grow (Thompson, 2002). Further, resiliency literature indicates that a positive school environment promotes resilience in at-risk populations (Benard, 2004; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Wolin, 2004). Synthesizing findings in resiliency research, Henderson & Milstein (1996) developed a Resiliency Wheel model to identify the essential elements that schools must provide for students to build resilience and mitigate students' pre-existing risk factors. Their Resiliency Wheel is illustrated in Figure 3. Opportunities to build students' resilience include providing opportunities for meaningful participation, setting and communicating high expectations for student behavior and achievement, and providing genuine care and support for students (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Mitigating risk factors includes creating opportunities for increasing the positive connections between students and their peers as well as between students and adults in the school environment (prosocial bonding), establishing and communicating clear boundaries and expectations for student behavior and achievement, and explicit instruction for students related to decision-making, stress management, conflict resolution, and problem-solving (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Figure 3 The Resiliency Wheel



Note: Adapted from Henderson, N., & Milstein, M. (1996). *Resiliency in schools: Making it happen for students and educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

As previously stated, NCLB legislation has brought national attention to public school accountability in regards to closing the achievement gap and ensuring that all students meet rigorous academic standards (Powell, 2003). School improvement and reform efforts are largely driven by these accountabilities. While educators cannot control community demographics, poverty, and family conditions, they can change educational policy and practices to meet the needs of students at risk of educational failure (Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Waxman, Padrón, & Gray, 2004). Henderson (2007b) maintains that effective school improvement efforts produce resiliency-building school climates for all stakeholders and that "resiliency building in schools is actually the foundation of effective education" (p. 62).

Effective Schools

Effective schools are ones in which all students, regardless of risk factors, meet prescribed academic standards and expectations (Brookover et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003). There is extensive research and literature devoted to effective schools. Edmonds (1982) and Lezotte (1991), who are largely regarded as two of the pioneers of effective schools research, identified unique characteristics of the majority of effective schools that correlate with student success. Edmonds (1986) held that the most powerful force in effective education is the school itself. He stated that

these schools succeed in what they do because they are coercive. I do not mean that they are coercive in the traditional sense; they don't spank children, and tend not even to punish them very much. They create their own environment, and it is so potent that for at least six hours a day it can override almost everything else in the lives of those children (Edmonds, 1986, p. 105).

Lezotte (1991), building on the work of Edmonds (1979, 1982), identified seven common correlates of effective schools which include: Clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, opportunity to learn and time on task, safe and orderly environment, positive home-school relations, and frequent monitoring of student progress. Reeves (2003) has devoted considerable attention to a group of effective schools, called 90/90/90 schools, in which more than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, more than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities, and more than 90 percent of the students met academic standards based on standardized tests of academic achievement. The common characteristics of 90/90/90 schools are similar to Lezotte's (1991) correlates and include: Focus on academic

achievement, curriculum choices that emphasize core subject competence, frequent assessment of student progress with multiple opportunities for improvement, an emphasis on informative writing across the curriculum, collaborative scoring and review of student work, and sustainable results without proprietary programs (Reeves, 2003). While there are many variations on the correlates of effective schools in the literature, there is broad consensus among researchers that while poverty and other demographic variables may be important, teaching quality is the most dominant factor in determining student success (Reeves, 2003).

Mission and Vision

In effective schools, there is a clearly articulated mission of the school through which the staff shares an understanding of and a commitment to the schools' goals, priorities, assessment procedures, and accountability. Senge (2006) notes that shared vision binds people together and provides directions for achieving common goals. A shared vision cannot be imposed on an organization or its stakeholders (Huffman, 2003). Rather, it must be meticulously built by analyzing personal and communal values, beliefs, and goals and combining them to create a shared vision for the organization. Evans (1996) suggests that authentic leadership is critical in building and communicating a shared vision. It is the role of the principal leader to provide opportunities for the school community to reflect on its traditions, evaluate current data and resources, and anticipate a future that represents the ideal reality for its stakeholders (Kouzes & Posner, 2007).

High Expectations for Students

The adult staff and stakeholders in any school community establish the schools' learning climate (Brookover et al., 1982; Henderson, 2007b; Reeves, 2003). In effective schools, academic performance is highly prized and there is a belief among all stakeholders that all students can learn and achieve at high levels (Lezotte, 2001; Reeves, 2003). Students are presented with challenging curricula and relevant instructional tasks and considerable attention is given to students who are not meeting standards to provide opportunities for improvement (Reeves, 2003). There is also a climate of high expectations for teachers and staff in which teacher excellence, collaboration, and mentoring are present (Brookover et al., Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

Leadership

Professional learning communities are composed of a series of interdependent relationships among stakeholders and understanding and navigating these relationships is the primary responsibility of the leader (Evans, 1996). Lezotte (2001) states that the role of the principal "as the articulator of the mission of the school is crucial to the overall effectiveness of the school" (p. 5). Successful school leaders create a culture of collaboration and collegiality in which all stakeholder groups understand their role and responsibility in achieving school wide goals (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggest that leaders should foster opportunities for teams to work together to establish goals that require input and participation from various stakeholder groups in order to be achieved. Evans (1996) notes that organizations that draw on the knowledge of their staff to make more informed choices enjoy higher levels of productivity and morale due to people's increased sense of control and accountability.

Opportunity to Learn and Student Time on Task

Knowing what to teach and providing adequate time to teach are essential for effective instruction (Lezotte, 1991; Reeves, 2003; Zmuda et al., 2004). Effective schools maximize instructional time and ensure that students are actively engaged in learning (Brookover et al., 1982; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003). In effective schools, students who are not performing at proficient levels are provided with multiple opportunities to improve performance (Brookover et al., 1982; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003; Zmuda, et al., 2004.)

A Safe and Orderly Environment

Maintaining a safe and positive school climate is directly linked to student academic performance and fewer student behavioral and emotional problems (Freiberg, 1999; Good & Weinstein, 1986). Research examining the impact of school climate in high-risk urban environments finds that a safe, supportive school climate can have a particularly strong impact on the academic success experienced by urban students (Haynes & Comer, 1993). Students learn best and achieve their full potential when they are physically, socially, emotionally, and academically safe – in safe and orderly classrooms (Lezotte, n.d.). Finally, a positive school climate is associated with greater job satisfaction among school staff and higher rates of staff retention (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995).

Positive Home-School Relations

The relationship between parents and the school must be an authentic partnership between the school and home (Lezotte, n.d.). In effective schools, parents understand

and support the basic mission of the school and are given meaningful opportunities to play important roles in helping the school achieve its mission (Lezotte, 1991).

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress

External accountabilities for schools, both state and federal, have been established to ensure high standards and equal access to education for all students. While there is little debate over the importance of summative standardized tests as they relate to these external accountabilities, Linn (2003) cautions educational leaders and educators not to overemphasize certain subjects and “narrow the curriculum” (p.4) to focus only on those subjects included in external accountabilities. Reeves (2001) encourages educational leaders to focus on the classroom as the “primary location for effective assessment” (p. 5). Teachers must use formative and summative assessment data to monitor student progress and modify instructional practice as needed (Ward & Murray-Ward, 1999). Formative assessments should be ongoing through a unit of instruction to both monitor classroom instruction as well as gauge students’ progress in mastering standards while summative assessments are administered at the end of instruction and tend to be more cumulative and high-stakes (Ward & Murray-Ward, 1999). Both formative and summative assessments should be authentic and representative of not only what is being taught in the classroom but also designed at the level of rigor outlined in the academic standards (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Effective Alternative Schools

There is little rigorous evaluation research related to the characteristics of effective alternative education programs, particularly continuation high schools in

California. Kelly's (1993) case study of a single California continuation high school in the late 1980s is often cited in current literature regarding California continuation high schools (Hill, 2007; Muñoz, 2004; Perez & Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco, 2008; Williamson, 2008). The most recent research on California continuation high schools has been sponsored by the John Gardner Center at Stanford University. As previously stated, the John Gardner center conducted case study research on continuation high schools in California in collaboration with the National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University and WestEd. The study provided a descriptive analysis of alternative education in California, most particularly, the operation and outcomes of continuation high schools in diverse regions of the state. Although the nature of the study was descriptive, some of the researchers (Perez & Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco, et al., 2008) attempted to identify important characteristics and/or essential elements of effective continuation high schools.

There is some consensus in the broader alternative education literature related to essential characteristics thought to be necessary for effective programs (Aron, 2003; Foley & Pang, 2006; Hill, 2007; Muñoz, 2004). Many of the characteristics thought to be essential in effective alternative education programs are also considered essential to effective traditional education programs and schools, although there is very little empirical evidence to support that assumption (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Raywid (1994), citing the work of Wehlage, Smith, and Lipman (1991) has identified three factors that may account for the success of alternative schools. "First, these schools generate and sustain community within them. Second, they make learning engaging. And third, they

provide the school organization and structure needed to sustain the first two”
(Raywid, 1994, p. 29).

Choice appears to be a significant factor in predicting the characteristics of alternative schools. Lehr et al. (2009) observed that alternative schools of choice were characterized by flexibility in structure and programming, small class size and low student-to-teacher ratios, parent involvement, innovative instruction, and individualized instruction. In contrast, alternative schools at which students are placed were characterized by a focus on behavior management and change, high transiency due to short-term placement, a focus on academic remediation, and providing an alternative to expulsion (Lehr et al., 2009).

Overall, successful alternative schools are generally characterized by supportive, student-centered school cultures, a well-defined referral and intake process, low student-to-teacher ratios, high levels of personalization both socially and instructionally, flexible operating structures to meet the needs of students, functional assessment components, a functional curriculum, the use of effective and efficient instructional strategies, transitional support for students, systems or services within school and community, caring staff and adequate resources, comprehensive evaluation and referral systems, the promotion of social, emotional, behavioral change in a safe environment, ongoing staff development, and ongoing program evaluation (Aron, 2003; Lange & Sletten, 2002; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2004; Paglin & Fager, 1997; Tissington, 2006). In alternative schools and programs, academic achievement arguably relies on a strong school culture of high expectations for student ability and achievement (Fairbrother,

2008; Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004; Powell, 2003). Diane Powell (2003)

asserts that effective alternative schools and programs

draw on the successfully validated practices of developing resilience in students by surrounding them with protective factors that lead to opportunities for meaningful involvement, caring relationships, opportunities for participation, and high expectations that manifest in shared decision making in the alternative setting. This means that the adults must believe that the students have the capacity for change, maintain high expectations, and foster opportunities for student success within the educational program (p. 70).

School and district-level leadership are also significant indicators of alternative school quality (Perez & Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) found that effective school leaders in California continuation high schools implement clear and consistent processes regarding the intake of students, they apply more rigorous standards to themselves and their faculties than those imposed by the state or district, and they use student performance data to guide the change process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Background

This study sought to explore a sample of successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California, as measured by multiple full term accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. The researcher believes that a better understanding of these elements would allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts. In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study will address the overarching question of: How do the services at California continuation high schools that have received multiple 6-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) support student learning and achievement? More specifically, (a) How does the structure of the school support student learning and achievement? (b) How do the academic practices of the school support student learning and achievement? (c) How do the social-emotional practices of the school build students' resilience and support student learning and achievement? (d) How does the staffing of the school support student learning and achievement?

Students in alternative education programs are believed to be at risk of educational failure (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). More specifically, California continuation high school students are more likely than students surveyed in comprehensive high schools to be in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent, are more likely to move from school to school, have significantly higher rates of

regular and heavy alcohol and drug use (including use at school), are more likely to have been in physical fights at school, are more likely to be involved with gangs, and are more likely to be physically victimized in and out of school (Ruiz de Velasco, Austin, Dixon, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Lynne Perez, 2008). The duality of purpose in alternative high schools in meeting both the social-behavioral, as well as the academic needs of students, required that both elements be considered in this research study. To validate the highly affective nature of the students served in continuation high schools, this study combined the theoretical frameworks of effective schools correlates and resilience theory to describe high-performing continuation high schools. It was the opinion of this researcher that successful continuation high schools are likely to incorporate structures that not only build students' academic and cognitive growth, but also build their resilience.

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research setting and context, (c) research sample and data sources, (d) instruments and procedures, (e) data collection methods and procedures, (f) analysis and synthesis of data, (g) role of the researcher, (h) issues of trustworthiness, and (i) limitations of the study. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

Research Tradition

It was the goal of this research study to provide a holistic description of the behaviors, values, and practices that exist in a sample of successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California. This study examined the traditional practices, modes of operation, climate, and general culture of these schools. A

qualitative, multiple-case study approach informed by the traditions of ethnography supported this research purpose.

Culture, specifically school culture, is an abstract concept that is difficult to contextualize and define. It is composed of the collective behaviors, values, and practices of individuals within the cultural group (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Individual perspectives and experiences combine to create the whole. In order to examine these perspectives, the researcher must become embedded in the social context he/she is attempting to understand. As a trusted participant-observer, the researcher is able to actively engage research participants and observe these behaviors, values, and practices in their natural context. As a result of this interaction, a holistic view of the cultural group was revealed through analysis of individual research participant's experiences.

Case study research includes both single and multiple case studies. A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Merriam (2009) notes that “the decision to focus on qualitative case studies stems from the fact that this design is chosen precisely because researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (p. 42). Most case studies are descriptive or explanatory, relying on multiple sources of evidence (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Further, multiple cases strengthen the results by providing an opportunity to match patterns and themes which increases confidence in the strength of the conclusions (Yin, 2009).

The purpose of ethnographic methodologies is to describe and interpret behaviors to provide a holistic view of a select cultural group (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The basic assumptions of this tradition are rooted in constructing the reality of a social structure by

examining the behaviors, interactions, and perspectives of individuals within the group. Ethnographers approach the concept of culture as an abstraction. Culture in and of itself cannot be defined. Rather, the ethnographer identifies common behaviors, values, and practices among individuals or subgroups within the larger social group. The larger social group is viewed as a collective construct of the group's members.

Ethnography's strong descriptive aspects align with the research purpose in that they support the construction of patterns of structures, behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs present in the cultures of successful continuation high schools based upon the collective experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders. Ethnographic methodologies, including, observation, interviews, document reviews, and focus groups provided the thick, rich descriptive data required to address the research questions. Qualitative methodologies supported the researcher's assumption that the status quo of alternative education, specifically continuation education in California, is not necessarily the ideal.

Research Setting and Context

This multiple-case study included three continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California that have received at least two successive full-term accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Each of these schools serves a predominantly minority ethnic population of at least 200 students.

A pilot study addressing the same research questions as this study was conducted by this researcher in October 2009 in which fifteen schools that had either received multiple full-term accreditations by WASC or that were identified as Model Continuation High Schools by the State of California were invited to complete a survey (Appendix A) describing their schools. The pilot study was descriptive in nature and focused on an

aggregate representation of participating schools. The pilot study included a survey that was administered online to accommodate the geographical representation of targeted schools. Eight of the fifteen schools completed the survey. Survey data were analyzed based upon a percent of response to particular items related to the research questions. Although the data analysis did not include correlative analysis, some responses were linked with enrollment numbers to provide a greater level of detail for descriptive purposes.

Following the completion of the pilot study, individual school's surveys were reviewed by the researcher to identify potential schools for inclusion in this study. Based upon survey responses, schools that met the selection criteria for this study were targeted for participation. Ultimately, six of the eight pilot study schools were identified for possible inclusion in this study. The three continuation high schools participating in this study were selected from that group of six schools and include Crawford High School, Nyrat High School, and Roscoe High School.

Crawford High School is located in a culturally diverse community twelve miles Northeast of Los Angeles. Crawford High School offers several alternative education programs on site at and at other satellite locations within the district. It serves approximately 300-400 students who have transferred from one of the five comprehensive high schools in the district. Ninety-five percent of the students enrolled are Hispanic, while 3% are white and 1% is Asian. Ninety-seven percent of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch through the Federal School Lunch Program. Crawford High School has received at least three full, six-year accreditation

terms from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and is currently recognized by the California Department of Education as a Model Continuation High School.

Nyrat High School is located in the northern part of Los Angeles County. It is the sole continuation high school in a district that has six comprehensive high schools. Nyrat High School has a maximum enrollment of approximately 500 students. Fifty-four percent of the students enrolled are Hispanic, while 37% are white, 5% are African American, and 4% are Asian. Approximately 40% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch through the National School Lunch Program. Nyrat High School has also received at least three successive full, six-year accreditation terms from WASC and is a Model Continuation High School.

Roscoe High School is located in a community just north of downtown Los Angeles. The city in which it is located is the third largest city in Los Angeles County. It is the only continuation high school in a district with three comprehensive high schools and one magnet high school. Roscoe High Schools serves approximately 300 students. Forty-seven percent of the students enrolled are Hispanic, while 39% are white, 2% are African American, and 12% are Asian. Approximately 48% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch through the National School Lunch Program. Roscoe High School has also received at least three successive full, six-year accreditation terms from WASC and was previously recognized as a Model Continuation High School in 2003.

Research Sample and Data Sources

Research Sample

In the review of literature related to California continuation high schools, there was consensus among researchers that continuation high school program quality is largely influenced by local district and county office of education support (Hill, 2007; Perez & Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008; Williamson, 2008). A delimiting geographic region of Los Angeles County was decided on by the researcher to ensure that all schools were served by the Los Angeles County Office of Education thereby being held to the same county-level governance structures and having access to the same support services and resources.

This multiple case study included three continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California. A stratified purposeful sampling technique was used to select schools for this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Purposeful sampling aligns well with the criteria indicated in the research question and is typical of ethnographic case study methodology (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This technique is appropriate because this study seeks to examine a specific subgroup of continuation high schools based upon specific criteria. A typical case sampling strategy was applied to finalize the group of schools participating in this study. Use of this strategy “serves to increase confidence in conclusions” (Miles & Huberman, p. 28) by studying schools that share common elements and meet identical criteria. Each of the three schools selected for this study is located in Los Angeles County, California, has received at least two successive full-term accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and serves at least 100 students of which at least fifty percent represent minority ethnic populations.

Research participants included teachers, administrators, and other school-based personnel. At each participating school, the principal was identified as the key informant. Qualitative research involves building and sustaining relationships with people (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The key informant should be recognized in the school community as what Rossman and Rallis (2003) define as an elite or expert. Elites, or experts, “are individuals considered influential, prominent, or well informed, or all three, in an organization or community and are selected on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 192). The researcher met face-to-face with the key informant at least once prior to beginning the study to explain the purpose and scope of their school's participation in the research study, to explicitly define the time commitments related to the study, to describe other important details of the study, and to address any questions and/or concerns that key informant may have. Further clarification were provided in follow-up meetings in person, via email, and/or over the phone at the convenience of both the researcher and the key informant. In addition, the key informant worked with the researcher to develop protocols for communicating and meeting with school-based personnel. The key informant worked with the researcher using a reputational case selection sampling strategy to select key staff members to participate in focus groups and interviews who were the best positioned and informed to provide data related to the research questions. Select focus group participants were selected by the researcher, using a within-case sampling strategy for follow-up interviews and observations. Follow-up interviews were conducted by the researcher to provide an opportunity to address more sensitive issues or clarify issues that may have surfaced in focus group meetings. The researcher

communicated with the key informant regularly either face-to-face or via telephone to review progress and conduct *member checks*. Member checks provide an opportunity for the researcher to share emerging findings with study participants to provide opportunities for participants to "elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about" (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 69) those findings.

Data Sources

Data sources for this study included administrators and certificated staff members at participating schools, documents related to school performance (WASC plan, and API/AYP/CST/ASAM data, and local assessment data), and local artifacts (Teacher/Student Handbooks, school web site, school promotional materials and brochures, course syllabi, local assessments). Data collection methods included interviews with key informants, focus groups, follow-up interviews with select focus group participants, and informal observations. Follow up interviews and classroom and school observations were conducted to provide greater depth and clarification of focus group data.

No serious ethical threats were anticipated; however safeguards were put into place to protect participants. Permission from each school's district office or board of education was obtained prior to the school's participation in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of both the school as well as individual participants. Physical research data (field notes, interview transcripts) were stored by the researcher in a locked, secure location. Any electronic data was encrypted and file-protected and stored with the same safeguards as physical data.

Instruments and Procedures

The principals of the three schools selected for this study were contacted via email and telephone by the primary researcher to invite them to participate in this study. A Research Announcement (Appendix D), an Invitation to Participate (Appendix E), and an Informed Consent (Appendix F) was developed by the researcher to provide descriptive information about the proposed study and outline the participation parameters to potential participants. Electronic copies of the Research Announcement, the Invitation to Participate, and the Informed Consent were sent via email to the principals of participating schools and paper copies of the same documents were sent to them via regular mail. The instruments and procedures for this study were developed based upon the previously mentioned pilot study conducted by this researcher. The pilot survey consisted of 70 questions in five areas. Those areas included school structure, school staffing, curriculum, instruction, and school culture.

Documents

In order to triangulate the data collected from interviews, field notes, focus groups, and observations, documents were collected from each of the participating schools. Document analysis is one of the many tools used by qualitative and ethnographic researchers. The researcher in a field-based study collects artifacts produced and/or used by members of the group, identifies how these artifacts function for the individual and/or the group, and explores how members talk about and name these artifacts. Rossman and Rallis (2003) define documents and artifacts as material culture. Material culture, such as documents, is examined for links to other events or artifacts. This type of analysis builds

on the understanding that group culture is often represented in artifacts and that links between and among cultural events is often evident in such documents.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus groups “possess elements of both participant observation and individual interviews” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 84) and are conducted to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people (Gay et al, 2009). Focus groups are considered to be naturalistic (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The researcher listens not only for the content of focus group discussions, but for emotions, ironies, contradictions, and tensions. This enables the researcher to learn or confirm not just the facts, but the meaning behind the facts. The social, semi-public nature of the methodology shapes the data and the purposes that it serves. The focus group is a type of group interview. In a focus group session, conversation among participants results in data that are “talk.” Focus groups elicit information that paints a portrait of combined local perspectives, which allows the researcher to observe organizational culture from a macro perspective (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). One caveat in the use of focus groups is the influence of social pressure in participant responses (Gay et al., 2009). Some participants may be unwilling to voice opinions that conflict with the perceived group consensus.

Focus groups and interviews, used in conjunction with the other data sources, added to the rich, thick description of the school environment and culture. The pilot study informed the development of the qualitative focus group and interview protocols for this study. Both focus group and follow-up interviews followed a guided interview approach using the previously mentioned protocols. In the guided interview approach,

the researcher "develops categories or topics to explore but remains open to pursuing topics that the participant brings up" (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, p. 181). Focus group and interview questions were designed to extract descriptive information related to the characteristics of effective schools (Lezotte, 1991) and building student resilience (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

Observations

Gay et al. (1990) note that observational fieldwork has advantages over other data collection methods in terms of understanding context, capturing routines, gathering data otherwise inaccessible in interviews, moving beyond the perceptions of the participants, and using direct experience as data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specific to this study, observations of students' interactions with adults, adults' interactions with other adults, classroom instruction, and students during passing periods or lunch were conducted in order to validate information obtained from interviews and document review.

Field Notes

Field notes were used to document data related to focus group and interview observations and to document observations conducted by the researcher during the course of the study. Field notes provide an additional data source for triangulation and will enhance the credibility and rigorousness of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Field notes provide a written record of the researcher's impressions, insights, and emerging hypothesis and include the descriptive data of what the researcher observes as well as the researchers comments and questions on those data or the project itself (Gay et al., 2009).

Data Collection

In qualitative research, validity is the degree to which qualitative data accurately gauge what one is trying to measure (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Several strategies assist in providing validity in qualitative studies. These strategies include: engaging with subjects over a period of time, the use of member checks, designing the study as participatory, and triangulation of data sources (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Gay, et al., 2009; Miles & Huberman, 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). To support the triangulation of data sources, this study employed a number of different data collection methods, including document reviews, key informant interviews, focus group meetings, follow-up interviews with focus group participants, and observations.

Document Review

Data collection for each site began prior to the researcher's first site visit with a review of documents related to school performance, publicly available documents, and documents and artifacts provided to the researcher by the school. Documents included school mission statements, the school's WASC plan, single school site plans, school web pages, California Department of Education assessment data, student handbooks, and teacher handbooks.

Key Informant Interviews

An initial structured in-depth interview was conducted with the key informant. In-depth interviews provide an opportunity for the researcher to understand how participants perceive their reality. "Often, deeper understandings develop through the dialogue of long, in-depth interviews, as interviewer and participant 'co-construct'

meaning” (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 180). While this interview followed the interview protocol developed by the researcher (Appendix B), additional questions were developed unique to each school based upon the initial document review conducted by the researcher.

Focus Group Meetings

At least one ninety-minute focus group meeting was conducted at each site with staff members and included classroom teachers, counselors, administrators, counselors, and other certificated personnel identified by the key informant and researcher. The focus group protocol (Appendix C) was structured similarly to the interview protocol with slight modifications to accommodate the group structure. The researcher communicated with the key informant via phone or face-to-face meetings to identify focus group participants and to schedule the focus group meeting time(s) and location(s). The number of focus group meetings held at each site were determined by both the size of the staff as well as the number of staff members identified by the key informant. At least one focus group meeting, but no more than two, was scheduled at each site. The number of participants in each focus group meeting did not exceed ten staff members. The purpose of the focus group meeting is to generate a group construct of the programs and supports at the site that support student learning and achievement. Focus group meetings were audio taped, transcribed by the researcher or a professional transcriptionist, and integrated with the researcher’s field notes from the meetings. Focus group meetings that were transcribed by the professional transcriptionist were validated by the researcher for accuracy.

Follow-Up Interviews

An interview is a purposeful interaction in which one person obtains information from another (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Interviewers can explore and probe participants' responses to gather in-depth data about their experiences and feelings. Follow-up interviews provided evidence for a rich case study description and extend focus group participants' responses, allowing for a more thorough and in-depth exploration of the school's existing programs and practices that correlate with effective schools research and/or resilience theory. Interview questions were be unique to each participant and focused on clarifying their statements from the focus group meetings, exploring topics in greater depth, and gathering sufficient evidence to answer the research questions and to write the case study.

Forty-five minute follow-up interviews were conducted with selected focus group participants. These interviews were scheduled at a separate date and time after the focus group data had been reviewed by the researcher and the researcher had conducted a member check regarding this data with the key informant. The key informant assisted the researcher in identifying staff members for follow-up interviews and assisted the researcher in communicating with interviewees and identifying the time(s) and location(s) for the interviews. Follow-up interviews were semi-structured in that they focused on the same general areas as the larger study, but the questions were adapted to address the views expressed by the participant. Follow-up interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient for the interviewee. Interviews were be audio-taped, and all audio-taped interviews will be transcribed by the researcher or a professional

transcriptionist. Interviews that were transcribed by the professional transcriptionist were validated by the researcher for accuracy.

. Transcription data were analyzed and coded by the researcher and were reviewed by additional researchers to establish inter-rater reliability in the data analysis. All tapes collected as part of this project will be kept on file by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

Observations

Observations may provide a broader picture of the school's culture while also providing an opportunity to clarify the structures, support, and programs described in the focus group and participant interviews. Observational research techniques solely involve the researcher or researchers making observations (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In the course of this research study, the principal researcher conducted direct observations at each participating site. Observations in this study were unscheduled and informal and emerged as the principal investigator spent time at each school site. The researcher worked with the key informant at each site prior to the start of the study to establish parameters and protocols for observations. Observations will be documented through the use of field notes and analyzed and coded by the principal researcher.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to a mass of collected data (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It is an ongoing process and begins during data collection with preliminary data analysis informing not only themes and patterns in the existing data but also how additional data collection will proceed. Data collection and data analysis constantly interact with the researcher collecting data,

examining data, comparing existing data with new data, and using that process to plan for gathering new data (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Gay, et al., 2009; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This cyclical and interactive process requires that the researcher be reflective and thoughtful in summarizing what is in the data (Gay, et al., 2009). To inform the data analysis process in this study, the researcher relied on descriptors and themes outlined in the theoretical frameworks supporting this study. Specifically, the researcher developed preliminary codes aligned with the indicators related to both Henderson and Milstein's (1996) resilience in schools correlates and Lezotte's (1991) correlates of effective schools to inform the identification of themes in preliminary data evaluation and provide an ongoing structure throughout the data analysis process. Additional codes and themes will evolve as the study progresses.

Data analysis began with the collection and analysis of documents and artifacts provided by the schools as well as those that were obtained through public record systems such as California Department of Education DataQuest web site which provides demographic, descriptive, and student performance data for all California public schools. Documents and artifacts were coded by the researcher using the preliminary codes described previously. Data gathered in this phase was used to inform the focus group and interview protocols for each site. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher assumed primary responsibility for the collection and preparation of data, including transcription of focus group recordings, the creation of field notes during observations, and preliminary data analysis. A transcriptionist was used to transcribe the key informant and follow-up interviews whose work was validated by the primary researcher. Data analysis software provides tools for qualitative analysis of large bodies of data and allows

the researcher to manage, extract, compare, explore and reassemble meaningful pieces of data in creative, flexible, yet systematic, ways. ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software system, was used to organize and code data throughout the data collection process. ATLAS.ti consolidates large volumes of documents and keeps track of all notes, annotations, codes and memos in all fields that require close study and analysis of primary material consisting of text, images, audio, video, and geo data. Interpretation of the data provided a descriptive analysis of the themes and patterns that support both the theoretical framework of this study as well as those themes and patterns that emerged organically in the research process.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Rossmann and Rallis (2003) outline several strategies researchers can use to enhance the trustworthiness and validity of their qualitative research, including: designing the study as participatory from beginning to end, gathering data over a period of time, providing member checks to share preliminary findings and themes, and triangulating data by “drawing from several data sources, methods, investigators, or theories to inform the same question or issue” (p. 66). This study was designed to be participatory in nature and engaged multiple participants using a variety of methods including focus groups, interviews, and observations to collect data to support the research focus. Data collection occurred over several months with the researcher visiting each site several times to conduct focus groups, interviews, and observations. To engage participants and increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis and conclusions, ongoing member checks were an integral part of the study.

Role of the Researcher

I was the planner, designer, and principal investigator in this study and assumed multiple roles. Although an etic, or outside observer, at each of the participating sites, I also assumed the role of colleague, policy analyst, and advocate. I am both a continuation educator and administrator which invited a more collegial or familiar relationship with research participants. My teaching and administrative experience also provided me with a strong understanding of the legislative purpose and function of continuation education in California as well as the deeply complex and varied student populations served by these schools. The very nature of my professional role as a continuation high school principal perceptually and practically positioned me as an advocate for continuation education.

The nature of this study was to describe and interpret cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices within a select group of successful continuation high schools. The criteria used to define “successful” are intrinsically subjective and based upon my own positive perception of the quality of the WASC accreditation process. As such, I was cognizant of this bias and its potential to influence my ability to objectively review the research data and/or that it may have inclined me to over-interpret data based upon my bias. In addition, research participants' awareness of how their schools were selected for this research study may have influenced their behavior in order to maintain their positive status. My strong personal connection to both the purpose of this study, as well as my desire to improve my own professional practice and the quality of my school, may have influenced my researcher role. However, I was careful to identify my own

value judgments as they related to the interpretation of behavior, values, and practices at research sites.

To minimize researcher bias, I sought to adhere to my role of observer and focus on revealing participants' experiences rather than sharing my own experiences with them. In addition, I made every effort to remain neutral in my tacit bias that these schools are successful based solely on their history of full six-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Developing a positive and professional rapport with the key informant at each site was critical in maintaining the objectivity in my researcher role. Frequent member checks with the key informant and other study participants also provided feedback regarding the accuracy of the data as well as preliminary findings. Throughout the study, I engaged continuation education colleagues and academic peers as critical friends to provide feedback on my data and findings.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This purpose of this study was to explore and describe a sample of three successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California, as measured by multiple, full-term accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. The researcher believed that a better understanding of these elements would allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from focus groups and principal interviews conducted at each of the three participating school sites, as well as from in-depth follow-up interviews with nine certificated staff members at the study schools. Additional data were gathered through document reviews that included the schools' WASC Self Study documents, public records obtained through respective school district and California Department of Education web sites, and other relevant artifacts collected during site visits. Six major findings emerged from this study:

Two Overarching Themes

1. Personalization: A focus on personalization permeates school operations and interactions with students at all three schools.
2. Positive Culture: All three schools maintain a positive school culture supported by a clear mission, high expectations for students success, and a safe and orderly school environment.

Four Findings

3. Varying Operational Structures: The operational structures at each school vary; however, all three schools perceive that they have a high level of district and community support, principal leadership that supports distributed leadership and collaboration, multiple pathways for students to complete graduation requirements, and class size norms below 25.
4. Differentiated Instruction: The culture of all three schools emphasizes differentiation of instruction based upon individual student needs and focuses on academic as well as personal growth.
5. Never Give Up: The staff at all three schools articulate a commitment to never giving up on students, and they prioritize student engagement through positive adult and peer relationships.
6. Staff Qualities: All three schools indicate that the affective qualities of staff members, both classified and certificated, are more important to the students' and schools' success than the quantity of staff members on site.

Following is a discussion of the findings organized in terms of the two overarching themes of personalization and positive school culture that were revealed in the data followed by the four specific findings related to the study's research question. The emphasis throughout this chapter is on allowing the participants speak for themselves about the factors that they believe are present in their schools that support student learning and achievement. Quotations taken from focus group and interview transcripts as well as WASC Self Study plans are included to support findings and provide insight into the beliefs and perceptions of study participants.

Findings

Personalization

The primary and central finding of this study is that personalization dominates all facets of the operational and instructional programs at the schools in this study. There is a genuine and conscious effort on the part of the school staffs to focus on the social emotional and academic needs of individual students. In every focus group meeting and every interview, regardless of whether they were discussing instruction, structure, staffing, or describing interactions with students, participants commented on the need to view students holistically and to understand their stories and connect with them on a personal level in order to serve them better. Anne, a teacher at Nyrat High School, explained: "Their growth has to be personalized. It's not one size fits all....So for each one of them, their successes will be measured individually by where they are."

That's the bottom line, to meet the needs of the kids, because kids have different needs....Most of them are academically behind, and so to find out where the kids are and see where we can get them from the point they got to us to where the point that they leave us, whether they're working at grade level or at below grade level. We want to make sure that the kids are moving and that there is learning happening and also so the academic needs as well as the personal needs are being met. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

At each school, the personalization begins with the intake process where a concerted effort is made by staff to get to know each student and plan a school program that meets their needs. Although the intake process varies at each school, each school's process includes making a personal connection between staff members and individual students.

It might take a half an hour to an hour to do an intake for a kid, and so we talk about what's happening, why they're failing their classes, what's happening at home. Sometimes a lot more things come up than you ever thought would come

out, but I think those issues need to be addressed at that point to see what we can do from the school's perspective to make sure that those needs are met, whether it's on campus or off campus. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

I think the orientation, you know, makes a huge difference because they get the kids ready for the transition [to the school]. You find out a lot about the kids....You get contact with the parents. You can see how they might function or how they'll fit in at Roscoe. (Justin, teacher, Roscoe High School)

They [the students] go through an intake. We do group intakes that Teresa [another counselor] and I do. And it's an hour long presentation that goes over everything about the school. Attendance, expectations, you know, all the urban myths and legends about us, all of that. We want them to feel like Nyrat is a good choice for them when they leave, so we go through all of that. And that's with their parents also....They're done in groups of up to 10 to 12 students. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

Overall, a philosophical commitment to personalization supports the culture at each of the schools and permeates virtually every aspect of the schools' instructional programs and operations. It informs classroom instruction, school operations, scheduling decisions, intervention programs, discipline, and staffing decisions. The vast majority of participant comments regarding personalization were provided in the context of students' perceived social-emotional needs, and very few such comments focused on perceived or actual academic needs. Anne, a teacher at Nyrat High School, provided a scenario describing how she works with students who are not meeting classroom expectations:

I'll watch a kid, and I'll go, 'He is not going to pass this unit because he's goofing off.' He's copying all the answers down as I call them out, and this is going to come back to bite him in the butt when he takes the test. And I am going to let him fail because he needs to see that there are consequences to his actions. But I don't leave it at that....I keep giving the kid feedback....All the way up there I'm fighting it [the student's behavior] tooth and nail, and letting him know that this is going to be a problem, and here's how we're going to combat it. My figuring is they don't have those social skills that are built in for kids at other schools, and they are experienced at failing. Nobody's ever told them, "If you do A, B will occur."

A conscious effort is made by the staff at all of the schools to engage students on a daily basis at a personal level. At Crawford High School, three or four staff members are out in front of the school every morning to greet students as they come into school. Matteo, the principal, commented that "engaging the kids is as simple as saying, 'Good morning. How are you?' and, you know, 'Welcome to school.'" Staff believe that knowing students individually, allows school staff to provide students with the appropriate supports to be successful. And, if students are not performing, understanding their perspectives and unique issues is an essential part of finding an effective intervention.

If the student is not engaged, we need to know so we can use the resources that we have to find out why. Whether it is the administration, the counselor, or community liaisons, we have to find out why that student is not engaged. More than anything, it is just to help them get on a path where they're going to be successful. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

Positive Culture

A second, overarching theme revealed in this study relates to school culture. Individually and collectively, the schools in this study presented strong school cultures characterized by a clear and consistent mission, a positive and safe school climate, and a culture of advocacy for their students.

Mission.

Collectively, the primary mission of these schools is for every student to complete his or her high school diploma with the academic and social skills required to be successful in the workforce or in college. A focus group participant at Nyrat High School stated, "We believe that when they come into our classroom, that they will get their education. They will get their diploma, and they will move on." At Crawford High

School, Laura articulated a similar mission: "I think that it's to get kids who were unable to succeed in the traditional high school to be successful, earn their diploma and become productive people out in the community." Deb, a teacher at Roscoe High School, echoed the same sentiment: "I think we take the at-risk student and try to remove some of those barriers so that they'll be successful both in high school and after high school."

High Expectations.

The mission of the schools is supported by a culture of high academic and behavioral expectations for students. Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School described her expectations: "I think my biggest thing would be for students to be the hardest working student they've ever been...I expect that they try the hardest they can because I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help them." Steve, also at Roscoe High School, believes that the "expectations are high [at his school] and we expect them to figure out what they need to do to get a passing grade in the class and they earn their grades."

We have various expectations. It starts with the basics, with the ESLRs. But we also have the state expectations, you know, where they need to pass the CAHSEE and they need to pass the class and receive a certain amount of credits for them to graduate. But, our philosophical expectations...Our students are expected to come ready to learn, not only for themselves but to have respect for other students around them. That they know when they walk into a classroom that the environment is going to be one, where students are learning and students are being productive and they are engaged, and they feel like they're part of something in the classroom. They can't come in just being completely disengaged, have their hood down, and put their head down...The students that come to school, they're aware of that now, you know. They're aware that you just can't come in, sit in the same chair, in the same spot, in the back of the room and be completely disengaged. But that's also related and tied in with the expectation of the teacher. That if the student is not engaged, we need to know so we can use the resources that we have to find out why. Whether it is the administration, the counselor, or community liaisons, we have to find out why that student is not engaged. More than anything it is just to help them get on a

path where they're going to be successful. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

It starts with the expectations. The staff had a lot of input in terms of deciding the standards, deciding the curriculum, developing the syllabi, developing the contracts with the kid when they're enrolled in a given class...The instruction is there. The teachers really know their curriculum. They know their instruction. They have their own expectations. They set high expectations for themselves. They're very passionate about what they teach and how they teach it and they have that same expectation for the kids. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

To quantify it, they have to have 70% or better to pass. At the other schools, it's 60%, and you still get credit. And we expect them to get 70% or better. We are preparing some of them for college...Some of them, I know, will pass with just a C. And I worry about what's going to happen to them next. But my goal is to have a deeper understanding than just a C. (Cathy, principal, Nyrat High School)

Clear and Consistent Boundaries.

High academic and behavior expectations are supported by clearly articulated and consistently enforced boundaries. All three schools have both formal and informal processes in place to communicate the school's academic and behavioral expectations to students. Marie, a teacher at Roscoe High School, explains her expectations for her students: "I expect really consistent work behavior, appropriate classroom behavior, raise your hand if you have a question, complete assignments, [and] learn to ask for help when you need it." Regarding behavioral expectations, Steve, an assistant principal at Roscoe High School believes:

First and foremost [students] have to be accountable for their discipline. They have to be accountable for their attendance. They have to maintain an 80% attendance rate to earn their credits in their class. We [adhere to] the guidelines of the school district regarding behavior and the rules of the district, and they have to abide by that. There are no fights on the campus. They know if there's a fight on campus they won't be allowed to go to school here.

I think it starts with your intake with placement and goes into the orientation piece to get the kids off on the right track as far as, you know, getting acclimated with

the school, the expectations, and then it's reinforced in the traditional setup. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

Study participants perceive that students are assigned more responsibility for maintaining their behavior and meeting school expectations.

We tend to treat them more as adults, give them a little more latitude but certainly within boundaries. I mean, we do suspend kids. We do have kids get into trouble for this or that. It's not a free rein. But they know, and they know the boundaries, and because they know that this is like a second or third chance for them, they don't want to mess up again. (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

In the end I keep thinking about this balance and mixture of transitioning from what wasn't standard space instruction to what is and staff wanting students to leave this school with an education that's comparable to the one that they're receiving at the traditional school. It's that balance of caring and showing the kids that the staff cares. But with these expectations. It's not just I'm going to sit here and hold your hand the entire time. At the same time, you're going to do these things. So it's a little bit of tough love with caring, and the kids have picked up on that. They know that sometimes we're very firm, and under some circumstances they may think that we're mean, but deep down inside they come to realize that we do it because we care. It's not easy. I don't think it's been easy to come to where that is. And that's where I think kids come around. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Professional Accountability.

At all three schools, the standard of high expectations also extends to staff. Staff members hold themselves and others accountable to a high level of professional performance that extends beyond classroom instruction to include maintaining a positive and engaging school climate for students. Colleen, a counselor at Nyrat High school acknowledged, "We want [the students] to do well. Pushing our teaching styles all the time and doing that, that also helps us with WASC and model school. Cathy, principal of Nyrat High School, stated "I don't think you can be a professional learning community if everyone's not working at a pretty high level." This belief was echoed by several study participants at each school.

There's no time to fool around. There's no time not to have the kids working from bell to bell. It's one of those things where the kids get here, they're in the classroom and teachers have to, you know, move quickly, keep kids engaged, give them homework and, you know, move them on. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

It's an awkward combination of stability and instability. And by that, is if certain things are consistent. Staffing, longevity. Where other things we continue to question the way we do things. It's not always easy. It's not always fun. But it helps us grow, and it helps us improve in certain areas. Whether it's from teacher to teacher. Department to department. Me to staff, staff to me. Just the way that we discuss certain dynamics here on campus continues to make us improve in many ways. Or undo things that may have worked years ago which may not be as effective now. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

I think you do have to be really flexible and willing to evolve, but you have to keep, you know, your expectations high and you have to keep moving the bar up and forward and you have to have that commitment which I think our staff does to kids having better lives. (Cathy, principal, Nyrat High School)

Positive School Climate.

All three schools describe their school climate as positive and supportive of student's academic and emotional needs. Staff believe that a positive and safe school climate is essential if the school is to be successful in engaging students. At Crawford High School, a positive school climate begins with the physical plant.

So right when they step on our campus or right when they walk into our office, they're engaged by looking at the pictures [of students] on the wall, by looking and seeing who comes here. That's why we have student pictures up everywhere. By looking to see that our trash cans look nice and clean, you know, that they get washed out on a weekly basis, and that the campus is looking sharp and they can't find a piece of paper. So I think right away they are already engaged. They're not thinking about, you know, whether they're going to be successful here or what their deficiencies are, or whatever it is, but they feel engaged just by looking at the campus. There's a message here, and I'm starting to pick up on it, and it can be from anywhere from like hey we care about you, that's why the campus looks so nice to the hello that we give them when they walk in or our secretaries greet them. So I think right away we give them positive messages and we engage them in those positive messages. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

I think it's the size [that contributes to the safe feeling of the school] for me, personally. I think there's so many different things. Like [another focus group participant] said he thought it would be rowdy. That maybe behavior and violence would be a problem here, but I think when you walk into this school and go further out into the quad when the students are out, you don't get that sense at all. As a teacher I feel extremely safe here. I worked at a middle school before, and I think that because there is such a small [student] population and the adults work very closely with the students, and they communicate with each other, that any kind of potential problem is known before hand and dealt with. (Marie, Roscoe High School)

Safe. I'd like to think that that's what - this is what the kids think. That when they think Crawford, the kids that have been with us for a while, they think of a safe place. They think of a clean place. They think of a place where they feel welcome. I think that that's real important because the perspective that students have before they get to us is completely different. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

Participants perceive the overall tone of their schools to be positive and supportive of students. There is also a sense of interdependence among staff members in maintaining the school climate.

It's just these high expectations with everybody because it's so small. Everybody knows everybody. The staff knows just about every kid. And you can't do anything and get away with it. So it's constantly monitoring and being on top of the kids. But in a good way. It's not oppressive. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

I think we have just a really good vibe and it's almost like a happy feeling. It's amazing to me, I forget sometimes, that so many of these kids were not happy or engaged in their former schools, but there is a high level of student engagement, respect that goes between staff and students, there's kind of a feeling of hope that permeates the school. Kids feel that they are being supported in meeting their goals, whether it be to go on to a technical college, a four year or two year, you know, they feel very on track and like they're moving forward. (Cathy, principal, Nyrat High School)

We all do our part. That's how I see it. I see it as just we all do our part. And each of us have these great - I mean, I just love the staff here. Because everybody's just incredible in their own way. And everybody takes their part seriously. And so you put all those pieces together, and I think that we really do a lot for our students. I mean, I was asking students today, "What is it about Nyrat that works?" And so many just said that the teachers really care, they don't wait

until you graduate, they help you graduate. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Participants recognize that the school climate must welcome a diverse student population that presents with a variety of risk factors and personal challenges.

I always say that, you know, continuation is like The Land of Lost Toys from Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer. Everybody has a broken part here, and so they all fit. So the train with the square wheels fits with the doll that can't cry. They understand that so they automatically form those bonds here together, and that's kind of what gets them...is just the nurturing environment. Teachers noticing that they are here. I'll call a kid up and say, "I just wanted to check and see how you're doing," and they're like, "Really?" So that kind of stuff tends to make them feel like they're part of the school. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

Advocacy.

Study participants at all three schools perceive that there is a negative perception of continuation high school students and continuation high schools among the public as well as among parents in the community. Cathy, the principal at Bowman High School believes, "A number of kids, their parents choose not to let them come here. They don't want their kids in a continuation school even though they're not going to graduate at their traditional high schools." To combat the negative perception Cathy indicates that the school staff does "a lot of salesmanship in terms of inviting those parents to come in to tour the school, to sit in on an intake, to talk with teachers before they make the actual decision to come in."

The students themselves often come to these schools with a negative perception of the school. That perception is presented to them by staff at their home schools, parents, and traditional stereotypes of continuation education.

[When they first enroll at the school, the students] need to protect themselves because this is quote, unquote a really bad place to come to. That's kind of how

it's sold to them at the home schools. I see why the counselors do it, why the administrators do it, because they don't want them to be here. They want them to succeed there. I don't know if it's the right way of going about it, but what happens is, because we hear it from the kids and the parents that when students are not being successful at the home schools, they're saying, "You don't want to go to Crawford High School, therefore, you need to show up at school on time.

[The home school staff tells them.] "You need to be successful. [Crawford High School is] a really bad place. There's a lot of bad kids." So they come with this idea of what Crawford is and they find, I think, completely the opposite once they get here. A lot of kids and parents will say this, "I didn't know that Crawford was this way."

Well, it's like the phrase, "You've got to work twice as hard to be considered half as good." That kind of phrase. And that's what these kids are dealing with. So I think they're starting to recognize, "Hey, I'm at the school that has that reputation, so I'm going to have to work really hard to offset that." And it's not fair, but it is what it is. (Anne, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Colleen, a counselor at Nyrat, noted that getting parents involved in their child's education is "hard, because these parents, a lot of them, have given up on their kids, because these kids are hard to parent." Parent involvement is challenging at all of the study schools.

Most parents have been through so much with their sons or daughters by this point. They're pretty fatigued and it's really hard to make a connection. I think the only way to do it from a teacher's point of view is through a positive. Something positive and constructive their son or daughter has done. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

We try. We really try to make the effort to contact the parents. I mean, there's negative things, obviously, but on positive things. We do truly make the effort to involve them in a positive way. You know, that this is not a bad place, it's a good place, and it's never too late to, you know, to involve yourself with your kid. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

I think by the time kids get to us, at their age, parents are either burned out or they're tired of this, or they're tired of the phone calls, or they're tired of their kid not being successful. So a lot of them kind of de-partner. Not all of them, but some of them. Plus, by the time the kid's 17 or 18, their parents have already

dealt with things a certain way, and so we lose that partnership. I think that's the biggest problem. (Deb, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Although the parent involvement level at each school is perceived by the staff to be low, there is a general sense among school staff that parents' perceptions of the school program is generally positive. Matteo, the principal of Crawford High School believes that "[The parents at our school] are very supportive of what we do, because they come in and they get a good feel for the school environment....But our engagement, our long term engagement is tough." Marie, a teacher at Roscoe High School, believes that "most of [the parents] are positive, especially the ones that come to Back to School Night or Open House. That's pretty traditional. The ones that are happy come. the ones that aren't happy are harder to get to."

I think generally once students have been here and they're happy with being here, the parents are very positive. If you do get a chance to talk to someone it's usually, "Thank you so much for everything you do to help my child. She's so happy here. It's such a difference. I never saw her this happy at the other school, or it's the first time she's gotten a B in this long." So usually [parents are] very thankful and positive once the kids have been here. I know that before they come here though, the general idea is that this is a negative place to be, but then once they actually get to see their students are doing better, that piece is very positive. (Nicole, teacher, Roscoe High School)

In combating the negative public perception of continuation students and continuation schools, the belief system in all three schools supports a culture of advocacy. Laura, a teacher at Crawford High School stated, "We all want everybody to think this is a great place and have it be a great place for kids, and so we do whatever it takes." Improving the public perception of their schools and ensuring that their school would be protected from budget cuts was a significant motivator for Nyrat and Crawford

High Schools to seek California Model Continuation High School honors as well as to continue to receive full term WASC accreditation.

Part of it is we have to fight for our survival in this economy. They're looking to cut programs all the time and these kids are disposable to most of the world. They've been thrown away. Our job is to protect them. We have to do whatever it takes to make sure that they are safe here and that they progress and that they move on to what's next. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

Varying Operational Structures

The operational structures at each school vary; however, all three schools perceive that they have a high level of district and community support, principal leadership that supports distributed leadership and collaboration, multiple pathways for students to complete graduation requirements, and class size norms below 25.

District and Community Support.

All three schools perceived a high level of district support from their respective district offices and believed that their colleagues in comprehensive high schools supported the work that they do. All three schools have a well-defined process for referring students to the continuation high school that is supported by both the district offices and their feeder high schools. All three schools indicated that they believed that they had a high level of district support because they were operating a quality program and students were being successful. Cathy, the principal of Nyrat High School stated, "I think we have a great deal of district support and I think it's because they trust us and we're so successful at what we do."

Anytime that I need something, they never...basically they never say no. It may take some time, but they always get what we need, because they know that we manage the school really well. They know that we really truly manage the school really well, so they're very supportive, you know. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

I think [there are] two reasons [that Roscoe High School has such a positive reputation]. We're not a dumping ground, and we're under the district's wing. Some people might think, "Wow, you're really next door, isn't that a bad thing?" That's a good thing for us. We're very connected. I mean, even to the Board of Ed., you know. They come to our graduations - individual board members, and I think we have pretty direct contact with next door. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Although recent budget issues in public education have resulted in some staffing and resource reductions at schools, the schools still perceive that the district is supportive and the resources that they are provided are sufficient to meet the needs of their students.

Even with the budget cuts, they've been super. That's my biased opinion as an administrator. We are like their baby here in the district. The continuation school. They go out of their way to give us as much as they can within their means. They take care of us really well. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

We've lost enrollment and we've lost teachers because of that. Because of enrollment, we've lost sections of classes, and obviously some teachers who were used to earning an extra hour a day of pay, we've lost that too. Still, for the most part, the school district has always, always been very good about us being able to get the programs, the materials, [and] all the things that we need here to be very successful. Because they see us as, hopefully making sure our graduation rate for the school district stays high. And [the district's graduation rate is] a high rate. So it's a very high graduation rate, and this school obviously contributes to it. We don't lose a whole lot of kids once they get here. (Steve, Roscoe High School)

The perception of a high level of district support is also shared by non-administrative certificated staff at each of the sites. At Crawford High School, for example, Alejandra, a counselor, shared that the superintendent of the district often comes to the site to join her for classroom visits and observations:

He comes, because he's available more so, when I do observations during fifth period, so he has my calendar and he comes and [says], "I'm going to join you today," and I was like, "Okay, good." So he'll come and he wants the students to know and the teachers to know that he's, you know, accessible.... So he comes around and they come and do their district walk through. You call them, you have an issue, they're very supportive.

In addition to district support, all of the schools have well-established partnerships with community organizations to support their instructional programs and provide support for their students. These partnerships primarily support social-emotional and behavioral needs of students and families.

We have a strong working relationship with our probation department. So we have some excellent probation officers that we can call upon for support from them... We have a child and family center, which provides mental health services right across the street, and they have a couple of programs where they work with our students here on campus. They are also available to us for emergencies. If we have a student that we feel is in crisis, we can call upon them... Our city has an amazing person who works with our homeless student population and does a lot for helping them. Even to the point where they help them get prom dresses and prom beds and, you know, a lot of resources there. And just the sense that if we can't figure it out, [we can] find somebody [in the community] who will. (Cathy, principal, Nyrat High School)

If...the school doesn't have those resources, we have those resources at the community relations office. So it's like a step above and beyond what the school does, that we can help aid you... When we need something, or we need volunteers, we get volunteers from retired police officers, from retired recreational workers, retired city workers that love to be a part of us now. We get invited to the majority of the city events, the school events everywhere. We're always included. We are a part of the scholarship process for a lot of the, you know, the women's club, the Kiwanis club, the Rotary club. They include us in everything. People really want to be a part of us. So we have a lot of community support now. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

We do have therapists that come on campus and do one-on-one on a weekly basis from three different agencies... as well as probably ten different agencies throughout the community that we could refer out [to]. Some of the providers do go to the other schools, but not ours. We have other providers that come [to us] specifically that we've set up because of the needs of the kids. If we see a specific problem arising, it may be a drug situation, it may be something that students need to be aware of, then we'll make the contact to the provider and say, look, this is what's happening on our campus. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

Community resources. There's quite a bit of that. Whether it's through our counseling staff, which now we're down to one. But the district has a lot of services for those kids through [Community] Mental Health and other agencies

that are out in the community. So there's a lot of support. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Community partnerships with local agencies support the instructional program and provide students access to needed services that schools can't provide.

The PE program operates [at the] YMCA. I think that gives students an opportunity and the community an opportunity to see our kids in maybe a different light, working out next to them or whatever. And then [the students] see the opportunities at the YMCA that are open to the community. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Community partnerships also provide opportunities for students to engage with the community. Community engagement activities are most often organized through the schools' Associated Study Body (ASB) or Leadership class. A lot of our students don't get out of the community. They don't what it is to go to the beach. Simple little things that you, as adults, you look at, oh, okay, that's normal. A lot of our students don't see that. Through [fieldtrips] they can. (Alejandra, counselor, Crawford High School)

Each school has established community partnerships that provide students with volunteer opportunities in the community. The opportunities are viewed as essential in providing students with a broader educational experience.

We also do things besides like the prom and fundraisers. [For example] tomorrow happens to be a blood drive day with the City of Hope. So we go into the classrooms and explain, you know, the City of Hope's coming, what they do, why they're coming and try and get kids involved in the community in that way by donating blood. We actually also have field trips to the City of Hope where kids can go with the Science and the Health teacher and kind of see the connection of what the blood that they gave that particular day, what's going to happen to it over there and see the bigger picture of what's going on. (Laura, teacher, Crawford High School)

They have trips they do, and one is a community volunteer clean-up day and the ASB teacher sets that up. and they've done, as part of ASB, she's also organized, you know, coats for children and working at a homeless shelter. They also volunteer for community service hours for the [Community Event] where they close down the street and all the restaurants come out in booths and things like that. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Through ASB, [we do] blood drives. We're having a blood drive on Friday. Community clean-up kinds of activities, which we do in the Spring with seniors, in particular, feeding the homeless, that kind of stuff. But, I feel like we did more of that in previous years, and I feel like a lot of it has been pulled back. I'm not sure why. I don't know where exactly it's coming from, but I don't see as much going on with the kids that they can get involved in. (Nicole, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Leadership.

Each of the three principals embraces a collaborative leadership approach and values distributed leadership. At all three schools, leadership teams share in the policy and decision-making process.

I would like to think that we're a partnership. I would like to think that we're collaborative. I would like to think that it's a professional learning community. I think we are, but there are times, as we were speaking earlier, where the buck stops here and I'm it....I think it's important to be collaborative, but then there comes a point where somebody has to make a decision. (Cathy, principal, Nyrat High School)

Our leadership structure obviously starts with me. I get directions from the district office, just like all the other districts. But we want everybody to be engaged in all parts of leadership, you know, from safety to curriculum, to dealing with the parents, to having being on the same philosophy as far as, you know, the structure of the kids' day. We want everybody to feel like they are leaders here. Everyone. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

The leadership structure is valued by the school staff and there is a high level of support for the school principal as well as a high level of participation in leadership activities by staff.

[The principal] solicits the leadership abilities in each of us. So I think the leadership structure is that I think we're all valued. I think she considers us all leaders in some capacity, and she tries to draw that out of us. I mean, we're part - she has almost every faculty member involved in something and taking some leadership role in something, it seems to me. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Nobody really balks at the ideas that come around. It's just some [staff members] are more - take a more leadership role of creating these new ideas and some don't.

[The ones that don't take a leadership role] don't seem to be negative about it, they just don't create the ideas. They follow along. (Laura, teacher, Crawford High School)

The leadership has allowed the teachers to be more involved in deciding what kind of direction this school goes into. It's been a group process and the leaders, the principals that we've had the past 10 to 15 years, have been guiding us, you know, towards what they believe, but also allowed for the teachers to have a lot of input in going in those directions. It has become a team effort, and that's why you have such a high amount of teachers that have been here for quite a while. (Steve, Roscoe High School)

All three schools have incorporated systems that promote and support positive professional communication. School administration has created and maintained common planning times and formal and informal protocols for staff to communicate regarding school operations and individual students. There is a perception among all staff that these processes and protocols support personalization and allow students to be more successful. These communication systems are also credited by staff members as effective in identifying strengths and needs of individual students and sharing best practices for meeting the needs of individual students.

There's a lot of collegiality in terms of the teachers sharing ideas and our staff meetings. There are always instructional practices that we're looking at. Our staff meetings always revolve around some practice that teachers can take back to their classroom. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Once a month we meet with our leadership team that includes all the department heads...and they bring up what's happening within their department. And they meet. Each department is expected to meet once a month...and discuss what issues are happening with them, whether it's curriculum development, whether it's adoption or new books, whether it's - whatever's coming from the district office or from the outside of the school. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

Each school has set aside time for common planning to discuss individual students and to address schoolwide issues.

On Fridays we have a banking day meeting. That's usually to try to prevent problems as they become evident. A student is experiencing attendance or academic issues. That's when we go through this process to brainstorm on Fridays to see what's happening in other classrooms with that same kid. Then administration or counselors will follow up. We'll get teachers feedback as to what's already being done to address those issues. It's a lot of communication in that regard. As opposed to waiting until something major happens before we react. It's not perfect but it's something that has been pretty effective for us. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

It's hard for [students] to hide. If something comes up - if the student is not being successful - if the student is just sitting in the back and just not being part of the class and they're having a hard time engaging a particular student, that usually comes up because it comes up in the three or four classes, or six classes that the student has and then that's kind of like - at our meetings it comes up. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

Multiple Pathways.

All three schools in this study enroll students on a continuous basis throughout the school year, but each school operates on a different daily schedule. Nyrat High School and Crawford High School operate two 180-minute sessions per day. Nyrat's two sessions are self-contained, and students are permitted to attend only one session. However, at Crawford High School, some students are permitted to attend both sessions if they are performing well which allows them to complete more classes. Roscoe High School operates one full-day session. Although the instructional day varies at each site, all three schools offer students multiple pathways for completing their course requirements. These pathways include independent study, Work Experience Education, adult school classes, online learning, and Regional Occupation Program (ROP) courses. Complementing the multiple pathways approach, all three schools offer considerable flexibility in the student scheduling process to accommodate students' individual needs. Flexibility is granted in the length of the school day, the teachers to whom students are

assigned, the course sequence that students follow, and the length of time students are enrolled in classes. Matteo, the principal at Crawford High School, articulates an approach to personalizing the scheduling process that is similar at all three schools:

The way we determine [which session a student attends] is we evaluate the transcripts. If we see that student is having a hard time, you know, like taking five classes at the comprehensive high school, we're not going to give him six classes because he's already having a hard time with five. If he's failing four out of five that he's taking at the comprehensive high school we only start students with three classes. The reason we start him with three classes is we want to make sure that he's successful in those three classes, and due to the lack of space, we don't want to have a teacher have a 1:40 ratio or 1:35 ratio. We feel that by giving the students three classes, that it gives the teachers less students in the classroom. That's why we run two sessions, so the students get better quality time with the teacher. The students need to feel that they are successful with those three classes before they move on to the other classes.

With some of the kids we do have the option for kids that only wish to have four classes or five classes for whatever reason. We have a couple of kids that come in at 9:00 and they start second period out of very special circumstances. So, it's kind of flexible in that regard and just the way that the school physically is set up, I think, it's very conducive to meeting the needs of the kids because of our ability to reach out to any kid at any given time. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

[Scheduling is] all over the place. They usually have three academics and one elective, so almost everybody is taking English and social studies....Math we group by time periods. Math is the only thing that we close off [to continuous enrollment]. You can't just go in and out of math because math is too difficult. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

If students are not successful in their classes, each school has mechanisms in place to accommodate their needs.

So if they don't pass something technically we don't give them a failing grade. They have to go back and relearn it. And there are some kids who would stay in the class - it's up to the teacher and what's happening with that student, but if somebody starts at the beginning of the 12 weeks, and it's taking them longer to master the material, they'll stay longer, so that they can learn it. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

If a teacher says, “I can’t make it work with this kid,” then we definitely [explore changing the student’s schedule]. It doesn’t do the teacher or that student any good just to leave them there failing.... We make an individual assessment at some point. And sometimes we’ll give the kid a break from something. And then put [the class] back later, because they know they have to meet that requirement. But maybe right now it’s just not the time. They don’t have the right frame of mind. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

It is a competency based system that allows students to move at their own pace and not all kids are allowed to move at a faster rate than the teacher would like them to go, just because the teacher may feel that the students are not ready to move on their own. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

Class Size.

Class sizes vary by school and by subjects within the schools, but all three schools maintain average class sizes at 25 or lower. Smaller class sizes are maintained through district support of staffing models that support lower class size as well as the flexible scheduling practices described previously.

The district does recognize that it’s an equity issue and that the smaller class size and that funding these kids is really critical to our success as a district. I think you’re only as strong as your weakest link, and if these kids are the most fragile and the weakest link in the district, the fact that our program has had minimal cuts in all of this economic uncertainty [is a testament to the fact that] there is a commitment from the superintendent and from the district personnel to support us. And the school board just loves us. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Study participants regularly credited smaller class size for their ability to provide students’ with more personalized attention to support their academic and behavioral needs. At Nyrat High School, where students are limited to 180 minutes of instruction each day, Colleen, a counselor, believes that smaller class sizes compensate for the shorter instructional day:

Well, I think it’s numbers more than time, because you’ve got fewer students.... In average classes, I’ve got up to 25 usually. But I think because the class size is

smaller [students and teachers] have more opportunities to sit and talk [with each other] and ask questions.

Participants perceive that smaller class size not only provides students with the physical and emotional space to be successful, but also provides teachers the opportunity to notice when students are struggling and to address their needs more quickly.

Here we have empty desks, because kids need [space]. These kids don't like to be snuggled close to [each other] or packed in. There's something phobic about that for them, so they really do need their space until they get to know one another. (Anne, teacher, Nyrat High School)

The small size classes don't allow them to hide in a sense. You know, we have 15 kids per class....It's hard for them to hide. If something comes up, or if the student is not being successful, or if the student is just sitting in the back and just not being part of the class and they're having a hard time engaging a particular student, that usually [is noticed and addressed.] (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

I would think when you compare us to teachers at other schools that we are more hands on with the kids, but at the same time, we also have the smaller classes that would lend itself to being able to do that. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Because I have such small classes, it affords me a lot of one-on-one time [with students,] so I do a lot of kind of mini problem solving. If a kid doesn't have binder, I get him a binder. If they're behind in this, I can do kind of checks....The smaller your classes, the more of that you can do, because you can see things and intervene. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Differentiated Instruction

The instructional program at all schools is grounded in standards-based instruction and focused on the Content Standards adopted by the California State Board of Education. All schools reported that the content and rigor of their instructional programs aligned with the curricula at the comprehensive high schools in their respective

districts. The culture of all three schools emphasizes differentiation of instruction based upon individual student needs and focuses on academic as well as personal growth.

Rigor.

At all three schools, there is a clear focus on offering students a rigorous, standards-based instructional program that is commensurate with what is being offered at comprehensive high schools. Licet, a teacher at Nyrat High School asserts that instruction at her school "looks a lot like it does at the other [high] schools. We do a lot of the same things." All three schools have established protocols for teachers to follow in outlining and delivering instruction.

Well, the core classes, I mean, there's an emphasis on them being standards based. We use district texts and are aware of district pacing calendars and that sort of thing. We adapt things to our students' needs. But for the most part, we're trying to hold them to the similar standard. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

We follow all the state standards. We put together an outline, and it's got to be according to the state's standards. We have outlines, so we are always accountable for how we give the students credits and how we assess them. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

Curricular design is influenced by the needs of the students being served.

We have staff here that is very flexible while at the same time balancing that with expectations for the kids - not just lowering the expectations and accommodating every individual need of the student in order for them to get through the curriculum. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

We use the same textbooks that they use at the comprehensive high school. Our department chairs go to the meetings with the other department chairs from the district and plan out the standards that need to be covered and kind of block it out into the - maybe the six week intervals on which standards need to be covered in each six week period and so then from that, then we make up our course outlines to include and make sure we cover all those standards, the assignments and the lessons, hit all those targeted standards that they would be doing at the regular

high school, just presented in the way our teachers think is best. (Laura, teacher, Crawford High School)

Pacing.

The pacing of instruction varies at each school but generally aligns to the semester or trimester model adopted at the school. There is an expectation that students will finish a course in the prescribed semester or trimester, but students who are capable and motivated may finish classes in less time. Conversely, students who struggle with the curriculum or productivity requirements may require additional time to complete a course. The systems at each school have been designed to support these variations.

The outline's the foundation, you know, they have to complete everything on the outline...If they come in three weeks late, they just need to go - some of the teachers, what they do, is they kind of set it up, so wherever they are, they just jump into that and they filter them through to the next portion to finish everything on the course outline. It varies class to class, but every class has an outline that is required for everything to be completed to get their credits. (Alejandra, counselor, Crawford High School)

And when we detect it, I mean, we do sometimes like slow down our instruction to match their pace. If they're not understanding it fully, we'll change it. We've got a lot leeway in that sense, so we can actually afford to do that. Our pacing calendar isn't as strict as the other schools...We've got our freedom that we can do that. We can kind of stretch out and make sure they've got that. I know it sounds really cliché, but we're not going to leave any of them behind. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Pedagogy.

All of the schools are using a variety of instructional approaches. The most common approaches include direct instruction, small group instruction, and students working independently with assistance from a teacher and/or instructional aide.

I'd say that we are very heavily direct instruction with a lot of pairing up or sharing. There's a lot of one-on-one interaction between the students and the teachers. In the middle of the class, the class will be working, and the teacher will be working one-on-one with each of the students, kind of checking in. We let the

students kind of let us know where they're at and where they need help in how they do it. So at any good time in the classroom, we're doing 2-3 different types of instruction. Whether we're sharing a concept on board, a lot of people are doing some group work or something and lots of people are working visually, and we kind of rotate between them. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

So keeping in mind the type of kids we have and the skills that they most of the time come with, the direct instruction has been tapered to kind of address those learning gaps...The kids will pick up [more] from direct instruction rather than from independent instruction. So it's kind of a balance, but most of it is geared towards direct instruction to hit on those skills [the students lack]. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Proficiency.

All three schools employ a competency-based approach to assess mastery.

Students must complete assignments to a certain level of proficiency in order to earn credit. If students do not initially demonstrate proficiency, they are given multiple opportunities to improve their performance.

It is a competency based system that allows students to move at their own pace and not all kids are allowed to move at a faster rate than the teacher would like them to go, just because the teacher may feel that the students are not ready to move on their own. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

[Earning credit] shows that [the student] achieved basically 70% or better mastery of what we call the essential standards. We have the state standards that we follow, but...the district has actually picked out for us...the power standards. So, if they earned credit then they've mastered [those standards] to at least a 70% level [of proficiency]. (Nicole, Roscoe High School)

Student progress is constantly monitored by classroom teachers.

I can't remember the last time I walked into somebody's classroom and saw [the teacher] sitting at their desk or something. You know. We're the type of teachers that are literally walking around our room constantly and checking with [the students'] work, as they're writing. I teach writing. By looking over their shoulders and watching the students write, I can tell right away if they did it or not, and I can catch that right on the spot. And help them...instead of just waiting for the paper to get in and getting out my stereotypical red pen. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

I think we do all these multiple [assessment] measures in our classrooms. A lot of them. A lot of it is informal with formative assessment because we just have smaller classes, which affords us the time to do this. I know, for example, in math, in a traditional [high school] math [class] of 40 kids, the teacher will assign the homework assignment and the next day read off the answers. [In that situation] the kids are responsible for asking questions. [Here] I check them myself, and I'm walking around [the classroom] making sure that they're getting it right while they're doing it. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

Differentiated Instruction.

All of the schools in this study use a differentiated instructional approach to provide a learning environment that will maximize the potential for student success. The teachers use strategies that connect with individual student's learning styles, and make adjustments when necessary. The teachers at these schools perceive that they manage instructional time in a way that meets the standards and also provides motivating, challenging, and meaningful experiences for students. The need to differentiate instruction is supported by an underlying belief system that continuation high school students are disengaged from learning because of academic deficits and/or a history of school failure. Matteo, the principal of Crawford High School explains, "We've learned to manage [instruction], and we've learned to make each part meaningful for the students regardless of what level they are."

It's on an individual basis, basically. Many teachers have taken it upon themselves to help that student get through [the coursework] individually. After time with them, modifying their work a little bit, or giving them extra work that's beneficial for them, because [the student is] more capable of a hands-on type of project instead of just reading the book and taking the test. Things like that. Or [if] the lecture's too tough for them, maybe they can research a project and do something like that. It's on an individual basis. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

It's a fine line you walk. If you push them too hard they check out, and you're done, completely defeated. I have all these different reading levels, and these kids don't have a knack for studying in school. They don't know how to read. So I try to help them through the reading. It's very scaffolded because they need that support. I cannot say, "Go read chapter five tonight, and tomorrow you're going to have a quiz on it." There's no way that's going to happen. (Rosemary, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Teachers differentiate instruction to address a perceived lack of academic and/or organizational/study skills among students.

I'm being very generalized, but the majority of our students don't have the skills to work independently, to comprehend the material, and produce a decent product independently. We don't water it down, but we definitely support. Sometimes I will water it down first before throwing the textbook material at them because it's just too advanced. (Licet, teacher, Nyrat High School)

There's kind of a working paradigm that [among the student body, there are] a lot of unidentified special ed kids, or kids who are struggling learners. If they're coming [to school regularly] and they're still struggling with the materials, they need another level of support besides going through the cycle again. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

In addition to differentiated instruction in the classroom, each school has intervention supports in place to provide additional assistance for struggling students.

Nyrat High School offers students before and after school tutoring programs. Crawford High School offers a lab setting after school where students can get extra help, and Roscoe High School offers students a flexible schedule on Fridays to allow them to catch up on missing assignments and get more one-on-one attention from the teachers during the day.

We have a tutoring program and we have after school tutors that stick around in a particular classroom. Well, they get paid for being here to help students with their work. So, those are additional resources that we have help support [students], you know, outside the classroom. We have after school programs to help with tutoring. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

So on Fridays, the kids that haven't met that expectation review or retest or do different things with the teacher in order to make sure that they get the essence of the material covered Monday through Thursday. So that's another way that the school over the years used as an intervention for the kids who are just not getting the material. (Focus group participant, Roscoe High School)

Teach Life Skills.

All three schools have adopted formal and informal strategies for teaching students the skills that are needed to enable them to achieve successfully on their own. These skills include not only basic academic skills, but also study skills, conflict and stress management skills, coping skills, and goal setting. There is a perception among study participants that this work is vital to the success of students, and that if attention is not given to addressing these needs among students, then their chances of successfully completing high school are significantly reduced. Laura, a teacher at Crawford High School believes that her staff knows "that they're not just their teacher there to teach them how to do algebra. They're there to teach them how to be good people and help them." Licet, a teacher at Nyrat High School expressed concern that, "Quite often many kids graduate with great academia, but they don't have the social skills [to be successful]." Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School frames it in the following way:

I guess knowing that as long as they - when they leave here they know that they have the tools to figure out how to take care of what they need to achieve. It's kind of hard for me to put into words - that as long as they pay attention to what they're expected to finish, and they don't leave it to somebody else to figure out, that they're taking responsibility for themselves and they know that they're able to do that without our help because they learned how to do it here.

It's a school climate. We're here to hopefully instill in them self-belief that they've lost along the way, to encourage them, to let them know that they can do it and to work with them as best we can to earn credits and reach that goal of walking across the stage. (Rosemary, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Initially I just try to shape school behavior again and to get them to start something and to see it through. Finish it. Turn it in, and to kind of meet with success on a daily basis to just become more productive. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

All three schools teaching goal-setting and focus on improving students' self confidence to set and achieve realistic goals. Colleen, the principal of Nytrat High Schools believes that "part of our job is to teach [students] that they can be successful. We believe that they'll be successful, but we have to teach them that they'll be successful." School staff encourage students to become actively involved in their educational experience and hold them accountable to do so.

We expect that not all [new] students are going to...receive the message [that they are responsible for their success] in the one-on-one intake with the counselor when they break down their schedule and provide a plan for them. But, that's the first thing we do is provide a plan for them, and we give them hope right off the bat. We have a plan for you. This is what we feel by just looking at the history that we have. With the information that we have, with the data that we have on you, on your deficiencies, this is how we are going to help you get over those deficiencies and start becoming successful in getting caught up. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

I think really [the school's responsibility is to help] the kids to set realistic goals and achieve them. I think [the students] always had everything all up in the air and have never been quite able to figure out how to even manage it. I think goal setting and maybe time management. I would think without us even realizing that's what we're doing, it seems like that that's the effect. We're helping kids to set [goals].... At least for me, my experience, and it may just be the way that I teach, but I feel like the two big things they come out with are being able to better manage their time and being able to set goals and reach them. (Nicole, teacher, Roscoe High School)

So we are trying to train [students] to know what they need. The teachers all kind of worked at this [document for students to use to track their progress towards graduation]. The teachers all can read these. They can all read a transcript, so everybody is trying to teach this kid that they need to know where they stand. We always tell them, "Once you come here you're an education responsible young adult." It's the first thing that we tell them. So you're responsible for your path here. We're support. You're the one driving it, so you need to know where you

stand. We will do everything that we can but this is your journey, so you need to know. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

Never Give Up

The staff at all three schools articulate a commitment to never giving up on students and they prioritize student engagement through positive adult and peer relationships.

Persistence.

Staff at these schools internalize a responsibility to retain students at their schools and to do whatever it takes to ensure that the students are successful. There is a genuine concern for students by staff. Colleen, a counselor at Nyrat stated, " We love and adore these kids. If you're working continuation...[these kids] get under your skin, and you'll do whatever it takes to make sure that they [are successful]...that [they know] we're here for them."

[I want my students to be] the hardest working student they've ever been...I expect that they try the hardest they can, because I'm willing to do whatever it takes to help them. [I don't want them to] just sit there and, you know, let themselves out of their responsibility. [I want them to] be helpful to everybody [and know] that it's a community of people helping each other and very respectful. Most of all that they know I expect them to try, because I'm willing to do anything it takes to make sure that they get the help that they need. The only students who don't finish my classes are the ones who, literally, just like, don't show up or don't try at all. But if you're here and you're listening and you're willing to do it, I guarantee you're going to earn your credit. They don't get out of it for free. They have to earn 70%, at least, on everything, but because of the policy that, okay, if you don't get 70% you have to re-do it, I'm here for them to help re-teach them. (Nicole, teacher, Roscoe High School)

I think one of the biggest factors is being empathetic towards the kids and knowing where the kids come from and where they've been, to try to understand what's happening in the kid's lives....I think understanding and forgiving the kids - understanding where they come from, [being] empathetic and forgiving that the kids have made mistakes, and they're going to continue to make mistakes. There's no Crawford after Crawford. We have to deal with their situations, and if

the kid, students, make a mistake, that they're going to come back the next day. We have to accept them, and if they make a mistake the following week, we're still have to accept them. We have to work with them. There is no other place for them to go. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

We don't shun them because they got pregnant, because they were in rehab, or because they got thrown in jail for six months. [I say,] "Okay, yeah, you did wrong, but you know what? We're here to help you. You want to graduate. Okay? Let's get on with it. Let's get on with your life." (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Staff at all three schools perceive that students come to continuation schools emotionally damaged in some way, and it incumbent upon the staff at the school to build students back up - to "fix" them. Rosemary, a teacher at Nyrat High School stated that many of her students "come in broken...whether academically, socially -- they've just been wounded somewhere along the road. We do our best to repair them. We don't put them back to 100%, but we get pretty darn close with a lot of them. Licet, Rosemary's colleague at Nyrat, shares a similar belief: "They're wounded. Their stories are incredible and heartbreaking. And so we try to fix them."

The community knows that we don't break the kids...we kind of get them broken for whatever reason. We fix it here. We fix it here, and the community understands that. That [our school is] not where the bad kids go. These are the kids that need help. These are the kids that are down on their luck, or whatever you want to call it. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

Student Engagement.

Student engagement is a priority at all three schools. Each school has developed formal and informal structures that provide students with opportunities to actively participate and become acculturated to the norms of their respective schools. Student engagement strategies include traditional student body events such as student recognition events, prom, yearbook, and grad night, but they also include giving students

opportunities to assume leadership roles, classroom strategies that target student participation and engagement. Cathy, the principal at Nyrat High School explains: "When [students] see that we listen to them, and that we're open to their ideas and implementing [those ideas] here, they get a real sense of ownership of the school." Anne, a teacher at Nyrat High School, described a strategy she used in her classroom to motivate and engage students:

I was looking for a way to motivate my 1st period students, because they'd show up to school late, and they just weren't getting through the math. So I went to a garage sale and I bought these little beanie babies. [They cost], like a quarter a piece. When somebody finished a chapter and had earned a credit, I gave the kid a beanie baby. And I said, "Hey, let me get your picture." So my very first picture is of these two guys, and they're looking really scary and tough. And one's holding a Pluto dog and the other one's holding a little monkey. And they're glaring at the camera because I said, "Look scary, because you're Nyrat students," (Laughs). And it just evolved from that. So then I started putting all these photos up on the wall. And everybody wanted to get a beanie baby so they could have their photo on the wall, because it made them feel famous. I must have - I don't know, 300, 400 photos now. Because I did it for the whole year, and every time you pass a chapter, you earn a credit and you get a beanie baby, and you get your picture taken. And it became this competition of people posing with funny poses. I never would have guessed it would be such a hit. It was such a stupid thing, you know. And then it just grew. And it was because it's nice to be recognized. It's nice to look up every single day and see your picture on the wall.

Positive Adult Mentor.

Each school emphasizes positive relationships with adults and emphasizes respectful treatment within the school community. There is a common perception among study participants that if students are able to form a positive relationship with at least one staff member, certificated or classified, then their chances of being successful are improved.

All of us here at Nyrat are teachers, counselors, mothers, fathers. I mean, we have 5 or 6 roles. And we all perform them, including Carrie. Including Mike, our

campus supervisor for years here. He was probably one of our best counselors. Currently Mary. Mary is Mama Mary...Mary knows more things about these kids, and they share with her, and they are as effective as we are in terms of helping to maintain the proper climate here for academic success. Even though they're a custodian, or a campus supervisor, or they're a secretary. In fact, kids sometimes, when they graduate, the ones who cherish the most, Sarah, our instructional assistant, would get the most gifts at graduation, because these kids were just so - she helped them so, so much. So, that's what works. It's that whole community. It really is a community here. It's not just the principal. And she's great. But it's her staff, her clerical staff, her custodial staff, her teaching staff, her instructional assistant staff. Everybody, everybody. That's what makes this such a unique place. It really is. (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

The success of our students is the connections that they make with every single staff member. They make a connection with at least one staff member here. And in some instances it's two. But just one makes the difference for many of our students. Because many times they don't have the stability in their homes that they have here each and every day. And when we go on breaks, some of our students are biting at the bit to come back because they've missed the stability that they enjoy here each and every day. So success for many of our students is helping them to believe in themselves because many of them never had a teaching staff, like we have here, that really believes in their abilities and helps them to see that they are quite capable of achieving anything they desire. (Focus group participant, Nyrat High School)

So we kind of expect not everybody to be a success story, but even though they aren't feeling successful, they know that they have a place to come where they can talk to somebody, or say hello to somebody, or build some type of positive relationships. We know we have that. (Matteo, principal, Crawford High School)

Staff members perceive that continuation high school teachers have a broader responsibility than their traditional high colleagues. Continuation high school teachers must have a willingness to relate to students outside of the standard curriculum.

I think relative to a comprehensive high school, most kids connect with one or two people on campus in a more personal way, but I don't know how long-term all of those relationships are. I think when they become long-term they become more valuable. You know, when they know someone's caring about what they do, you know, down the road and they come back and, you know, you can write recommendations for them. You can give them advice. (Deb, teacher, Roscoe High School)

I think that's a skill comprehensive teachers don't get. And I have taught in a comprehensive high school environment. It was very curriculum academic based. I don't think there's the affective and social component [at comprehensive high schools]. Like, I'd almost say it's 50/50 here. You've got to take care of the heart before you take care of the mind kind of thing. You know what I mean? (Rosemary, teacher, Nyrat High School)

If somebody asked me to describe why, even why I enjoy teaching here, it's because I'm able to get that one-on-one time with kids, which is huge because that connection is I think what motivates them to do as much as they can, if they feel like somebody cares if they do it. (Nicole, teacher, Roscoe High School)

Kids are going to come to you with all kinds of questions, not just math or English questions and you're more than just a teacher to them. You're kind of like a co-parent in some senses. So, I think that the teachers here know that and that's part of the hats that they wear. (Laura, teacher, Crawford High School)

Positive student-staff relationships are supported by a commitment to respectful treatment. Even when students are struggling, staff members make a conscious effort to model appropriate interactive behavior with their students. Staff also takes into consideration that outside influences may be impacting students' attitudes or behaviors.

Even when they've done something that's just so offensive or disruptive, even as you're sending them out [of the classroom], you've got to make sure, they know how much you love them. And I'm not very touchy feeling and saying, "I love you guys," and anything like that. But they do know that they're forgiven before they even walk out the door. And that's really important. (Anne, teacher, Nyrat High School)

[Our security officer] serves in a variety of unofficial capacities, and one of them is interacting with the kids. They have the most respect for him, and he has his way of getting kids to do whatever they're supposed to without it becoming [an] issue. We rarely have issues with security, between security and students because of the support. (Francisco, principal, Roscoe High School)

We treat them like adults, and we give them the respect that they need, and therefore they respond. These kids - Anne knows this - these kids will do anything she tells them to do, or me, or any of us. Because we get that respect. Not because we demand it. Because we've earned it and we give it in return. And that is the huge key right there. (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Staff Qualities

All three schools indicate that the affective qualities of staff members, both classified and certificated, are more important to the students' and schools' success than the quantity of staff members on site.

Staffing Structure.

The staffing structure at each school is similar. In terms of classified staff, each school employs at least three clerical staff members in the main office, at least one school safety officer, and a varying number of instructional aides to support classroom instruction. Certificated staff at each school includes administrators, counselors, and teachers. All three schools have one full-time principal. Two of the three schools have assistant principals while one has no assistant principal. Two of the three schools have two full-time guidance counselors with one school having one full-time counselor. The staffing structure for out of classroom certificated employees was not based on norm charts or student enrollment. Rather, it was, in all three schools, prescribed by the district office. For example, the school with the lowest enrollment was assigned an assistant principal by their district and provided with one counselor. At each school, the local district supported a staffing structure that maintained a class size below 25 students.

Staff Affect.

At all three schools, study participants perceived that successful continuation high school teachers had to possess a willingness to engage with students and an understanding that, while there is a focus on academics, academics are not always the priority when interacting with students in the classroom. Colleen, a counselor at Nyrat High School, describes her perception of good continuation high school teachers:

They have to have a heart for kids at risk. Because anybody can teach math, but not everybody knows when a kid needs to come see the counselor. [Not everyone is willing to] meet them at Starbucks to help them get that last credit in math so they'll graduate. And, you know, it comes back to that unknown quality a continuation staff member.

That's one of the things that [our principal] looks for in teachers. We don't have a lot of turnover here. But when we need a new teacher, one of the things she looks for is not how many master degrees you have. Because that doesn't really mean anything. It's can you teach from the heart. Can you be a person who can relate and work with and help somebody? And that - the kids pick up on that immediately. They immediately know that you care. (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Among study participants, there is a perceived set of affective skills that continuation educators must possess.

I think one of the biggest factors is being empathetic towards the kids and knowing where the kids come from and where they've been, to try to understand what's happening in the kid's lives. We all know that kids come with a bag of stuff when they come to school and before we get to, you know, the understanding of the subject matter, we have to find out what's happening with those kids. The other thing, I think is patience, a lot of patience. The students aren't going to change overnight. It takes time, but they do change, because we see it. If they're patient enough - and this is something that we always push - if they're patient enough, if they're caring enough, if they're prepared in the classroom, then students will respond to that because we see that. (Ben, counselor, Crawford High School)

[Successful teachers] have to be flexible, but still I think you have to have high expectations, you know, for the students. I would say, I'm not sure what the word is I'm looking for, like kind of like this is their calling. (Laura, teacher, Crawford High School)

It's not how many academic degrees you have in order to teach advanced placement, advanced placement, advanced placement, but how well can you connect with students and help them, motivate them. What we have to do here is reconnect students who have become disengaged with the system - either through tardies, or failures, or whatever. And we have to - in order to help them graduate, we have to reconnect them. That's our main job. Teaching math or history comes secondary to reconnecting them. And once we do that, we establish a bond with those kids that's very strong. And when they graduate, the bond doesn't go away. (Bill, teacher, Nyrat High School)

Study participants perceived that continuation educators must be committed to individual students' success and must demonstrate a willingness to work with at-risk students.

A big part of [our success is the] staffing here. We do make substantial sacrifices, substantial. Time-wise, emotionally, I mean I think that the emotional connection and contribution we make to these kids or with this kid is immense. Nothing like I've ever felt before. I found my niche. (Rosemary, teacher, Nyrat High School)

I think it's all about the consistency of the staff too. I think you have teachers, for the most part, who want to be here, not that we're dumped here and have kind of chosen this and I think it's really about the people, you know, that work here. (Marie, teacher, Roscoe High School)

I don't know how you measure the magic in continuation. It's just the staff...and the people here. It's the kids. It's the combination of that chemistry that happens when you put continuation staff with those kids and [the magic] happens. (Colleen, counselor, Nyrat High School)

Summary

This chapter presented the two overarching themes and four specific findings related to the study's research question. Findings were organized by presenting the two overarching themes and then addressing the specific findings related to the research question. Data from key informant interviews, focus groups, and follow up interviews provided insight into study participants perceptions of what made their respective continuation high schools successful. Extensive samples of quotations from study participants are included by the researcher to build confidence of readers by accurately representing the reality of the schools studied.

The first overarching theme revealed in this study is that personalization dominates all facets of the operational and instructional programs at the schools participating in this study. This theme revealed itself as the participants discussed their

perceptions of the structures that their schools have in place to support student learning and achievement. In discussing what they believed made their schools successful, participants consistently brought discussions back to meeting the needs of individual students and getting to know those students as critical in providing the foundation to do their work. Participants believed that knowing students' individual stories contributed to their ability to accommodate students' needs. Knowledge of students' stories, in turn, informed instruction, scheduling, and support services provided to students.

The second, overarching theme revealed in this study relates to school culture. Individually and collectively, the schools in this study presented strong school cultures characterized by a clear and consistent mission, a positive and safe school climate, and a culture of advocacy for their students. The primary mission of these schools is for every student to complete his or her high school diploma with the academic and social skills required to be successful in the workforce or in college. The mission of the schools is supported by a culture of high academic and behavioral expectations for students, which, in turn, are supported by clearly articulated and consistently enforced boundaries. All three schools have both formal and informal processes in place to communicate the school's academic and behavioral expectations to students. At all three schools, the standard of high expectations also extends to staff. Staff members hold themselves and others accountable to a high level of professional performance that extends beyond classroom instruction to include maintaining a positive and engaging school climate for students. All three schools describe their school climate as positive and supportive of student's academic and emotional needs. Staff believe that a positive and safe school

climate is essential if the school is to be successful in engaging students. Study participants at all three schools perceive that there is a negative perception of continuation high school students and continuation high schools among the public as well as among parents in the community. In combating the negative public perception of continuation students and continuation schools, the belief system in all three schools supports a culture of advocacy. Improving the public perception of their schools and ensuring that their schools would be protected from budget cuts was a significant motivator for schools to seek California Model Continuation High School honors as well as to continue to receive full term WASC accreditation.

The first key finding related to the research question is that the operational structures at each school vary; however, all three schools perceive that they have a high level of district and community support, principal leadership that supports distributed leadership and collaboration, multiple pathways for students to complete graduation requirements, and class size norms below 25. All three schools perceived a high level of district support from their respective district offices and believed that they received that support because they were operating quality programs and students were being successful. In addition to district support, all of the schools have well-established partnerships with community organizations to support their instructional programs and provide support for their students. These partnerships primarily support social-emotional and behavioral needs of students and families. Each of the three principals embraces a collaborative leadership approach and values distributed leadership, and they have incorporated systems that promote and support positive professional communication. There is a perception among all staff that these processes and protocols support

personalization and allow students to be more successful. Although the instructional day varies at each site, all three schools offer students multiple pathways for completing their course requirements. Complementing the multiple pathways approach, all three schools offer considerable flexibility in the student scheduling process to accommodate students' individual needs. Class sizes vary by school and by subjects within the schools, but all three schools maintain average class sizes at 25 or lower. Study participants regularly credited smaller class size for their ability to provide students' with more personalized attention to support their academic and behavioral needs.

The second key finding of this study related to the research question is that the culture of all three schools emphasizes differentiation of instruction based upon individual student needs and focuses on academic as well as personal growth. The instructional program at all schools is grounded in standards-based instruction and focused on the Content Standards adopted by the California State Board of Education. All schools reported that the content and rigor of their instructional programs aligned with the curricula at the comprehensive high schools in their respective districts. The culture of all three schools emphasizes differentiation of instruction based upon individual student needs and focuses on academic as well as personal growth. All three schools have established protocols for teachers to follow in outlining and delivering instruction. The pacing of instruction varies at each school but generally aligns to the semester or trimester model adopted at the school. There is an expectation that students will finish a course in the prescribed semester or trimester, but students who are capable and motivated may finish classes in less time. Conversely, students who struggle with the

curriculum or productivity requirements may require additional time to complete a course. The systems at each school have been designed to support these variations. All of the schools are using a variety of instructional approaches. The most common approaches include direct instruction, small group instruction, and students working independently with assistance from a teacher and/or instructional aide. All three schools employ a competency-based approach to assess mastery. Students must complete assignments to a certain level of proficiency in order to earn credit. If students do not initially demonstrate proficiency, they are given multiple opportunities to improve their performance. In addition to differentiated instruction in the classroom, each school has intervention supports in place to provide additional assistance for struggling students. All three schools have adopted formal and informal strategies for teaching not only basic academic skills, but also study skills, conflict and stress management skills, coping skills, and goal setting. There is a perception among study participants that this work is vital to the success of students, and that if attention is not given to addressing these needs among students, then their chances of successfully completing high school are significantly reduced.

The third key finding of this study related to the research question is that the staff at all three schools articulate a commitment to never giving up on students and they prioritize student engagement through positive adult and peer relationships. Staff at these schools internalize a responsibility to retain students at their schools and to do whatever it takes to ensure that the students are successful. There is a genuine concern for students by staff. Staff perceive that students come to continuation schools emotionally damaged in some way, and it is incumbent upon the staff at the school to build students back up -

to "fix" them. Student engagement is a priority at all three schools. Each school has developed formal and informal structures that provide students with opportunities to actively participate and become acculturated to the norms of their respective schools. Each school emphasizes positive relationships with adults and emphasizes respectful treatment within the school community. There is a common perception among study participants that if students are able to form a positive relationship with at least one staff member, certificated or classified, then their chances of being successful are improved. Positive student-staff relationships are supported by a commitment to respectful treatment. Even when students are struggling, staff members make a conscious effort to model appropriate interactive behavior with their students. Staff also takes into consideration that outside influences may be impacting students' attitudes or behaviors.

The fourth key finding of this study related to the research question is that the affective qualities of staff members, both classified and certificated, are perceived to be more important to the students' and schools' success than the quantity of staff members on site. Staffing structures in terms of classified and certificated positions were similar with each school perceiving that they had adequate numbers of administrators, teachers, and classified staff to maintain a quality program. The single commonality in staffing structure among all three schools was a commitment from their respective districts to employ enough teachers to keep class sizes below 25 students. Throughout the presentation of findings, participants noted that small class size supported their school's goals related to personalization and differentiation of instruction. At all three schools, study participants perceived that successful continuation high school teachers had to

possess a willingness to engage with students and an understanding that, while there is a focus on academics, academics are not always the priority when interacting with students in the classroom. Empathy, patience, flexibility, consistency in words and actions, and a commitment to do whatever is necessary to support student learning and achievement were identified by study participants to be characteristics that successful continuation high school educators possessed.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This study sought to inform policy and practice in continuation education. In addition, it was the intent of this researcher to contribute to the knowledge base regarding alternative school quality as it relates to supporting the academic, social, and behavioral needs of a highly diverse at-risk student population. This study explored a sample of successful continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California, as measured by multiple, full-term accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. The researcher believes that a better understanding of these elements will allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts.

It was the goal of this research study to provide a holistic, descriptive overview of the behaviors, values, and practices that exist in three successful continuation high schools. Given the descriptive and open-ended nature of this research study, an ethnographic approach was best suited to address the research questions. This multiple case study included three continuation high schools in Los Angeles County, California. Participants in the study included a total of 20 certificated staff members from the three study schools: Three principals, two assistant principals, three guidance counselors, and 12 teachers.

Summary of the Study

This research used naturalistic inquiry to collect qualitative data by conducting an in-depth interview with the principal at each site, a focus group meeting comprised of certificated staff at each site, and follow-up interviews with select focus group participants at each site. The data were coded using open coding, analyzed, and organized first by research question and then by categories and subcategories guided by the conceptual framework, as depicted in Chapter 2. The study was based on one overarching research question: How do the services at California continuation high schools that have received multiple 6-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) support student learning and achievement? More specifically, (a) How does the structure of the school support student learning and achievement? (b) How do the academic practices of the school support student learning and achievement? (c) How do the social emotional practices of the school build students' resilience and support student learning and achievement? (d) How does the staffing of the school support student learning and achievement?

The research question was largely satisfied by the findings presented in chapter 4. Two overriding themes emerged in addition to the four findings related to the research question. These two themes of personalization and positive school culture permeated the findings related to operational structures, academic practices, social emotional practices, and staffing at each of the study schools.

This chapter analyzes and discusses the findings, identifies implications for policy and practice, and makes recommendations for future research. The chapter is organized by the following analytic categories:

1. Philosophy Informing Structure
 - a. Structures
 - b. Instructional Practices
 - c. Social Emotional Practices
 - d. Staffing
2. Effective Schools Correlates
 - a. Clear School Mission
 - b. High Expectations for Success
 - c. Leadership
 - d. Opportunities to Learn and Time on Task
 - e. A Safe and Orderly Environment
 - f. Positive Home-School Relations
 - g. Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress
3. Resilience
 - a. Individual Protective Factors
 - i. Social Competence
 - ii. Problem Solving Skills
 - iii. Autonomy
 - iv. Sense of Purpose
 - b. Environmental Protective Factors
 - i. Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation
 - ii. Set and Communicate High Expectations
 - iii. Provide Genuine Care and Support for Students

- iv. Increase Positive Connections
- v. Set Clear Boundaries and Expectations
- vi. Teach Life Skills

These analytic categories are directly aligned with the study's research question and were also used to code and organize the data and present the findings in Chapter 4. In supporting the descriptive nature of this study, the analysis focuses on providing an expository narrative within each analytic area of the structures and practices in place at the schools that participated in this study. The analysis also incorporates the relevant theory and research presented in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 4, the findings of this study were presented by organizing data from focus groups, interviews, and document reviews into themes and categories to produce a coherent narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and interpret these findings. The discussion takes into consideration the conceptual framework of this study and addresses the findings in the context of the relevant literature related to alternative schools, effective schools, and resilience. The implications of these findings are intended to provide additional insight into identifying and understanding the structures and practices that are in place at successful continuation high schools. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research to identify topics that may need closer examination and further study.

Discussion

Philosophy

Diedre Kelly (1993) presented a typology that identified continuation high schools as either safety valve or safety net schools. In this typology, safety valve schools

provide "a mechanism to rid mainstream schools of failures and misfits without holding school administrators fully accountable for the consequences" (Kelly, 1993, p. 68). In contrast, safety net schools provide a student-centered program that is designed to meet the intellectual or social needs of those students that the mainstream schools cannot or will not help (Kelly, 1993).

Jorge Ruiz de Velasco (2008), built upon Kelly's work to propose a typology of continuation high schools in California that includes three philosophical paradigms: Fix the school to adapt to students, fix the student to adapt to school, and dumping ground. Schools that operate under a fix the school paradigm are closely aligned with what Kelly (1993) describes as safety net schools. According to Ruiz de Velasco (2008), the underlying philosophical assumption at this type of school is that the students coming to alternative schools were not well served by traditional schools. As a result, administrators and staff at this type of school work in students' best interest to individualize instruction and services and demonstrate a willingness to adapt the school and/or instructional environment to meet the unique needs of each student (McLaughlin et al., 2008).

Schools in this study appear to operate in accordance with a safety net/fix the school typology. These schools are characterized by a strong school culture that prioritizes personalization in the structure of the school, its instructional and social emotional practices, and its staffing practices.

Structures.

The operating structures at each of these schools in terms of schedule and operating procedures vary significantly. For example, Nyrat High School has adopted a

daily schedule that involves a double session in which students in one session are not permitted to take classes in the other session. Crawford High School also operates a double session, but students who have met performance and behavioral benchmarks are permitted to take classes in both sessions. Finally, Roscoe High school operates under a single, more traditional daily schedule that is comparable to the instructional day at a traditional high school. Although the structure of each school's daily schedule is operationally unique, the scheduling practices at each school are flexible and tailored to meet the individual needs of students. Matteo, a principal, articulates that perspective clearly:

One of the strengths of this school is the flexibility....If we can work with the student and the student is showing progression, you know, and is doing what they're supposed to be doing in their classes, we try to be as flexible as we can to help them with our schedule (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Staff at these schools demonstrate a willingness to not only modify the instructional day to address individual students' circumstances, but also frequently make adjustments to student schedules based upon how productive a student is in a particular class or the nature of the student's relationship with a particular teacher. Rosemary, a classroom teacher, explains that, at her school

for the most part there's two teachers for...just about everything So if a kid and I butt heads, he's not stuck with me. It depends with the kid which [teacher they get]. Some kids you just don't mesh with, and...there are other options. I think that's a key component (personal communication, March 4, 2011).

Colleen, a counselor at the same school, provides insight into what her school does with students who are not making progress in a particular class: "There are times if a kid sits in a class too long [without making progress], I'll just pull them out and put them someplace else and see if [that works for the student] (personal communication, March 4, 2011).

Ultimately, it appears that flexibility with the structures of the school based upon the needs of individual students is a characteristic of these schools rather than the actual structure of the school.

One structural characteristic common to all three schools in this study is a commitment to class sizes below 25. In most classes, the class size was below 20. In some cases, the class sizes are even smaller. At Roscoe High School, Franciso reported, "We have classes that will go from 8 up to 22. It just varies from period to period, teacher to teacher (personal communication, January 11, 2011). Staff perceive smaller school and class sizes as very important in maintaining the high level of personalization and individualized attention for students. A focus group participant at Crawford High School believes "the small size classes doesn't allow [the students] to hide in a sense. You know, you have 15 kids per class" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Cathy, the principal at Nyrat High School appreciates that her district supports a staffing model that allows for smaller class size. She stated: "The district does recognize that it's an equity issue and that the smaller class size and that funding these kids is really critical to our success as a district (personal communication, January 25, 2011). Licet, a teacher at Nyrat, believes that the smaller class size compensates somewhat for the shortened instructional day in their double-session model.

I think it's numbers more than time, because you've got fewer students. In average classes, I've got up to 25 usually. But I think because the class size is smaller, you have more opportunities to sit and talk [with students] and ask questions. (personal communication, March 4, 2011)

Instructional Practices.

The instructional practices at each school also appear to be strongly influenced by an emphasis on personalization. Instructional pedagogy is influenced by the teachers' perceptions of what will meet individual students' needs best. A focus group participant at Nyrat High School believes that

At any good time in the classroom, we're doing 2-3 different types of instruction. Whether we're sharing a concept on board, a lot of people are doing some group work or something and lots of people are working visually, and we kind of rotate between them (personal communication, January 25, 2011).

At Roscoe High School, a focus group participant explains a similar approach at their school:

Although there's group discussion and lecture, we also work towards the need of the individual too. Some might be a little slower than others and we work to help that person along in our own way. Some are a little faster than others. They get it much more quickly and we adapt to that also. (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

The instructional programs at these schools are characterized by a commitment to differentiated instruction and are predicated on a perception that their students may lack the academic and organizational skills required to be successful students. Rosemary articulated this clearly when she stated that "the majority of our students don't have those skills to work independently, to comprehend the material, and produce a decent product independently" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). This perception is supported by Quinn et al. (2006) who observed that many students enter alternative education programs with little confidence in their abilities to be successful students. While this perception could be interpreted to echo what Muñoz (2004) identified as a culture of remediation in which low expectations for both students' abilities and expected

learning results fall short of adopted standards, in the case of these schools, that perception fuels a commitment to differentiated instruction and a commitment by teachers to do whatever it takes for students to meet standards. Nicole, a teacher stated:

The only students who don't finish my classes are the ones who don't show up or don't try at all. But if you're here and you're listening and you're willing to do it, I guarantee you you're going to earn your credit. They don't get out of it for free. They have to earn 70%, at least, on everything, but...if you don't get 70% you have to re-do it. I'm here for you to help re-teach you. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

Flexibility in scheduling and continuous enrollment influence the instructional program because there is a constant cycle of students entering and exiting classes throughout the school year. All three schools have developed instructional systems to compensate for continuous enrollment to ensure that all students are engaged. At Crawford High School, Ben states that they've "learned to manage it, and we've learned to make each part meaningful for the students regardless of what level they are" (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Social Emotional Practices.

Historically, alternative schools, and in particular continuation schools in California, focused on students' social and behavioral development (Johnson, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco et al, 2008; Sagor, 1999). A focus group participant at Nyrat High School echoed the perceptions of several other study participants when she stated: "[Our students] don't have those social skills that are built in for kids at other schools, and they are experienced at failing" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). This perception leads staff members at these schools to incorporate social skills instruction within the regular instructional program to build students' capacities to be successful in school and

in the community. Many staff members assume an almost parental role with students in this pursuit. Rosemary, a teacher at Nyrat High School shared: "They're my babies. I'd go to bat for them in a heartbeat. Especially the ones you get to know. They're like my kids....I'm yelling at them for getting hickies, because someone's probably not yelling at them for getting hickies" (personal communication, March 4, 2011). Francisco believes that his school's approach with students is "a little bit of tough love with caring....They know that sometimes we're very firm, and under some circumstances they may think that we're mean. But deep down inside they come to realize that we do it because we care" (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

Students in alternative education programs generally have a higher number of risk factors present in their lives as compared to student in traditional education settings (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Quinn et al. 2006; Sagor, 1999). In summarizing the findings of The Phi Delta Kappan Study of Students at Risk, the largest longitudinal study of this population ever conducted, Frymier & Gansneder (1989) reported that educators accepted responsibility for addressing at-risk students' learning and higher-order thinking skills, but felt that addressing attendance, attitude, homework completion, and general behavior issues presented by at-risk students was the responsibility of the students themselves and their parents. Those findings are not supported by the findings of this study. The staff at these schools believe absolutely that it is their responsibility to address the entire spectrum of risk factors. The staff at these schools have a keen awareness of students' risk factors, and great attention is given to getting to know students' individual stories in an effort to serve them better. Cathy, the principal of Nyrat High school believes:

When kids aren't coming to school, there's usually a reason, and it's often drug, alcohol related or they don't have enough money to get to school. There's social issues, so it's really imperative to deal with those issues and to face them" (personal communication, January 25, 2011).

Licet believes that continuation high school teachers, in general, are more focused on students' personal circumstances and the impact those circumstances have on students' ability to focus and be productive at school.

I think continuation school teachers are more aware of what these kids have actually been through. It's very difficult to convince a kid to read...this wonderful piece of literature when his parent is ODing or just got arrested last night. So it's very difficult to instill value of an education when there's so much chaos going on in their lives.

Matteo, the principal of Crawford High School acknowledges that students have challenging circumstances that may impact their commitment to school, and he and his staff work with students to develop the skills they need to be able to communicate that effectively to staff.

If they're not ready to learn, we expect them to let us know why. It could be that they've had a bad night, a bad week, they're hungry, they're cold, or they're having, you know, any type of psychological issues. We expect them to communicate with us, why they're not ready to learn (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Frymier and Gansneder (1989) noted that how young people cope with failure and factors that put them at risk is critically important in their success. Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard (2001) assert that "the interaction between child or adolescent and caregiver, in the context of a supportive society, is what primarily provides for learning, development, and ultimately resilience" (p.17). Of particular importance is that the caregiver need not be a parent, guardian, or primary caregiver (Benard, 2004; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Brown, et al., 2001; Henderson, 2007a; Henderson & Milstein, 1996;

Thomsen, 2002 Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001). Staff, certificated and classified, make a conscious effort to develop meaningful, supportive relationships with students. The principal of Crawford High school explains how engaging students is the responsibility of all staff:

Having safeguards for them is making the teachers aware that they have the right curriculum for them, where they're going to feel successful...We have to make sure that our aides are always trying to make connections with our students, you know. That all the classified staff are always making connections with those students. So even though the student doesn't feel like they're being successful... the students that aren't being successful right away, that they have somebody or someone to go to where they feel welcome, that there's somebody there for them. (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

There is a preponderance of evidence in the literature to indicate that students in alternative schools appreciate the high level of personalization, small class size, individualized academic attention, and personalized relationships with school staff (De La Osa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Quinn, et al., 2006). A focus group participant at Nyrat High School stated: "We kind of pride ourselves in just getting to know our students and caring about them. We look at them like they're ours. And we're here for them" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School believes, "It's the personal - it's the connections with the kids...I would think most of the kids have at least one person that they have a connection with, they feel they can go to if they need support" (personal communication, March 23, 2011). Staff interactions with students are characterized by a high level of respect, patience, and understanding of individual circumstances. Bill, a teacher at Nyrat, asserts:

We treat them like adults, and we give them the respect that they need, and therefore they respond. These kids...will do anything she tells them to do, or me, or any of us. Because we get that respect. Not because we demand it, [but,]

because we've earned it, and we give it in return. (personal communication, March 4, 2011).

Staffing.

The three schools in this study have similar but not identical staffing structures for classified and certificated staff. Each school has school safety personnel, clerical support staff, instructional aides, counselors, at least one on-site administrator, and enough teaching staff to maintain a 25:1 or smaller class size. All three schools indicated that the affective qualities of staff members, both classified and certificated, are more important to the students' and schools' success than the quantity of staff members on site. This philosophy aligns with Werner's (2007) assertion that it is not the structure, programs, or material resources within schools, but the belief system of the people within those schools who hold the potential to build students' resilience. Further, in a school setting, educators' attitudes towards children determine whether or not students' natural resilience will be nurtured and grow (Thompson, 2002). Ben, a counselor at Crawford High School believes that for staff members to be successful at his school:

The biggest factors are being empathetic towards the kids and knowing where the kids come from and where they've been to try to understand what's happening in the kid's lives. We all know that kids come with a bag of stuff when they come to school and before we get to, you know, the understanding of the subject matter, we have to find out what's happening with those kids. (personal communication, February 24, 2011).

Rosemary, a teacher, reveals, "We do make substantial sacrifices...Time-wise, emotionally. I mean I think that the emotional connection and contribution we make to these kids or with these kids is immense. Nothing like I've ever felt before. I found my niche" (personal communication, March 4, 2011).

Effective Schools Correlates

Effective schools are ones in which all students, regardless of risk factors, meet prescribed academic standards and expectations (Brookover et al., 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003). Lezotte (1991) identified seven common correlates of effective schools which include: Clear school mission, high expectations for success, instructional leadership, opportunity to learn and time on task, safe and orderly environment, positive home-school relations, and frequent monitoring of student progress. In this analytic category, key findings are analyzed to understand how the structures and practices of the successful continuation high schools in this study align with Lezotte's (1991) effective schools correlates.

Clear School Mission.

Senge (2006) asserts that shared vision binds people together and provides direction for achieving common goals. Collectively, the articulated primary mission of these schools is for every student to complete his or her high school diploma with the academic and social skills required to be successful in the workforce or in college. A focus group participant at Crawford High Schools believes her school's mission is "to get kids who were unable to succeed in the traditional high school to be successful, earn their diploma and become productive people out in the community" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). A focus group participant at Nyrat High School stated, "We believe that when they come into our classroom, that they will get their education. They will get their diploma. And they will move on" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). Deb, a teacher at Roscoe High School said, "I think we take the at-risk student and try to

remove some of those barriers so that they'll be successful both in high school and after high school" (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

This mission is largely influenced by an underlying belief that, inherent in the mission, it is necessary to reconnect students with school, build their academic confidence, and help them manage their personal risk factors. Cathy, the principal of Nyrat High School believes:

You know, what we have to do here is reconnect students who have become disengaged with the system. Either through tardies or failures or whatever. And we have to - in order to help them graduate, we have to reconnect them. That's our main job. Teaching math or history comes secondary to reconnecting them.

The principal at Crawford High School believes that is achieved by engaging students:

On a day-to-day basis our school's mission is to make kids feel engaged. We want to make kids feel engaged from the moment they walk on....So when we get a new student, whether it's a student from our comprehensive high school or a student that is coming from another school district that just moved into the city, we want to engage them and send a message to them right away. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

One of the focus group participants at Roscoe High School stated:

I think as a teacher, my general mission regardless of the English and literacy I teach is to...try to empower them to like and to want to learn again. You know, to want to acquire some education and to begin and complete tasks, assignments, and classes, and to keep that momentum going until they go all the way to get their diploma. (personal communication, January 11, 2011)

High Expectations for Success.

In effective schools, academic performance is highly prized and there is a belief among all stakeholders that all students can learn and achieve at high levels (Lezotte, 2001; Reeves, 2003). Students are presented with challenging curricula and relevant instructional tasks and considerable attention is given to students who are not meeting

standards to provide opportunities for improvement (Reeves, 2003). There is also a climate of high expectations for teachers and staff in which teacher excellence, collaboration, and mentoring are present (Brookover et al., Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

The three schools participating in this study value students' academic performance and believe that all students are capable of meeting the schools' expectations for academics as well as behavior. The expectations for student achievement align with the articulated mission of the schools. It is important to note that mission of these schools is for students to graduate from high school. This mission is decidedly different than that of most traditional high schools where academic expectations are aligned with meeting four-year college entrance requirements, advanced placement classes, and test scores. In some ways, it could be perceived that the level of expectation for continuation high school students is lower than that of traditional high school students. To some degree that is true. However, there is a shared belief among this study's participants that all of the students they serve are capable of earning their high school diplomas. A focus group participant at Nyrat High School stated:

We also believe all students can succeed. We really believe that. And that drives a lot of what we do....If they want to go to college, we believe that they can succeed. We believe that when they come into our classroom, that they will get their education. They will get their diploma. And they will move on. I think every single one of us believes that. And so that drives us too and that gives us that hope and that motivation. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

All of the schools report that they follow a standards-based curricular approach that is commensurate with the instructional program at the traditional high schools in their

respective districts. A focus group participant at Nyrat High School reflected on her school's instructional program:

Well, the core class, I mean, there's an emphasis on the main standards based. We use district texts and are aware of district pacing calendars and that sort of thing. We adapt things to our students' needs. But for the most part, we're trying to hold them to the similar standard. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

At all three schools, the curriculum is monitored through a competency-based approach with all students having to demonstrate at least 70% in order to receive credit. Crawford High School organizes their courses into outlines with standards-based assessments linked to each unit of instruction: "Each outline has assessment for each unit. There has to be some type of assessment" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). Alejandra, a counselor at Crawford High School provides further clarification on the course outlines:

And the outline's the foundation. They have to complete everything on the outline so that...so if they come in three weeks late...they just jump into that and they filter them through to the next portion to finish everything on the course outline. It varies class to class, but every class has an outline that is required for everything to be completed to get their credits. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

There is a high level of professional accountability among the staff at these schools. At Nyrat High School, the principal has high expectations for her staff: "I don't think you can be a professional learning community if everyone's not working at a pretty high level, and I think it's important to be collaborative" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). She went on to say:

There's no time to fool around. There's no time not to have the kids working from bell to bell. It's one of those things where the kids get here, they're in the classroom and teachers have to, you know, move quickly, keep kids engaged, give them homework and, you know, move them on. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

At Crawford High School, the teachers use observational teams comprised of teachers, counselors, and administrators to conduct classroom visits and provide teachers with feedback related to instruction and classroom climate. Alejandra, a counselor explains the intent of the observation groups: "It's so [the teachers] can get ideas from other teachers within their department and so forth, because sometimes they don't get to get outside of their classroom, you know, to see what's going on" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). A focus group participant at Nyrat indicated:

There's a lot of collegiality in terms of the teachers sharing ideas at our staff meetings. There are always instructional practices that we're looking at. Our staff meetings always revolve around some practice that teachers can take back to their classroom. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Leadership.

All three schools have strong, well-respected principal leaders. At each school site, the researcher interviewed the principal via a key informant interview. In all three cases, the principal's philosophical views were echoed by their staff in focus group meetings and follow up interviews. There appears to be a common language around the work of the school. As an example, in a quote used earlier in this chapter regarding student engagement, the principal of Crawford High School stated:

On a day-to-day basis our school's mission is to make kids feel engaged. We want to make kids feel engaged from the moment they walk on....So when we get a new student, whether it's a student from our comprehensive high school or a student that is coming from another school district that just moved into the city, we want to engage them and send a message to them right away. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

In a focus group meeting, one of his staff members repeated that sentiment:

Yeah, but what happens I think is just the engagement of the kids on a personal level is, I think, is knowing the kids by name, number one and I think that automatically the kids are like shocked when you know their name after the third or fourth day.

Although there is clearly strong principal leadership at each site, the general leadership style is more closely characterized by collaborative and distributed leadership practices that engage both certificated and classified staff in leadership roles. Evans (1996) notes that organizations that draw on the knowledge of their staff to make more informed choices enjoy higher levels of productivity and morale due to people's increased sense of control and accountability. Steve, assistant principal at Roscoe High School, describes a history of collaborative leadership at his site:

The leadership has allowed the teachers to be more involved in deciding what kind of direction this school goes into. It's been a group process and the leaders, the principals that we've had the past 10 to 15 years, have been guiding us towards what they believe. But [they have] also allowed for the teachers to have a lot of input in going in those directions. It has become a team effort and that's why you have such a high amount of teachers that have been here for quite a while.

At Crawford High School, the principal wants to engage all school staff in leadership roles:

Everybody here is a leader. Everybody understands what's going on, you know, from the counselors to the teachers to the classified. So I guess to answer your question is, our leadership structure here is we want everybody to be leaders. (personal communication, February 25, 2011)

The principal at Nyrat High School shares a similar view of leadership, and understands that, in her role as principal, the ultimate decision-making responsibility rests with her.

I would like to think that we're a partnership. I would like to think that we're collaborative. I would like to think that it's a professional learning community. I think we are, but there are times...where the buck stops here, and I'm it. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Opportunity to Learn and Time on Task.

Effective schools maximize instructional time and ensure that students are actively engaged in learning (Brookover et al., 1982; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003). At all three schools, the minimum instructional day is shorter than that of a traditional high school. To compensate for a shorter instructional day, Cathy, the principal of Nyrat High School believes that instructional staff must "leverage instruction to the max" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). One of her teachers expresses a similar sense of urgency: "In my instruction, I'm trying to meet as many standards in a very short period of time to expose these kids to the necessary standards and materials" (personal communication, March 4, 2011).

In effective schools, students who are not performing at proficient levels are provided with multiple opportunities to improve performance (Brookover et al., 1982; Lezotte, n.d.; Reeves, 2003; Zmuda, et al., 2004.) As mentioned previously, all three schools incorporate a competency-based approach. In this system, students must complete coursework to a minimum of 70% proficiency. If students complete assignments below that rate, the assignments are returned to the student and he/she is given additional time and opportunities to complete the assignments. Complementing the competency-based approach, each school has flexible structures in place so that students are allowed the time that is necessary to demonstrate competency. In addition to traditional tutoring opportunities before and after school, all of the schools allow flexibility in student scheduling to allow students to remain in classes until they complete the course requirements. None of the schools issue failing grades on the report card. Rather, if students haven't completed course requirements at the end of the

semester/trimester, the student is generally permitted to continue in the course into the next semester/trimester to finish.

A Safe and Orderly Environment.

Maintaining a safe and positive school climate is directly linked to student academic performance and fewer student behavioral and emotional problems (Freibert, 1999; Good & Weinstein, 1986). All three schools have at least one, full-time campus security position, and they report that there are very few security issues on their campuses. At all three schools, study participants perceive that the school is very safe.

Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School reports that her campus is

Very safe...Ninety-five percent of the time somebody's watching. Somebody always knows what's going on, and a lot of us will stand out at our doors between classes so we can see what's happening....The kids know it too. They'll say like you just - you can't get away with anything here cause somebody always knows what you're doing. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

Positive Home-School Relations.

Lezotte (n.d.) argues that in effective schools, the relationship between parents and the school must be an authentic partnership between the school and home. All three schools provide opportunities to engage and involve parents on a regular basis at the school; however, there is a perception among participants that parent participation levels are low. All three schools have implemented intake processes that require parents to participate in an orientation at the school prior to enrolling their child. Lori, a counselor at Nyrat High School who is responsible for the intake process says, "We work really, really hard on engaging the parents. But it is hard. It's hard to get them here" (personal communication, March 4, 2011). Regardless of the low level of parent participation, there is a perception among participants that, overall, parents have a positive perception

of the school. "Our parents are very supportive of what we do, because they come in and they get a good feel for the school environment. They're supportive of what we do. But our engagement, our long term engagement is tough" (Matteo, personal communication, February 24, 2011). Marie, a teacher at Roscoe High School, understands that some parents may be wary of communicating with the school and tries to build parent engagement through positive home communication.

Most parents have been through so much with their sons or daughters by this point. They're pretty fatigued, and it's really hard to make a connection. I think the only way to do it from a teacher's point of view is through a positive - something positive and constructive their son or daughter has done. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

Frequent Monitoring of Student Progress.

Reeves (2001) encourages educational leaders to focus on the classroom as the "primary location for effective assessment" (p. 5). Teachers must use formative and summative assessment data to monitor student progress and modify instructional practice as needed (Ward & Murray-Ward, 1999). At Nyrat High School, focus group participants indicated that formative assessment is ongoing on a daily basis in their classrooms: "We are always kind of checking our students' understanding. Like we're throwing out examples on the board, rubrics up on the board. We're showing them examples - I mean it's a consistent process (personal communication, January 25, 2011). A colleague clarified further: "Well, I think we do all these multiple measures in our classroom...A lot of it is informal with formative assessment because we just have smaller classes, which affords us the time to do this" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). This approach to progress monitoring is consistent with Ward & Murray-Ward's (1999) recommendations that formative assessments should be ongoing through a

unit of instruction to both monitor classroom instruction as well as gauge students' progress in mastering standards.

There does not appear to be consistent summative assessment programs at any of the three schools. Roscoe High School does require students to pass a district benchmark exam in order to earn credit for Algebra, but there are no similar requirements in other courses.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as one's ability to overcome adversity (Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Thomsen, 2002; Topf, Frazier-Maiwald, & Krovetz, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001). In a school setting, educators' attitudes towards children determine whether or not students' natural resilience will be nurtured and grow (Thompson, 2002). Resilient people draw on *protective factors* to overcome adversity (Benard, 2004; Benard, 2007; Brendtro & Larson, 2006; Henderson & Milstein, 1996; Thomsen, 2002; Werner and Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 2001). Henderson (2007) defines protective factors as the internal and external supports and opportunities that are available to at-risk youth that buffer the effects of risk factors and allow for positive growth. Resiliency literature indicates that a positive school environment promotes resilience in at-risk populations (Benard, 2004; Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard, 2001; Wolin, 2004). Synthesizing findings in resiliency research, Henderson & Milstein (1996) identified the essential environmental protective factors that schools must provide for students to build resilience and mitigate students' pre-existing risk factors. Opportunities to build students' resilience include providing opportunities for meaningful participation, setting and communicating high expectations for student behavior and achievement, and providing genuine care and

support for students (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Mitigating risk factors includes creating opportunities for increasing the positive connections between students and their peers as well as between students and adults in the school environment (prosocial bonding), establishing and communicating clear boundaries and expectations for student behavior and achievement, and explicit instruction for students related to decision-making, stress management, conflict resolution, and problem-solving (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). In addition to environmental protective factors, there are four areas of individual protective factors that can be developed in individual students by school personnel. These areas include social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and sense of purpose.

In this analytic category, key findings are analyzed to understand how the structures and practices of the successful continuation high schools in this study support students' development of individual protective factors as well as how well they align with Henderson & Milstein's (1996) essential environmental protective factors for schools. Overall, all three schools have established a school culture that supports students' development of individual protective factors while also providing all of the environmental protective factors identified previously. None of participants in this study indicated that building students' resilience was a priority, nor did any of the participants indicate that they were familiar with resilience research. The inclusion of individual and environmental protective factors within the school culture appears to have developed organically and instinctively and is closely tied to the school staffs' commitment to personalization.

Individual Protective Factors.

Social Competence

Social competence is defined as the ability to form and maintain positive relationships and includes empathy and caring, service to others, and humor (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Participants in this study routinely model appropriate social competence with students and expect students to demonstrate social competence with school staff as well as peers. Bill, a teacher at Nyrat explains the importance of modeling appropriate interpersonal skills: "Because we work so hard to be civil to them, they work pretty hard to be civil back. We are modeling something that we're trying to get them to emulate (personal communication, March 4, 2011). Anne, another teacher at Nyrat, shared an example of how she interacted with a noncompliant student to articulate a commonly used approach with students to model social competence:

Like today I had to get on this one's kid case because he was on the computer. It was like "Juan, get off the computer and get some work done." And he's like, "Hang on, hang on." And it's like, "Juan, I did say now." And I'm mad because he's still on the computer. So I'm walking over to the desk to get the time-out slip, because I'm irritated....But at the same time, I know Juan, and I've never had a problem with him before. So by the time I walk u to him with the time-out slip, that I haven't yet filled out, he's off the computer, and I'm remembering that I've never had any problems with him before. But still, I kneel down, because that's - it's also a body language thing. So now I'm kneeling down, he's sitting down, so I'm lower than he is. I'm going, "Dude, don't do that to me. You made me look really bad. You know, if I ask you to get off the computer, you got to do it right away, not take your sweet time. It's really disrespectful." And he's, "I'm sorry." So I gave him an opportunity to back down because I could have sent him out, but that ratchets things up. He still needed to be talked to. But they've had some really crummy things happen to them, and they've had people be very threatening and abusive to them. So the last thing we need is to have anything that resembles anything like that from their teachers. So no matter how tough they might appear, they just melt if you really - are kind to them. (personal communication, March 4, 2011)

This type of interaction with students was common among participants in this study. In all three schools, it is part of the culture of the school to model social competence and teach students how to build and maintain positive relationships.

Problem Solving Skills

Problem solving skills include good decision-making skills, flexibility, creativity, a love of learning, and competence to resolve challenges (Henderson & Milstein, 1996).

A focus group participant at Nyrat High School expressed an underlying perception held by several study participants that their students

don't have those social skills that are built in for kids at other schools, and they are experienced at failing, and nobody's ever told them "if you do A, B will occur." And furthermore, I don't know how many people have told them, "Let's do this instead." (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Staff members at these schools internalize a responsibility to develop these skills in their students. A focus group participant at Roscoe High school believes that one of her primary responsibilities is to empower students "to be better decision makers. Getting that knowledge and that self discipline. To make sure that they are able to transition from k-12 into the adult life as responsible and as prepared as possible" (personal communication, January 11, 2011).

Autonomy

Autonomy is defined as developing an internal locus of control, being self-motivated and independent, and having the ability to be persistent in order to meet your responsibilities and goals (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). A focus group participant at Roscoe High School stated:

We want them to be accountable...because it carries over to getting their jobs and also to going to a school to advance themselves after high school and things like

that. Accountability is a huge thing for them to understand and start working on. (personal communication, January 11, 2011)

By holding students accountable and providing support for them to be successful, these schools build students' confidence in themselves and in their ability to be successful students. Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School wants to instill a sense of autonomy in her students before they leave her classroom.

I [want them to know] when they leave here [that] they know that they have the tools to figure out how to take care of what they need to achieve. It's kind of hard for me to put into words - that as long as they pay attention to what they're expected to finish and they don't leave it to somebody else to figure out, that they're taking responsibility for themselves and they know that they're able to do that without our help because they learned how to do it here (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

Focusing on students' successes builds their confidence and motivation to continue to do well. Matteo, the principal of Crawford High school observes that "the closer they get [to their goals], they're willing to...do anything...and show up anytime. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

Sense of Purpose

Developing a sense of purpose increases an individual's sense of self-worth because one has a positive outlook on one's personal future (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). In building students' sense of purpose all three schools develop individualized learning plans. "That's the first thing we do is provide a plan for them and we give them hope right off bat" (Matteo, personal communication, February 24, 2011). At Nyrat High School the principal builds a sense of purpose for students by helping them to understand how critical their education will be in securing their future:

It's really important for our kids to see that their quality of life and how much they earn is really contingent upon the education that they have and I think that's

a really important thing. So, often our kids don't get that connection and I think we're really good at making that connection. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Rosemary, a teacher at Nyrat High school concedes that building students' confidence requires tremendous persistence and patience on the part of staff members.

Sometimes it takes a long time for our kids. It takes time for them to get there. To get over their past failures and to soak in the belief that we have in them. And, you know, sometimes it's a month before it's time to graduate, and you'll see the light go on. And you'll see them wanting to work, you know. They're finally motivated. And so we have to be patient. But I think that's what we're trying to do. (personal communication, March 4, 2011)

Environmental Protective Factors.

Provide Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

Opportunities for meaningful participation include participation in community organizations such as athletic teams, religious organizations, and social events (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). While athletic teams are an integral part of traditional high school experiences, they are not available to most continuation high school students. Each school has formal social events such as prom, grad night, and graduation. All three schools have active student leadership organizations that plan social events for students on campus. Most of these activities are planned during lunch and are designed to engage students with the school culture on a social level. At Crawford High School, focus group participants described some of their student activities:

We also have lunchtime...activities. [We do] lip syncing contests or watermelon eating contests or little obstacle courses around the school. We do barbecues for fundraising to help throughout the year – make money for the honor courses here, for prom. [Sometimes we]play music during lunch time, just to kind of lighten up the atmosphere. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

Often, student activities are planned by student organizations, such as Associated Student Body (ASB) or student council. By giving students the opportunity to plan and implement activities, it increases their connection to the school and builds the school culture around student-determined needs. The principal at Nyrat High School believes these opportunities are critical to student engagement:

I think giving kids who come to us wanting leadership opportunities and when they see that we listen to them and that we're open to their ideas and implementing them here, they get a real sense of ownership of the school (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Set and Communicate High Expectations

In building students' resilience, setting and communicating high expectations includes a belief among school staff that students can succeed academically, behaviorally, and socially (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Laura, a teacher at Crawford High School believes: "You have to be flexible, but still I think you have to have high expectations, you know, for the students (personal communication, February 24, 2011). At Nyrat High School, the principal stated: "You have to keep your expectations high, and you have to keep moving the bar up and forward. You have to have that commitment, which I think our staff does, to kids having better lives" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). A focus group participant at Roscoe High School shared his thoughts on his school's culture of high expectations:

It's not an oppressive culture. It's just these high expectations for everybody because it's so small. Everybody knows everybody. The staff knows just about every kid. And they can't do anything and get away with it. So it's constantly monitoring and being on top of the kids. But in a good way. (personal communication, January 11, 2011)

Provide Genuine Care and Support for Students

Providing care and support for students is supported by respectful treatment and mutual trust and is driven by positive adult mentors (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). Brown, D'Emidio-Caston, & Benard (2001) assert that "the interaction between child or adolescent and caregiver, in the context of a supportive society, is what primarily provides for learning, development, and ultimately resilience" (p.17). All three schools believe that if a student has a positive relationship with at least one adult on campus, that that student has a greater likelihood of success. At Nyrat High School, a focus group participant shared: "We're very accommodating and understanding. I guess we kind of want to pride ourselves in just getting to know our students and caring about them" (personal communication, January 25, 2011). Bill, also at Nyrat High School, believes that their students are successful because they

build that bond, that connection. That's why they stay here and want to graduate, because they feel comfortable here. We've made it safe for them. We've made it comfortable for them. We treat them like adults, and we give them the respect that they need, and therefore they respond. These kids - Anne knows this - these kids will do anything she tells them to do, or me or any of us. Because we get that respect. Not because we demand it. Because we've earned it and we give it in return. (personal communication, March 4, 2011)

Building positive relationships between students and staff is mutually beneficial. Many staff members indicated that the positive relationships that they have with students are very rewarding, and that they care deeply about students' successes. Nicole, a teacher at Roscoe High School articulates that sentiment:

if somebody asked me to describe why, even why I enjoy teaching here, it's because I'm able to get that one-on-one time with kids, which is huge because that connection is I think what motivates them to do as much as they can, if they feel like somebody cares if they do it. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

Increase Positive Connections

Increasing positive connections includes providing students with opportunities to engage with others and with the community (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). All three schools prioritize student engagement in their academic classes and within the culture of the school. Marie, at Roscoe High School commented:

you can make really strong connections with kids and particularly if you have them in a block schedule and everything, you know, you can kind of individualize things and personalize it and you can do that very consistently. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

In addition to engaging students in the school community, all three schools design activities, opportunities, and events to provide students with opportunities to engage with their respective communities. All three schools have done blood drives and community volunteering events, and all three schools have strong relationships with community organizations that provide opportunities for students to volunteer their time. Roscoe High School has adopted their block to maintain as part of their city's community cleanup project. Crawford High School makes extensive use of community agencies to provide support for students and connect students to community activities and services. Nyrat High School participates in community recognition programs for their students and partners with community organizations to bring activities on campus.

Set Clear Boundaries and Expectations

Setting clear and consistent boundaries includes clearly articulating and consistently enforcing rules and expectations and providing students with the opportunity to provide input and receive feedback (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). All three schools explicitly introduce new students to the rules and expectations via the intake process or

an orientation program. Matteo, the principal at Crawford High School believes that the intake process is critical in establishing expectations for students: "We take [the intake process] really seriously, because that's where we give them a lot of information, and that's kind of when we give them the lay of the land. We do it one-on-one" (personal communication, February 24, 2011). An orientation teacher at Roscoe High School explained:

I would say that one of the things that I really preach to them in the first few days [of orientation] is that their ability to come here to Roscoe is a privilege....If they are not mature enough or ready to start to change some of their behaviors and take some responsibility for their actions, we have other people who are waiting for their seats. They can always return back to their other high school if they are not ready to get with the program here. There can always be another opportunity down the road when they are ready or when they do mature. This is a fresh start. It's a new beginning, but it's very much a privilege for them to be here. (personal communication, January 11, 2011)

Marie, a teacher at Roscoe High School understands that articulated boundaries and expectations is an ongoing process:

Well, in the beginning of the trimester I go over the rules and the expectations. Every day we go over the agenda. [But] today, fourth period was horrible, so I went, I just revisited all of the expectations and [for] a lot kids [I have to] repeat myself every day. You know, no hoods. Drop your hood. There's no swearing in here. Kind of just repeating the rules over and over (personal communication, March 23, 2011).

Teach Life Skills

Teaching life skills includes providing students with opportunities to develop healthy assertiveness, conflict resolution, decision-making, problem-solving, and stress management skills (Henderson & Milstein, 1996). It also involves explicit instruction and support in goal setting. The culture of all three schools incorporates explicitly teaching life skills and goal-setting. Each school incorporates life skills into their

curriculum either formally via a specific life skills course or informally by integrating life skills with other core courses. Nicole, a math teacher at Roscoe High School, believes that

At least for me, and it may just be the way that I teach, but I feel like the two big things [the students] come out [of my class] with is being able to better manage their time and being able to set goals and reach them. (personal communication, March 23, 2011)

School staff also believes that their focus as educators cannot be solely on the academic curricula. They must also provide students with the skills that they need to be successful in the work force and in the community. A focus group participant at Nyrat High School stated:

I feel ideally that they can go to college, but I feel that most of them will be working their way to college, just like they're working their way through high school. So I feel like if I can give them the skills that will help them get a job, I feel like that's a celebration for me. (personal communication, January 25, 2011)

Marie, a teacher at Roscoe High School builds life skills and organizational skills instruction into her core class

I just try to shape kind of school behavior again, to get them to start something, and to see it through. Finish it, turn it in, and to meet with success on a daily basis to become more productive and to meet with success. (personal communication, March 4, 2011)

Life skills instruction for these schools also includes assisting students in identifying their personal needs and developing a plan to get those needs met. During the intake process, Ben, a counselor at Crawford High School, described his typical interactions with new students:

We talk about [their] issues. It might take half an hour to an hour to do an intake for a kid. We talk about what's happening, why they're failing their classes, what's happening at home, and sometimes a lot more things come out then you

ever thought would come out. But I think those issues need to be addressed at that point to see what we can do from the school's perspective to make sure that those needs are met, whether it's on campus or off campus. (personal communication, February 24, 2011)

Limitations

California school districts operate 519 continuation high schools. This study samples three schools within a specifically targeted sample and is in no way representative of continuation high schools statewide. The primary criterion by which participating schools were selected is their WASC accreditation term. This accreditation term, coupled with its related self-study process, is assumed to be an accurate indicator of school quality; however, using the WASC accreditation term as indicator of school quality is not aligned to standardized measures of school accountability in California. Finally, given that there are no state guidelines for required elements of continuation high schools and very little state oversight of program components at individual schools, schools participating in this study may vary widely in terms of resources, programs, staffing, and structure. This limitation can be minimized in that the nature of this study is descriptive rather than comparative and its purpose is to identify common elements at these schools.

Another limitation of this study is that study participants include only certificated school-based personnel. Parents, students, and district administrators were not included in the participant sample. The inclusion of these stakeholder groups would have provided this study with a greater breadth and depth of data from a broader perspective.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this research study indicate that a strong, positive school culture that emphasizes personalization is foundational in successful continuation high schools. Students at these schools are viewed holistically and policies and practices are designed and implemented to address to accommodate students' individual learning, behavioral, and social needs. A focus on student engagement permeates these schools and is perceived by study participants to increase students' sense of belonging, academic performance, and academic achievement while also providing them with opportunities to build their social and organizational skills. These findings support Powell's (2003) assertion that effective alternative schools and programs

draw on the successfully validated practices of developing resilience in students by surrounding them with protective factors that lead to opportunities for meaningful involvement, caring relationships, opportunities for participation, and high expectations that manifest in shared decision making in the alternative setting. This means that the adults must believe that the students have the capacity for change, maintain high expectations, and foster opportunities for student success within the educational program (p. 70).

The findings of this study suggest that successful continuation high schools have structures and policies in place that not only align with Lezotte's (1991) effective schools correlates, but also align with Henderson & Milstein's (1996) essential components for schools to build resilience in students. The typology of these schools can be classified as what Kelly (1993) identified as *safety net* schools, which aligns with what Ruiz de Velasco (2008) identified as schools that operate under *fix the school* paradigm.

Administrators and staff at this type of school work in students' best interest to individualize instruction and services and demonstrate a willingness to adapt the school and/or instructional environment to meet the unique needs of each student (McLaughlin et al., 2008).

The final implication of this study relates to accountability measures used to evaluate continuation high schools. It is clear from the findings of this study that the perceived indicators of school success articulated by study participants do not align with external indicators associated with NCLB and the California Department of Education. It appears that there may be a different set of quality indicators for continuation high schools in comparison to traditional high schools. Consequently, there may be a need to establish external accountability measures that more closely align with the mission of continuation high schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research might duplicate the approach of this study but expand the participant sample to include classified staff, district staff, parents, and students to provide a broader descriptive narrative of successful continuation high schools.

Expanding the participant sample would enable future researchers to evaluate whether the findings of this study are unique to certificated staff members perceptions or if the findings are consistent across stakeholder groups.

Future research may also focus on the research question examined in this study but incorporate quantitative or mixed methods to allow for further exploration of themes and findings. Quantitative data would allow researchers to further describe current conditions, investigate relations, and/or study cause-effect phenomena. Additionally,

incorporating quantitative methods may provide researchers additional confidence in their findings.

Future research could build on the findings of this study to determine quality indicators for continuation high schools that could be used in state and federal accountability measures. Accountability measures are pivotal in traditional school reform efforts. Continuation high schools are held to the same accountability measures as traditional schools and are considered by most continuation educators to be unreliable indicators of continuation school quality. Research conducted in order to identify and establish accurate and reliable indicators of continuation school quality could be critically important when used to drive school improvement efforts in continuation high schools.

Conclusion

It was the intent of this researcher to contribute to the knowledge base regarding alternative school quality as it relates to supporting the academic, social, and behavioral needs of a highly diverse at-risk student population. Currently, there is very little empirical research to guide continuation education practitioners in alternative education in improving practice, and there is little formal or informal consensus among policy makers and school district leadership regarding quality indicators for continuation high school programs.

Alternative high schools, in particular continuation high schools, are not like traditional high schools. In the smaller learning environment, the values and beliefs within the learning community play a significant role in the school's culture. Findings from this study suggest that a strong school culture that emphasizes personalization is foundational in successful continuation high schools. This culture of personalization

permeates virtually every aspect of the school's operational and instructional program and influences school policy and procedures. There are no "one size fits all" solutions. School staff must consider students holistically and prioritize individual needs of students to ensure that the students have the best chance of success. The cornerstone of personalization is positive and meaningful relationships between students and at least one adult on campus. There is an understanding among school staff that they must all be willing to work hard to engage students and build positive relationships if they are to successfully serve their students.

As schools and districts seek to improve practice to retain more students at-risk, considerable attention must be given to building positive school cultures and recruiting staff with the values and beliefs that support student engagement. The structures and practices at successful continuation schools not only align with effective schools correlates, but also explicitly assist students in building their individual protective factors in a school setting that provides all of the environmental protective factors that students need to improve their resilience. The findings of this study serve to validate the practices and policies of many committed continuation educators. In the absence of empirical data, these dedicated professionals have operated instinctively in the best interest of the students they serve.

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APPENDIX A: Continuation High School Research Project Pilot Survey

California Continuation High School Research Project

1. Introduction, Overview, and Consent

The Continuation High School Research Project, conducted by Stephanie McClay as part of the requirements for a fieldwork course in the Ed. D. program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, is designed to inform educators' practice in serving at-risk adolescents in the continuation high school setting.

The research will add to the limited literature we have about the cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices within high performing continuation high schools in California. I am hopeful that this information will be of assistance to school-level administrators and educators to inform their practice as well as to district level administrators who want to improve the quality of instruction as well as the level of performance of their districts' continuation high schools.

Any information that is collected in this study that can be identified specifically with your school or with you as an individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission or if required by law. The cumulative results of this study will be published, but the names or identity of subjects will not be made known. All data/documentation collected as part of this project will be kept on file by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

There may be specific benefits which you can expect as a result of participation in this study, including the recognition of your school as a high-performing school as well as access to the published research study for your use in staff development and community engagement. Your participation will also benefit the larger continuation education community by expanding the current literature related to high-performing programs.

You should understand that approval for your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this study at any time.

If you wish to voice a concern about the research, you may direct your question(s) to the researcher, Stephanie McClay, by email at steph.mcclay@lausd.net or by phone at 818-621-3973. If you have specific questions about the study you may contact Dr. Peggy Johnson, faculty advisor, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8265, and by phone at 818-677-7856.

1. I have read the above and understand the conditions outlined for participation in this survey. Please indicate your consent to participate:

I consent to participate in this survey.

I do not consent to participate in this survey.

2. Participant Information

Contact information is requested in order to identify participating schools and establish a designated contact at each site. Any information that is collected in this study that can be identified specifically with your school or with you as an individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission or if required by law. The cumulative results of this survey may be published, but the names or identity of subjects will not be made known. All data/documentation collected in this survey will be kept on file by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

*** 1. Please provide the name of your school.**

*** 2. Please provide the mailing address for your school.**

*** 3. Please provide the phone number for your school.**

California Continuation High School Research Project

*** 4. Please provide your name.**

5. Please provide your email address (optional)

6. It may be necessary to follow up with you regarding your participation in this survey. What is your preferred method of contact? Please indicate all that apply.

- Phone
 Email
 US Mail
 Please do not contact me

3. School Structure

1. What is your school's current enrollment?

2. What is your school's target student/teacher enrollment ratio?

- 10-15:1 15-19:1 20-24:1 25-29:1 30:1 or greater

Please indicate your target student/teacher enrollment ratio.

3. What is your school's average class size?

- 10-14 15-19 20-24 25-29 30+

4. How long is the students' required instructional day?

- 3 hours 3-4 hours 4-5 hours 6 or more hours

5. How many sessions per day does your school offer?

- 1 2 3 4 more than 4

6. Which of the following alternative education schools reside on or adjacent to your campus? Please check all that apply.

- Independent Study School Pregnant Minor School Community Day School Opportunity School Home/Hospital School

California Continuation High School Research Project

7. If you have more than one type of alternative school on your campus, does the continuation high school administrator have responsibility for supervising the additional school programs as well?

- Does Not Apply
 Yes
 No
 Other (please explain below)

Other (please explain)

4. School Staffing

1. Please indicate the number of FULL TIME administrative positions at your school.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Assistant Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Other Administrative	<input type="checkbox"/>					

2. Please indicate the number of PART TIME administrative positions at your school.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Assistant Principal	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Other Administrative	<input type="checkbox"/>					

3. Please indicate the number of FULL TIME out-of-classroom certificated personnel assigned to your school.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Counselor	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Dean	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Categorical Programs Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Instructional Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>					
School Psychologist	<input type="checkbox"/>					

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4. Please indicate the number of PART TIME out-of-classroom certificated personnel assigned to your school.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Counselor	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Dean	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Categorical Programs Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Instructional Coordinator	<input type="checkbox"/>					
School Psychologist	<input type="checkbox"/>					

5. How many FULL TIME certificated teachers are assigned to your school?

6. How many PART TIME certificated teachers are assigned to your school?

7. How many FULL TIME instructional aides are assigned to your school?

8. How many PART TIME instructional aides are assigned to your school?

9. Office/Clerical Support: Please indicate the number of office/clerical support positions assigned to your school.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Office Manager/Senior Secretary	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Clerical Support	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Attendance Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Credit Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Business/Financial Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Other (please specify)

10. Campus Security: Please indicate the number of campus aide and/or school security personnel at your site.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
School Police Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>					
School Security Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Campus Security Aide	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Supervision Aide	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Other (please specify)

5. Referral and Enrollment Process

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1. Does your staff play an active role with the feeder school(s) and/or district personnel in the identification and referral of students to your school?

Yes No Sometimes

2. What is the minimum age permitted for enrollment at your school, and what is the maximum age permitted for continued enrollment?

	13	14	15	16	17	18	19+
Minimum	<input type="radio"/>						
Maximum	<input type="radio"/>						

Comments

3. Are students primarily referred to your school to provide them with academic and/or behavioral interventions so that they may return to their comprehensive high school(s)?

Yes No Sometimes

California Continuation High School Research Project

4. Students are referred to continuation schools for a variety of reasons, and often for multiple reasons. Please rank the reasons for referral to your school indicated below from highest to lowest. Begin with '1' for the most common reason for referral.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Poor Attendance	<input type="radio"/>						
Behind in Credits	<input type="radio"/>						
Pregnant/Parenting	<input type="radio"/>						
Mild/Moderate Behavior Issues (defiance, disrespect)	<input type="radio"/>						
Severe Behavior Issues (violence, gang activity)	<input type="radio"/>						
Expulsion/Suspended Enforcement	<input type="radio"/>						
Other (please describe below)	<input type="radio"/>						

Other

5. Which school and/or district personnel are responsible for referring students to your school? Please select all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> Pupil Services and Attendance Counselor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Principal, Discipline | <input type="checkbox"/> District Office Personnel - Expulsions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant Principal, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Probation Officer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance Counselor | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

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9. If a student is unsuccessful behaviorally at your school, to what type of school are they referred? Please check all that apply.

- Continuation High School Independent Study School Community Day School
- Other (please specify)

10. Does the demographic profile of your school's enrollment match the demographic profile of your feeder high school(s) in terms of:

	Yes	No
Ethnicity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Socioeconomic Status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
English Learner Status	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Comments

6. School Climate and Culture

1. Our school has a clearly articulated vision and/or mission related to student achievement.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Our school fosters an ongoing discussion of norms, rules, goals, and expectations for staff and students.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

3. There is a positive, cooperative culture for adults and students at our school.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

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4. Our school staff embraces and respects students of different cultures, religions, and belief systems.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. Staff members believe in and promote collaboration with each other.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. Staff members have high performance expectations for themselves.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Staff members have high academic performance expectations for students and challenge them to do their best work.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. School staff have a clear and consistent focus on students' academic achievement.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

9. Our school promotes students' development of a positive bond with at least one caring adult in the school through an advisory program or other program.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

10. Staff members have high behavioral performance expectations for students.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

11. Our school has a clearly defined and consistently implemented progressive discipline plan.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

12. School rules are clearly articulated and consistently applied and reinforced throughout the school.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

13. The school provides training and support necessary for students to meet behavioral expectations.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

California Continuation High School Research Project

14. The staff values the opinions of students and asks for their input when campus issue/problems arise.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. Our school campus is clean and the classrooms and instructional spaces are well kept and orderly.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

7. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

1. Students at our school must meet the same graduation requirements as students at the comprehensive high school(s) in our district.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

2. Our students have access to all of the A-G required courses on our site.

- Yes No

3. If your students DO NOT have access to all of the A-G courses on your site, please indicate the subject areas in which the entire A-G sequence is not available. Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Does Not Apply | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Visual and Performing Arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> English | <input type="checkbox"/> Laboratory Science | <input type="checkbox"/> Electives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics | <input type="checkbox"/> Foreign Language | |

Comments (please elaborate)

4. The curricula at our school is closely aligned with the curricula at our district's comprehensive high school(s).

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

5. Teachers have developed standards-based syllabi for their courses and make it clear to students what assignments and projects are required to complete each course.

- Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

California Continuation High School Research Project

14. Our school has adopted a standards-based formative assessment program to monitor students' progress in meeting grade-level standards.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. Our school has implemented an intervention program for students who are struggling to meet academic and/or behavioral benchmarks.

Strongly Agree Agree Disagree Strongly Disagree

8. Thank You for Your Time

This concludes your participation in this survey. Thank you for your time.

Once again, if you wish to voice a concern about the research, you may direct your question(s) to the researcher, Stephanie McClay, by email at steph.mcclay@lausd.net or by phone at 818-621-3973.

APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol

Research Question:

How do the services at California continuation high schools that have received multiple 6-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) support student learning and achievement? Specifically,

How does the structure of the school support student learning and achievement?

How do the academic practices of the school support student learning and achievement?

How do the social emotional practices of the school build students' resilience and support student learning and achievement?

How does the staffing of the school support student learning and achievement?

1. Please tell me about your experiences as a continuation high school educator.
2. Please describe your school's mission, vision, and beliefs.
3. How would you describe the leadership structure of your school?
4. How are students referred to your school?
5. How is the school day structured for students?
6. How is the school day structured for staff?
7. How does the staffing of your school support student learning and achievement?
8. What expectations do you have for your students?
9. How do you communicate those expectations to students?
10. What supports are in place for students who are not meeting expectations?
11. What academic practices (curriculum, instruction, and assessment) are in place at your school to support student learning and achievement?
12. How is students' academic progress in meeting grade-level standards monitored and reported at your school?
13. Describe home-school relations at your school. How would you describe parent involvement at your school?
14. Describe your district's support of your school.
15. Is there anything that you would like to tell me about your school that I haven't asked about?

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Protocol

Research Question:

How do the services at California continuation high schools that have received multiple 6-year accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) support student learning and achievement? Specifically,

How does the structure of the school support student learning and achievement?

How do the academic practices of the school support student learning and achievement?

How do the social emotional practices of the school build students' resilience and support student learning and achievement?

How does the staffing of the school support student learning and achievement?

1. Let's take a moment to introduce ourselves to each other. Please tell me your name, your position, and describe your experiences as a continuation high school educator.
2. How would you articulate your school's mission, vision, and beliefs?
3. Tell me about the students your school serves.
4. How would you describe the prototypical staff member at your school?
5. Please describe the climate of your school?
6. What does a typical day look like for most students at your school?
7. How is the curriculum organized at your school?
8. How is instruction delivered at your school?
9. How is students' academic progress in meeting grade-level standards assessed at your school?
10. Describe how your school supports students who are not meeting academic expectations?
11. Describe the social-emotional supports available to your students?
 - a. How does your school meaningfully engage students as active participants in both the school culture as well as their own individual educational experiences?
12. Describe the staffing structure of your school.

- a. Do you believe that the staffing structure is adequate to appropriately meet the academic, social/behavioral, and safety and security needs of your students?
 - b. What staffing changes would you make if you could?
13. Describe your district's support of your school.
14. How would you describe parent involvement at your school?
15. Is there anything that you would like to tell me about your school that I haven't asked about?

APPENDIX D: Research Announcement

Continuation High School Research Project

Continuation High Schools Wanted

Introduction

The Continuation High School Research Project seeks to explore a sample of successful continuation high schools in California to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement.

Eligibility

In order to qualify for this study, continuation high schools must:

currently hold at least two consecutive full-term (6 or 6R) accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

be located in Los Angeles County, California.

serve a significant population of historically underrepresented students (at least 50% of enrollment).

have an enrollment over 100 students.

Commitment

Schools selected for this study will identify 5-10 certificated or classified staff members to participate in one (1) focus group meeting with the principal investigator. Some participants from the focus group may be asked to take part in one (1) follow up interview, again conducted by principal investigator. School visits may also include classroom and non-classroom observations of the school's structure, culture, and community.

Contact Information

If your school is interested in participating in this study, you may direct your inquiries to the principal researcher, Stephanie McClay, by email at stephanie.mcclay@mysun.edu or by phone at 818-621-3973. You may also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Diane Gehart, by mail at 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8265, and by phone at 818-677-7468.

Confidentiality

Any information that is collected in this study that can be identified specifically with a participating school or individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with the written permission of the participant or if required by law. The aggregate results of this study will be published, but the names or identity of subjects will not be made known. Your approval for your school's and your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this study at any time.

APPENDIX E: Invitation to Participate

Continuation High School Research Project

Invitation to Participate

My name is Stephanie McClay, and I am the principal of Cal Burke High School, a continuation high school located in Los Angeles. I am also a doctoral student at California State University, Northridge in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. As part of my dissertation work, I am conducting a research study involving high-performing continuation high schools in California. Specifically, my study seeks to explore a sample of successful continuation high schools in California, as measured by multiple, full-term accreditation terms by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), to examine structural, social, academic, and staffing practices that support student learning and achievement. I believe that a better understanding of these elements would allow district and school-level educators to proceed from a more informed perspective in terms of informing continuation high school improvement and reform efforts.

XXXXX High School has been identified as a high-performing continuation high school based upon multiple full-term WASC accreditations. As principal of the school, I would like to invite you, and your school, to participate in this research study. I want to assure you that any information that is collected in this study that can be identified specifically with your school or with you as an individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission or if required

by law. The cumulative results of this study will be published, but the names or identity of subjects will not be made known.

If you choose to participate in this study, you, and/or staff representatives from your school, will participate in one (1) 60-minute focus group meeting with me, the principal investigator. Some participants from the focus group may be asked to take part in one (1) 60-minute follow up interview, again conducted by me. My school visits may also include non-classroom observations of your school's structure, culture, and community.

Your school or you may not benefit personally from your participation in this study. However; your school's participation in this study provides recognition as a high-performing school as well provides you access to the published research study for your use in staff development and community engagement. Your participation will also benefit the larger continuation education community by expanding the current literature related to high-performing programs.

Your approval for your school's and your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this study at any time.

If you would like your school to participate in this study, please contact me via email at stephanie.mcclay@mycsun.edu or via telephone at 818-621-3973.

APPENDIX F: SCHOOL PERSONNEL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOL RESEARCH PROJECT

Project Title

The Continuation High School Research Project, conducted by Stephanie McClay as part of the dissertation requirements in the Ed. D. program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, is designed to inform educators' practice in serving at-risk adolescents in the continuation high school setting. More specifically, this study seeks to contribute to the research base and expand the literature related to indicators of school quality in continuation education in California.

This research will add to the limited literature we have about the cultural patterns of behavior, values, and practices within successful continuation high schools in California. I am hopeful that this information will be of assistance to school-level administrators and educators to inform their practice as well as to district level administrators who want to improve the quality of instruction as well as the level of performance of their districts' continuation high schools.

Introduction

Each participant may be in the study for approximately three to six months. Participants will be asked to participate in a 45-minute focus group with colleagues at their school sites. Based upon focus group data, the researcher may conduct 60-minute follow-up interviews with select participants. In addition, the researcher will conduct non-classroom observations at participating school sites which may involve you.

Description of Research

Participation in this study has potential risks, but they are not significant. You will be asked questions of a personal nature regarding your behavior, values and practices as they relate to your experience as a continuation high school educator and you may feel uncomfortable talking about some things. You are free to decline to answer any questions that you don't wish to answer, or you may stop your participation in any interview, conversation, or survey at any time without penalty. You will not receive monetary compensation for participation in this study.

Subject Information & Risks

Any information that is collected in this study that can be identified specifically with your school or with you as an individual will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your written permission or if required by law. The cumulative results of this study will be published, but the names or identity of subjects will not be made known. All data/documentation collected as part of this study will be kept on file by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

Confidentiality & Final Disposition of Data

Access to raw research data will be limited to the principal investigator, the principal investigator's dissertation committee, and those working with the principal investigator to assist with transcription and data analysis. A complete list of those who have access to your data will be provided to you upon your request.

Qualitative data from this study, including quotes from individual participants, will be published and publicly available in the final dissertation. In addition to being

published in the dissertation, data, including quotes and findings from this research study may be presented at professional conferences or workshops and/or published in professional publications or journals.

Right to Know

Personal benefits from your participation in this study may include self-discovery and self-awareness of your understanding and perceptions about continuation education. In addition, all participants will be provided access to the published research study for use in staff development, community engagement, and personal professional growth. Your participation will also benefit the larger continuation education community by expanding the current literature related to high-performing programs.

Uses of Data

Benefit of Participation

If you have specific questions about the study you may direct your question(s) to the principal researcher, Stephanie McClay, by email at stephanie.mcclay@mysun.edu or by phone at 818-621-3973. You may also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Diane Gehart, by mail at 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8265, and by phone at 818-677-7468.

Concerns

Voluntary Participation

You should understand that approval for your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy. Likewise, the researcher may cancel this study at any time. You are not obliged whatsoever to answer or respond to any questions or to discuss anything you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any questions, or any part of any question, and will not face any penalty for answering, or not answering, any question in any way. You may stop or leave the interview or focus group at any time for any reason without consequence of any kind. You are not waiving legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. You may withdraw from this research study up to six (6) weeks after focus groups or interviews have been completed. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, the details of this study, or any other concerns, please contact the Office for Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, 818-677-2901.

During the course of conducting focus groups and interviews, participants may be audio taped. Your initials here _____ signify your consent to allow your conversations and/or interviews to be audio taped. You may ask at any time during interviews that the audio recorder be stopped without any consequences of any kind. All audio taped interviews will be transcribed by the researcher, and transcription data will be reviewed by the researcher and may be reviewed by additional researchers to establish inter-rater reliability in the data analysis. All tapes collected as part of this project will be kept on file in a secure, locked location accessible only by the researcher at the conclusion of the study.

Audio Taping

CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOL RESEARCH PROJECT
SCHOOL PERSONNEL INFORMED CONSENT

Subject
Signature

Signature of Research Subject

I have read the above and understand the conditions outlined for participation in the described study. I have been provided with a copy of this consent form to keep and I give informed consent for my child, named below, to participate in the study.

Witness/P.I.
Signature

Participant's Name _____

Last

First

MI

Signature _____ Date _____

Witness signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator

In my judgment the research subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

Stephanie McClay

Return form
to:

Name of Principal Investigator

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

If you have signed this form, please return one copy in an envelope by mail to:

Dr. Diane Gehart
Department of Education, Educational Psychology
and Counseling
California State University, Northridge
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330-8265

or give this form to Stephanie McClay.

Keep one copy of this consent form for your records.

APPENDIX F: Curriculum Vitae

- 1988 Bachelor of Science in Education Degree – Special Education, Millersville University of Pennsylvania
- 1988 Preliminary Special Education Teaching Credential (PA) Mild/Moderate, Moderate Severe Authorization
- 1988-1992 Self-Contained Special Education Teacher (grades 9-12), Lincoln Intermediate Unit, York Count, PA
- 1992-1999 Self-Contained Special Education Teacher (grades 9-12), Independence Continuation High School, Los Angeles Unified School District, CA
- 1999-2004 Instructional Technology Applications Facilitator, Local District A, Los Angeles Unified School District, CA
- 2001 Master of Arts in Education Degree - Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, California State University, Northridge
- 2002 Certificate of Eligibility for the Administrative Services Credential, California State University, Northridge
- 2004 Professional Clear Level II Education Specialist Instruction Credential, CA Commission on Teacher Credentialing
- 2004-2011 Principal, Cal Burke Continuation High School, Los Angeles Unified School District, CA
- 2009 Clear Administrative Services Credential, CA Commission on Teacher Credentialing
- 2008-Present Doctoral Student, Educational Leadership, California State University, Northridge
- 2011-Present Founding Principal, USC Hybrid High School, Los Angeles, CA