The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look Into the Academic Success of Foster and Homeless Youth

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful family and friends. Their support is exemplary and their potential is amazing.
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Abstract

The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look Into the Academic Success of Foster and Homeless Youth

By

Brianna J. Nix

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

This study revealed the perceptions of former foster youth and homeless youth as they related to educational policies that impacted the academic success of current foster and homeless youth. Foster youth and homeless youth high school graduation rates are low in comparison to non-homeless or non-foster peers. For example, 89 percent of non-foster youth completed high school, and only 59 percent of foster youth enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of grade twelve (Burley, Mason, Halpern & Mina, 2011). To close the research gap this study looked at the academic success of homeless youth and foster youth as one inclusive population. This study relied on research regarding to educational barriers, low graduation rates, high special education enrollment, grade retention, school behavioral problems, poor academic performance, behavioral
health challenges, school mobility, and low post-secondary educational attainment. The purpose of this research study was to better understand the impact of existing institutional policies on the high school academic success of foster and homeless youth.

*Keywords:* foster youth, homeless youth, academic success, educational policies, social capital
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Homelessness has affected people of all occupations, geographic regions, ages, religions, ethnicities, and Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS) placements. However, homelessness has occurred with greater disproportionately among minorities and people of color (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2005). At any point in the year, 1.3 million youth were homeless in the United States (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2005). According to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (2001), homelessness is defined as not having fixed, regular, or adequate housing. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (MCKV) included youth who were a part of the Department of Children and Family Services and awaiting foster placement. Homelessness does not only define youth whose family is homeless, but is a term used for a large variety of young people, including unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors are youth navigating life separate from their parent or guardian. The term unaccompanied minor includes runaways, which are youth who have ran away from home or foster placements for various reasons such as violence, sexual orientation, disagreements, etc. The term unaccompanied minor includes throwaways, which are youth whose guardians stopped caring for them and refused to let them back into the home. Lastly, the term unaccompanied minor includes street youth which are defined as youth who chose to live on the street and participate in the street economy, and systems youth, who were a part of the DCFS system and had an open case with the state court (Moore, 2005). For this study, adults who had experienced homelessness as a child according to MCKV and were not in foster care are referred to as a Non Foster Child
(NFC). Adults who were foster children and received services from the Department of Children and Family Services at some point between birth and 18 years of age are Foster Children (FC) (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

Though the number of homeless youth is high, equally daunting is the number of youth living in out-of-home care. For example, there were approximately 35,000 youth receiving services from DCFS in an urban region of southern California (Department of Children Family Services, 2013). These youth are classified as out of home placement youth because they are in the care of the State of California’s foster system (DCFS). At any point in time, many of these youth could become homeless without notice (Lenz-Rashid, 2006). Out of home placement youth may have been removed from foster homes or group homes, runaway from foster placement, or become victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children. Lenz-Rashid (2006) researched a sample of 252 homeless young adults accessing homeless services in San Francisco, and found 43 percent reported having a history of foster care in which a portion of these youth ran away from foster care placements and ended up homeless. In 2001, approximately two percent of all foster care youth (9,112 young people) in the United States ran away from their DCFS placement (Lenz-Rashid, 2006) resulting in homelessness.

Homelessness is barrier to education, basic needs, and put youth at-risk of violence, victimization, substance use, depression, illness and suicide (Julianelle, 2007). Not only did homelessness severely hinder the lives of youth, but much of the trauma experienced during their young lives, greatly impacted their transition to adulthood. According to Akerly (2009), more than 50 percent of former foster youth never completed high school and 62 percent were unemployed. Moreover, children in homeless
families were out of school for an average of ten months at a time and a typical homeless family lived in three different residences in a single year (Nunez, 2000). The study by Nunez (2000) found 93 percent of homeless families moved at least once a year, and 25 percent of those families moved at least three times or more. According to the U.S. Department of Education, 87 percent of homeless youth were enrolled in school, but only 77 percent of those youth attended school regularly. In that study, over half of homeless youth missed more than two weeks of school each year. Julianelle (2007) researched several studies regarding homeless youth and found 20 to 50 percent of those youth were sexually abused in their homes, while 40 to 60 percent were physically abused. Self-concept and other emotional problems were growing reasons for both homeless youth and foster youth to choose to miss school and when those students were faced with homelessness, they were more likely to develop a negative self-image, eventually drop out of school, and get into trouble with the law (Nunez, 2000).

Financial self-sufficiency was another difficulty experienced by homeless and foster youth. Rashid (2004) surveyed 810 foster youth after leaving foster care and found about half were unemployed, 40 percent of foster youth surveyed were a cost to the community at the time of the research study interview (i.e. received public assistance, incarcerated, etc.), and 62 percent had not maintained a job for at least one year since leaving care. Furthermore, Roman and Wolfe (2006) suggested early dependence on state welfare while in foster care did not adequately prepare foster children for independence and could be detrimental to the maturation of an adolescent. Moreover, youth who received services such as transportation assistance, free tutoring services, free and reduced lunch, clothing allowances, and therapy and mental health resources, at a
young age may become dependent upon those services believing this type of assistance would be in place and always accessible to them when they entered adulthood.

**Problem Statement**

Serious educational problems affecting foster youth as well as homeless youth were of major political concern for several reasons: low graduation rates, high special education enrollment, grade retention, school behavioral problems, poor academic performance, behavioral health challenges, school mobility, and low post-secondary educational attainment (Gustavesson & MacEachron, 2012). The California School Boards Association (2008) found youth in foster care lose six months of academic achievement with each school move. This directly related to low graduation rates for high school students, as only 59 percent of foster youth enrolled in 11th grade completed high school by the end of grade twelve, as compared to the completion rate of non-foster youth at 89 percent (Burley, Mason, Halpern & Mina, 2011). Youth that experienced homelessness may have missed school due to employment obligations or frequent movement due to housing issues. These youth may struggle to concentrate on school due to a lack of sleep or struggled in school due to concerns about having their basic needs met. Many homeless youth struggled in school simply because they were unable to complete assignments due to a lack of resources or a quiet place to study (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010). The problem this research addressed was homeless youth were often left behind academically in comparison to their foster peers who were frequently mobile due to the gap between legislation enacted for both homeless and foster youth. There is a gap in the research on educational policies that had an impact on both former foster and homeless youth and their academic success, and specific
research on the impact of AB 1806 was limited. Not only did this research address the
gaps in legislation and in the literature, but this research addressed how large urban high
schools are implementing proper legislation that increased high school success for foster
and homeless youth.

While the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of
2008 (AB 12) worked to remove many of the immediate negative educational
consequences for foster youth, and McKinney-Vento addressed the needs of homeless
youth, educators, transitional living programs, scholarship committees, and colleges
continued to regard these two student populations (homeless youth and foster youth) as
separate communities. This separate designation was problematic in the educational arena
because some provisions for high school success and completion are afforded to one
population and not the other (i.e. foster youth scholarships, transitional living for
homeless youth, independent living services for foster youth, Assembly Bill 167/AB 216
for foster youth). The majority of research studies surrounding foster and homeless youth
continued to separate the high school experiences of these two populations, which left
homeless youth with multiple barriers to their education and few policies that helped
successfully guide them through high school. Assembly Bill 1806 (2014) allowed
educational leaders to understand why some homeless youth would request to graduate
with California minimum state standards of 130 credits, how partial credit, and a fifth
year in high school could be beneficial to homeless youth as well as foster youth. The
benefit to graduating with 130 credits as opposed to district requirements when students
are homeless and constantly moving is that students will be able to fulfill the needs of all
220 credits required by a district for example. If the student only needs to focus on core
classes such as math, English, history, science, physical education and the CAHSEE, homeless and foster students who are severely behind in credits, may have a better chance to be academically successful. In addition, a fifth year may be useful to students with the ability to complete district requirements with the extra year, or they become the age of majority (and possibly have a more stable living arrangement) which would allow them to focus more on finishing high school successfully.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to understand how institutional policies impacted the high school academic success for foster and homeless youth. This research hopes to contribute to the understanding of academic success through the implementation of more comprehensive policy or procedures for this specific population. In this study, the education of foster youth and homeless youth, the completion of A-G graduation requirements, and graduation or receipt of the G.E.D added to the conceptualization of “academic success.” This study examined the perspectives of former foster and homeless youth on the use and implementation of policies such as AB 167/216, AB490 AB 1806 and McKinney-Vento during their high school experience to demonstrate how useful these policies were for actual homeless youth and foster youth.

**Significance of the Study**

While foster and homeless youth did have their differences, many of the K-12 educational problems they experienced were similar. For example, homeless youth couch surfed, moved from shelter to shelter, lived in motels and moved from place to place while they attended high school (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004). Students who experienced homelessness found difficulty accruing credits, class offerings, and faced differing
graduation policies across school districts (National Center for Homeless Education, 2010).

Similarly, foster youth experienced multiple foster and group home placements, new family members, different cities, and even new social workers in their ninth through twelfth grade years in high school (Morton, 2012). Those changes effected the educational attainment of a child in the system. Rafferty, Shinn, and Weitzman (1999) and Aviles de Bradley (2000) stated that stability was a key component needed for children and youth to physically and emotionally develop. For both homeless and foster youth, this stability was disrupted multiple times throughout their K-12 educational years, which often lead to educational problems (Aviles de Bradley, 2000), and unsuccessful high school careers.

**Conceptual Framework**

A social capital lens helped guide this research study. Social capital was defined as actual or potential resources linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships (Stablein, 2011). Stablein used social capital to discuss both the positive and negatives of homeless adolescent street life and Bantchevska, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Glebova, and Slesnick (2008) explored social capital as an important predictor of problem behaviors among adolescents. Bantchevska et al. (2008) state in some cases, deficiencies of social capital in the family predicted homelessness.

This study reviewed how a lack of social capital caused a student to suffer academically. Looking at the experiences of foster and homeless youth and their ability to navigate the process of graduating high school successfully, utilizing school policies and procedures designed specifically for them, was more difficult when foster and homeless
youth did not possess the knowledge or information to navigate the high school process. Social capital connected individuals to resources they would otherwise not possess through their own means. Resources included medical services such as Medi-Cal, educational policy implementation and interpretation from foster and homeless liaisons, and mental health services within group homes and youth shelters. Furthermore, social capital for homeless youth and foster youth increased their academic success in high school through positive networks, educational policies, and knowledge. Though many of these youth did not typically sustain social capital that secured a connection to resources for education and mental health services, foster youth and homeless youth however, did possess social capital, amongst street companions, homeless peers helped find food and shelter, and developed socio-emotional support amongst peers (Stablein, 2011). Social capital was used to influence youth to stay on the streets along with homeless peers. Social capital connected youth to positive and negative resources where a lack of positive social capital was detrimental to a youth’s well being in school or on the street. Therefore, using the benefits of social capital as a lens helped this research study uncover what networks and resources homeless and foster youth needed in order to acquire academic success.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the following questions: How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts? In what ways do the services and practices of support agencies impact the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? How does
social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success?

**Definition of Key Terms**

The following are definitions of key terms used throughout this study.

*Academic Success.* Two aspects measured academic success: cognitive measures which included mental ability and non-cognitive which measures included certain personality traits (Li, 2012).

*Department of Children and Family Services.* A system that serviced approximately 35,000 youth in a large urban city, and provided them with Medi-Cal, a children services worker, and out-of-home placement. Youth accessing DCFS services were classified as system youth, and were placed in out-of-home care that consisted of foster homes, group homes, emergency shelters, and kin-gap (Department of Children Family Services, 2013).

*Emergency Shelter.* A facility offered youth shelter, food, beds, and showers in the event of homelessness or a change of foster care placement (Layn.org).

*Group Home.* A type of foster care placement that housed multiple foster care youth for long periods of time, such as eighteen months, and provided stable housing, food and clothing. Group homes typically employed staff members that acted as care givers to foster youth twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (Layn.org).

*Former foster youth or foster care alumni.* Adults who were foster children and received services from the Department of Children and Family Services at some point between birth and 18 years of age (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

*Homeless youth alumni.* Adults who experienced homelessness as a child according to the McKinney-Vento Act and were not in foster care (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).
Highly mobile students. Students with a series of non-promotional school changes (Rumberger, Larson, Ream, & Palardy, 1999).

Homelessness. This was defined as not having fixed, regular, or adequate housing used for nighttime residence. The definition included families doubling in homes, couch surfing, or utilizing a space to sleep not suitable for living purposes (i.e. park benches, abandoned building, and cars) (The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, 2001).

Placement. According to the federal definition of foster care and related terms, placement included and was not limited to foster family homes, foster homes of relatives, group homes, emergency shelters, residential facilities, childcare institutions, and pre-adoptive homes (DCFS, 2013).

Overview of Methodology

This study’s research methodology included a discussion about the research design and tradition of the study. This study used a qualitative approach and a grounded theory case study design. In order to answer the research questions, this study used semi-structured interviews and document review. Semi-structured interviews were used because they allowed the researcher to uncover rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives. Data sources included former foster and former homeless youth, the process of graduating high school and those federal policies designed to assist homeless and foster youth throughout their enrollment in grades ninth through twelfth. The types of data this study collected included: semi-structured interviews and a review of federal and state public policy documents that instructed school districts on how to assist homeless and foster youth throughout their educational process in grades ninth through twelfth.
The criterion for participation in this study includes homeless and foster youth alumni, or cases, who were graduates of high school or obtained a GED (tests of general educational development). Participants had to have experienced homelessness or have been in the foster care system before reaching high school completion. The study utilized a snowball strategy to identify cases of interest from foster and homeless alumni, as well as, from people who knew individuals who met the criterion of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

There was one sole researcher for this study. The researcher was a doctoral candidate, an education liaison, and advocate for homeless and foster youth. The chapter concluded with a brief summary and discussion of how their work with foster care and homeless alumni assisted in identifying ways to contribute to the understanding of academic success for current high school students whom experience homelessness or foster care.

**Limitations**

The limitations of this study included a small sample size due to limited access to foster and homeless youth alumni. It is possible many former foster youth and former homeless youth did want to participate due to embarrassment, traumatic experiences, time constraints, living situations, or lack of trust in the researcher. Moreover, foster and homeless status was confidential information and schools as well as agencies such as the Sunshine Shelter and the Department of Children and Family Services were restricted in disclosing any information regarding students’ residency status. The study was limited in that it only focused on an adult population of high school graduates and GED holders due to the Department of Children and Family Services protection of state dependent minors.
Delimitations

The delimitations of this study included the length of the study and the location of the study. The length of the study was over the span of one year, due to time constraints of the researcher’s doctoral program. The researcher did not have the option to elongate the study, which limited how many times the researcher could interview participants and how much qualitative data the researcher collected. Another delimitation of this study was that it was bound to the location of the researcher and participants, the southern region of California. These delimitations impacted the generalizability of the data found in this study.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The remaining chapters discussed a review of the literature, the research methodology for the research, the results and analysis of the data, followed by the conclusion and recommendations for future research. Chapter One provided an introduction to the topic. Chapter Two included a review of the literature, which consisted of research surrounding the issues homeless youth have experienced separately from foster youth. The literature review presented a discussion and overview of the policies that have impacted the success of foster and homeless youth the most. Other key points the literature review addressed, included a discussion on student mobility and how research found it impacted academic success and generated educational barriers. Chapter Three included the methodology section and offered a thorough discussion of the methods used in this research to identify specific educational policies which could be used to increase academic success for current foster and homeless youth. Chapter Four contained the researcher’s findings, and data from the interviews and document review.
Lastly, Chapter Five was an analysis of the data and recommendations for future research on homeless youth and foster youth.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This literature review explored the research of the past two-three decades in regard to homeless youth and foster youth as well as educational policies and their impact on high school academic success. Homelessness and educational outcomes, students placed with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in the state of California, educational barriers, and educational policies specifically addressing homeless youth and foster youth were discussed throughout this chapter. The purpose of this study was to understand how federal and state policies impacted academic success for both foster and homeless youth as one at-risk population versus two separate populations.

The populations in literature review had experienced living in emergency shelters, other transitional living programs, or dealing with individual life circumstances which resulted in homelessness. Many of these individuals experienced foster care, which and either lived in out-of-home care, been detained by the state, or lived in a foster home or group home. The foster and homeless youth population were important in this study because of their experiences with high trauma throughout adolescence, many adult experiences of being unstable, or having difficulties with employment and college enrollment between the ages of eighteen to twenty (Courtney & Dworsky, 2010). The educational community, specifically the K-12 community, had become more aware of the disadvantages many of the homeless and foster alumni faced through the recent news about DCFS, growing dropout rates, and college retention (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012; Mersky and Janczewski, 2012; Frerer, Sosenko, & Henke, 2013). This literature review
uncovered the history of academic success for homeless youth and foster youth. For this review, the term “homeless youth” included unaccompanied youth, runaways, throwaways, street youth, and systems youth (Moore, 2005). The term “foster youth” refers to youth who are in the custody of the Department of Children and Family Services in a large urban city in southern California. A youth in foster care has 24-hour substitute care and is placed away from their parents or guardians for a period of time set by the court. The state agency has placement and care responsibility for the youth. Foster youth are assigned a children’s social worker (CSW) and receive medical benefits through Medi-cal. These CSWs work to find foster youth out-of-home placement and provide them access to resources through DCFS.

Trauma filled experiences (i.e. sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, neglect, violence, gang activity, or drugs in the home) and barriers to education (i.e. poor grades, educational disability, school behavior problems, low achievement test scores) impaired academic success of homeless youth and foster youth. Li’s (2012) research on academic success, demonstrated the importance of identifying factors promoting academic success in minority students, which included students of color, low social economic status, and/or students with disabilities. Academic success was what this research study sought to increase within the homeless youth and foster youth populations in secondary education. According to Li (2012), there are two measurements of academic success: cognitive and non-cognitive measures. She stated, “Cognitive measures include mental ability and non-cognitive measures include certain personality traits. High school grades, ACT scores, SAT scores or collegiate cumulative grade-point-averages were often cognitive predictors...For non-cognitive measures, [Barrick and Mount's (1993)] seminal work
establish the foundation, i.e., the taxonomy of personality traits i.e., conscientiousness, agreeableness, extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experience” (Li, 2012, p. 261). Academic success in homeless and foster youth was often determined by their non-cognitive measures. For example, conscientiousness reflected how dependable, responsible, achievement-oriented, and persistent a person could be. Agreeableness was defined by how good-natured, cooperative and trusting an individual is. The prototypical characteristics for extraversion were sociable, talkative, and assertive characteristics, and emotional stability in foster youth and homeless youth related to how tense, insecure, and nervous those youth were. Lastly, openness to experience was often limited even though it referred to the artistic and imitative abilities of the youth (Barrick & Mount, 1993). As previously mentioned, the education of foster youth and homeless youth, the completion of A-G graduation requirements, and graduation or receipt of the G.E.D added to the conceptualization of “academic success.”

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research was to understand how institutional policies influenced the academic success of both foster and homeless youth, as a way to contribute to the understanding of academic success through the implementation of more comprehensive policy or procedures for foster and homeless youth as one population. The study reviewed how the services and practices of support agencies facilitated and/or inhibited the academic success of homeless and foster youth. As previously mentioned, adults who had experienced homelessness as a child according to McKinney-Vento (2001) and were not in foster care were referred to as a Non Foster Child (NFC). Adults who were foster children and received services from the Department of Children and
Family Services at some point between birth and 18 years of age were Foster Children (FC) (Lenz-Rashid, 2006).

**Conceptual Framework**

This literature review used a social capital lens as the conceptual framework. According to Stablein (2011), social capital is the actual or potential resources linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships. Social capital connected youth to positive and negative resources, such as Medi-Cal, educational resources, and homeless shelters. Social capital for homeless youth and foster youth increased their academic success in high school through positive networks, educational policies, and knowledge. Cultural networks and community involvement, athletic teams, and social circles were examples of positive social capital. Social capital connected youth to resources both positive and negative. A lack of social capital was detrimental to a youth’s well being in school or on the street. For example, social capital was negatively used to influence youth to stay on the streets with homeless peers and increased the risk of dropping out of high school (Stablein, 2011). The research questions guiding this literature review are: How do institutional policies and practices influence academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? How do the services and practices of support agencies influence the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? How does social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success?
History of Homeless and Foster Youth

Historically homelessness was associated with older alcoholic White men concentrated in skid row areas of major cities (Mahwinney-Rhoads & Sthaler, 2006). However, in the early 20th Century, there were no child labor laws, and many people were migrating to cities to find more work. These experiences coupled with the Great Depression of 1929 all added to an increase in child homelessness. Economic hardship in the 1970s and 1980s caused more families to become homeless, and generated an increase in children experiencing homelessness. More recently, the recession of 2007 impacted education in a number of ways. According to Irons (2009), factors that reduced a family’s resources severely impacted and limited the quality and level of their children’s education. For example, early childhood was important and Irons found that family income had a direct impact on math and reading scores in the early childhood years. The recession negatively impacted larger families with younger children, because necessary cognitive growth at young ages was connected to nutrition that had the potential to lead to greater grade attainment, reading comprehension, cognitive abilities, and possibly wages later in life (Irons, 2009). According to Irons (2009), in 2007 13 million U.S. families, and 12.7 million children experienced food insecurity. This meant families faced difficulty providing enough food for all family members. In a study that focused on women who became homeless due to economic issues and a lack of adequate and affordable housing, out of 44,430 urban women, including White, Asian, Hispanic and African American, 11.4 percent of these urban women had experienced homelessness during a seven year period after the birth of their first child (Webb, Culhane, Metraux, Robbins, & Culhane, 2003). Fifty-three percent of African American women, who had
dropped out of high school and was the parent of four or more children, had experienced
homelessness during the seven-year period assessed in a study by Hernandez Jozefowicz-
Simbeni and Israel (2006). Moreover, Mahwinney-Rhoads and Sthaler (2006), and
Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006), found 900,000 to 1.4 million children
in America were homeless for a time in a given year. This meant as the homeless
population grew, more children experienced unstable living situations, which made it
more difficult for them to attend school on a regular basis. The obstacles encountered
when a child or family is homeless interfere with regular school attendance.

Homelessness among youth included those youth in the custody of the
Department of Children and Family Services (Lenz-Rashid, 2006), because those youth
left placement without permission or they were awaiting permanent foster placement,
grew tired of waiting, or they aged out of the system. Foster youth leave placement
without permission regardless of their age or the location of the foster home or group
home. Foster youth are considered AWOL (absent without leave) or runaway if they do
not change placements with the permission of their social worker or court. Additionally,
foster youth age out of the system at the age of majority, which is 18, unless a foster
youth notifies the court they would like to extend foster care passed the age of 18, they
will be exited from the system (DCFS, 2013). Foster youth typically lived in foster
homes, group homes, emergency shelters, and on some occasions with family members.
Regardless of whether youth were in the custody of DCFS or they were homeless with
families or independent of their families, foster and homeless youth were at risk of
missing their education, at risk of acquiring health concerns, and at risk of engaging in
dangerous survival behaviors (English, 2006). Foster and homeless youth can become
susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, become victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking, and engage in survival sex for basic needs such as food and shelter.

**Department of Children and Family Services**

The Department of Children and Family Services located in an urban region of southern California (Department of Children Family Services, 2013) serviced approximately 35,000 youth. These youth are classified as system youth, and are ages zero to twenty-one. Youth are typically placed in the system due to sexual, emotional, physical abuse, neglect, or endangerment. DCFS youth are placed in-out-of home care consisting of foster homes, group homes, emergency shelters, and kin-gap. Morton (2012) stated that like homeless youth, foster youth were an invisible population that educators were not adequately trained to meet the unique needs of foster youth. Many foster youth exhibit similar vulnerabilities as other at-risk sub-groups and their specific needs often get over looked. According to The Center for Social Services Research and The Institute for Evidence-Based Change (2013), most foster youth shared similar vulnerabilities with other disadvantaged at-risk students such as homeless youth, disabled students, ESL students and low social-economic students. Many of those shared vulnerabilities are abuse, neglect, poverty, violence, homelessness, and/or mental health issues. Their research indicated fewer foster and at-risk students in their study, completed high school or college when compared to students from the general population. In fact, the Center for Social Services Research and the Institute for Evidence-Based Change found only 45 percent of foster youth completed high school compared to 79 percent of general population students. Another key point noted in the study was “for foster youth,
at-risk characteristics coupled with trauma associated with maltreatment and foster care placement, may place them at greater risk for education failure than their disadvantaged peers” (CSSR & IEBC, p. 2, 2013).

**Educational Policies**

Federal policies were implemented for the education system nationwide, in an effort to alleviate and minimize many of the barriers which put homeless youth and foster youth at greater risk for educational failure. These policies were meant to assist both foster youth and homeless youth in navigating the education system even while experiencing homelessness. However, a closer review of the literature found that not all policies are as equipped to help facilitate graduation completion and high school success as they hoped to be. Assembly Bill 167/216 and Assembly Bill 490 focused solely on the foster youth population while McKinney-Vento provided legislation outlining specific provisions for homeless youth in school districts. Assembly Bill 1806 was the latest bill to be critical in the treatment and provisions granted to homeless youth that paralleled legislation for foster youth.

**Assembly Bill 167**

Assembly Bill 167 (AB 167) was legislation that became active on January 1, 2010. AB 167 referred to California legislation that amended section 51225.3 of the California Education Code to exempt students in foster care from school district graduation requirements exceeding state graduation requirements (Ref 5670.0). The bill stated that there must have been movement or a transfer into a district, or multiple high schools within the district, while the student was in their eleventh or twelfth grade year in high school. It had to be determined that unless otherwise assisted by AB 167, the child
could not meet the standard district graduation requirements. This determination was discussed in a meeting with the child’s educational rights holder, school counselor and the student. The educational rights holder of any child makes all educational decisions for the child in terms of school enrollment, special education, etc. until the child turns 18. The educational rights holder is their birth parent, and the educational rights can only be limited and changed by the court. AB 167 allowed a student impacted by foster care at the time of graduation or during his/her eleventh or twelfth grade year, the ability to graduate under California minimum state graduation standards, which included 130 credits and successfully passing the California High School Exit Exam.

**Assembly Bill 216**

According to Alliance for Children’s Rights, Assembly Bill 216 attempted to clarify multiple components of AB 167 to ensure consistent implementation. The new bill sought to clarify when a student qualified for the California minimum state graduation standards. For example, foster students who transferred during their eleventh or twelfth grade year qualified for AB 167, however with AB 216, students were eligible after they completed their second year of high school either by number of credits or years of high school enrollment (California Education Code, 51225.1, 2013).

While AB 167 and AB 216 offered provisions toward graduation requirements for youth in out-of-home care, these bills did not assist youth experiencing homelessness. This legislation was geared to assist foster youth and yet homeless youth were faced with many of the same issues. Homeless youth experienced movement from living arrangement to living arrangement, and school mobility as they experienced multiple transfers to different high schools. Such as with foster youth, these experiences caused
severe damage to homeless youth’s education. Though homeless youth experienced educational barriers, these youth were not included in the provisions provided by AB 167 (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simheni & Nathaniel, 2006).

**Federal Legislation**

Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was the first major federal initiative to address the problem of homelessness in America (Mahwinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2009; Hendricks & Barkley, 2012). This initiative was later revisited and became the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 2001 (MCKV), which had increasingly become an essential tool in the educational success of students experiencing homelessness. School districts were able to target homeless youth enrolled in their schools and allocate funding to assist them with academic tutoring, free and reduced lunch, school uniforms, and homeless liaisons. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 (MCKV) defined homelessness as not having fixed, regular, or adequate housing used for nighttime residence. This definition included families doubling in homes, couch surfing, or utilizing a space to sleep not suitable for living purposes (i.e. park benches, abandoned building, and cars). While the policy had positive impacts on students’ attendance rates and academic outcomes, there were however, some barriers to the implementation of the policy. Miller (2011) took a careful look at the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act 2001 and stated MCKV mandated the involvement of multiple parties across many different contexts striving to achieve similar outcomes. Assistance with the implementation of MCKV included the allocation of funding to State Educational Agencies (SEAs) for distribution to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) through grants (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel, 2006). The multiple parties
included homeless liaisons, school personnel, and community agency workers like emergency shelter staff and protective service workers for example. In other words, there were multiple people involved in making sure the correct actions were being taken and implemented through the use of MCKV. This was quite similar to Spillan’s distributed leadership perspective (Miller, 2011) in which collaborated leadership and distributed leadership happen when different leaders and participants worked together but in different arenas, with specific duties assigned. Miller (2011) recommended the mobilization of homeless liaisons, increased collaboration between districts and community agencies, and the overall expansion of conceptualizing homeless education. This recommendation was not acted on in the study, but it was a suggestion to school districts working with homeless students.

MCKV supported homeless youth, however this policy as it stood, only served homeless students; not foster youth who lived in group homes and out-of-home care placements. In 2002, MCKV was reauthorized to include some foster youth (Woodward, 2004), and this more recent definition included youth “awaiting foster care placement” as a type of homelessness leading to instability and disruption in a student’s life. Though the law was revised to now include some foster youth, there was a wide spectrum to which youth were actually included in “awaiting foster placement.” For example, there could be youth placed in an emergency shelter by DCFS waiting to return home or placed in the emergency shelter while their children’s social worker found an appropriate foster placement for them. Foster youth who lived in group homes were considered by some to be awaiting permanent foster placement, and foster youth who had run away from foster placements and were now homeless were included in the spectrum. Furthermore, in 2003,
the U. S. Department of Education attempted to clarify the use of “awaiting foster care” and rendered any youth taken away from their parent or guardian home and already placed in foster care was not “awaiting foster care placement” (Woodward, 2004). This change to clarify the initiative in turn significantly stifled MCKV’s ability to assist foster youth in need. The foster youth placed in group homes and emergency shelters no longer had the provisions of MCKV when some districts did not fully recognize and implement legislation specifically designed to assist foster youth.

According to Hendricks and Barkley (2012), MCKV was over a decade old; however no evaluations of the law’s effectiveness were reported. The authors did a study on fifth and sixth grade test scores based upon funds given to schools by MCKV for academic improvement. The authors used test scores of homeless students and compared them to test of homeless students who received no benefits from MCKV. The study showed there was no significant difference from students who received funds from MCKV to raise test scores as compared to students who did not receive funds from MCKV. A study by Hendricks and Barkley (2012) failed to support homeless youth’s test scores were significantly improved by the implementation of MCKV. The author’s research indicated homeless students have poorer grades, lower scores on achievements, more grade retentions and are more likely to drop out of school as compared to their conventionally housed peers (Hendricks and Barkley, 2012). Although there were a sizable number of research articles on MCKV itself, there researcher of this study did not find empirical articles studying the direct impact MCKV implementation had on the academic achievement of both homeless youth and foster youth.
Assembly Bill 490

Though MCKV was a federal mandate, the states were left to determine how to include foster youth in their definitions of “homeless” youth. California, for example, developed Assembly Bill 490 which required education agencies to designate a foster care education liaison to ensure proper school placement, facilitate enrollment for foster youth and ensure transfer of school records for foster youth (Shea, Zetlin, & Weinberg, 2009; Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). This comprehensive law took effect in January of 2004 and was designed to correct some of the educational problems foster youth experienced, which severely impacted their education outcomes. AB 490 required each educational program to have a foster youth liaison if they received funds to assist their foster youth population. One person at each high school site was supposed to be appointed as the foster youth liaison, and make all contact with the school district regarding their school’s foster population. AB 490 mandated foster students must be immediately enrolled regardless of insufficient health and education records. The bill mandated foster students could remain in their school of origin, if foster students moved out of this school’s boundary area. According to research by Shea et al. (2009), out of the ninety-four AB 490 liaisons who responded to their survey, 48 percent worked in districts or County Offices of Education (COEs) with fewer than 50 foster youth. Fifteen percent of these liaisons worked in districts or COEs with between 51 and 100 foster youth, and three percent worked in districts or COEs with more than 500 foster youth. Interestingly enough, six percent had no foster youth enrolled in their district or COE, and seven percent did not know how many foster youth were in their district or COE. The purpose of the research study by Shea et al. (2009) was to better understand the roles and duties
assigned to AB 490 liaisons, as a way to develop recommendations and improvements. This study brought about more awareness to AB 490, and the impact efficient training and support for AB 490 liaisons has on addressing the needs of foster students.

According to Hahnel and Van Zile (2012), AB 490 worked to increase educational stability within the lives of foster youth. The bill maintained that students in foster care had their course credits and grades protected when they transfer schools. Due to several school transfers, some foster students were missing classes, repeating courses, and losing grades. However, similar to AB 167/216, AB 490 did nothing to assist youth experiencing homelessness during their secondary education. This particular bill only benefited and made provisions for youth living in out-of-home care, or foster youth.

**Assembly Bill 1806**

Assembly Bill 1806 (2014) allowed homeless youth to graduate under similar provisions as AB 216 for foster youth. AB 1806 required a school district to exempt a homeless student who transfers between schools any time after the completion of the student’s second year of high school from all coursework and other district graduation requirements unless the school district finds the student can reasonably complete the school district graduation requirements in time to graduate from high school by the end of the student’s fourth year of high school. Furthermore, existing law allowed foster youth to remain in high school for a fifth year in order to complete graduation requirements were extended to homeless youth under AB 1806. This legislation further extended the law that school districts accepted and issued a student in foster care full or partial coursework satisfactorily completed in a public school, a juvenile court school, or a
nonpublic, nonsectarian school or agency, to a homeless student as defined by McKinney-Vento.

**Educational Barriers**

Homeless youth and foster youth experienced many barriers to their educational attainment. According to Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006), homeless youth were more likely to experience poor grades, educational disability, school behavior problems, low achievement test scores, truancy and increased school dropout as compared to the general school population. Similarly, foster youth were more likely than other youth not experiencing foster care or homelessness, to have had academic and behavioral problems in schools, higher rates of disciplinary referrals, grade retention and placement in special education classes, and lower performances in class and on standardized reading and mathematics tests (Shea, Zetlin & Weinberg, 2010).

Typically, these youth are far behind their peers academically, which causes them to exhibit behavioral problems in the classroom. For example, these youth may be embarrassed because they lack math skills that peers have, or they no longer remember how to write a proper essay due to their inconsistent school enrollment and mobility. These youth have experienced so many traumas, education is sadly one of the last areas to stabilize after safety, housing placement, mental health and nutrition (layn.org). These youth struggle in subjects such as math and English and it is possible that teachers passed them along every year instead of working to decrease deficiencies in their skill levels. Students that exemplify these behaviors are sent out of the classroom for yelling, being deviant, or causing other disruptions in the classroom, which means they end up in the discipline office, but they have escaped embarrassment and the lesson plan for the day.
Residency requirements, transportation and medical records were reasons why students experiencing homelessness and students placed in foster care could not enroll in school in a timely manner. Students’ impacted by homelessness often times did not have proof of residency due to instability with permanent housing. Homeless families may not have had safe storage for their personal documents such as social security cards, identification, health and medical records, and school transcripts. These families sometimes moved often and were limited in the amount of personal belongings they could carry, which meant items may be left behind, or lost while in transition. Furthermore, homeless unaccompanied youth may have been on the street fleeing from unsafe conditions and only had the clothing they were currently wearing. Districts usually required proof of residency upon enrollment, which created a barrier for many students living in-between homes (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006). A study by Rafferty (1999) focused on adolescents whom had been rehoused after they were homeless with their families, and compared them to adolescents in impoverished families whom had never experienced homelessness. The students who had never experienced homelessness fared better academically than their homeless peers. Rafferty’s study suggested future recommendations for homeless student assistance should be focused on strengthening national level policy in support of rehousing homeless families. The home life was so influential to a child’s school success and the stress of homelessness greatly diminished a child’s ability to succeed in school (Rafferty, 1999).
Health and Immunizations

Medical records were often lost as students and their families were frequently moving. A lack of health records presented an issue for both foster and homeless because schools required parents/guardians to produce these medical records upon enrollment. On the one hand, foster youth might have had the immunizations required for enrollment, however if proper paperwork was not sent by the social worker to their placement, students had to receive certain shots over again. Many foster youth were subjected to over-immunization because of this practice. For example, a foster youth may have been up to date on all immunizations, however without documentation or proof of these immunizations, they received several shots again so the school could have a record on file. Schools were required to ensure that all students enrolled were properly immunized, which meant that every time a foster youth enrolled in a school without immunization records, they were given thirty days to locate the records or get new vaccinations. On the other hand, homeless youth were possibly under immunized, or not immunized at all (Reganick, 1999). Mawhinney-Rhoads and Stahler (2006) found many schools across the United States required students to enroll with a parent or guardian, this generated a barrier for youth whom might have been staying with a non-guardian relative, and for youth trying to enroll in school whom are homeless unaccompanied minors. As previously mentioned in Chapter One, unaccompanied minors are youth navigating life, homeless or otherwise, separate from their parent or guardian. California was one of the only states that allowed unaccompanied youth to enroll in school without a guardian, while the school searched for the student’s caregiver (U.S Department of Education, 2002).
Other Social/Personal Problems

According to The Foster Care and the Health Care System, nearly half of all children in foster care had chronic medical problems. Foster care youth did have medical coverage through Medi-Cal, however the coverage was limited and might be terminated completely after a child left the system. Foster care alumni (FCs) have expressed experiencing medical issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, turning to substance abuse, depression, and anxiety disorders (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2008). Some foster youth engaged in health risk behaviors such as poor nutrition, inadequate physical activity, illicit tobacco use, drug use, and violence (Gramkowski, Khools, & Robbins, 2009). These medical problems and health risk behaviors became barriers to education for not only foster youth, but for homeless youth as well. Homeless youth faced a daunting battery of problems including: depression, low self-esteem, alcohol and/or drug abuse, antisocial behavior, trouble with law enforcement officials, survival sex, pregnancy, prostitution and sexually transmitted diseases (Reganick, 1999), and many foster youth faced similar problems as well. In a study by Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, and Nackerud (2000), 12 out of 12 participants in their study associated with peers involved with drugs, crime, sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, and other unhealthy behaviors. They stated homeless youth and foster youth suffered at the hands of pimps and drug dealers, which increased the possibility of contracting the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). In a study by Covenant House (2013), they found out of a sample of 174 youth ages 18-25 years old, 14.9 percent experienced some form of trafficking victimization consistent with the definition under federal law. Four participants in the research study reported being kidnapped before being forced into
prostitution, and described repeated unsuccessful attempts at escape. Furthermore, 48 percent of the sample said they engaged in commercial sex activity because they did not have a place to stay for the night. Pimps and other traffickers often loitered around youth shelters and homeless areas specifically targeting vulnerable youth (Girls Educational & Mentoring Services, 2015). Both homeless and foster youth populations were more vulnerable because they lacked financial resources, they were missing a positive caring adult in their lives, they lacked consistent access to education, had a history of sexual abuse and mistreatment, and lacked positive social capital.

**Transportation Issues**

Transportation was a huge barrier to students both in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness because a lack of transportation (i.e. bus pass, tokens, automobile, bicycle) severely impacted the attendance of these students, which in turn impacted their educational attainment (Mawhinney-Rhoads, 2011). Rafferty (1999) found transportation was one of the most frequently cited barriers to education. Even when transportation was provided, families experiencing poverty could not afford to take advantage of the provided services. Rafferty found the transportation was a Nationwide problem for homeless youth and was a consistent issue for foster youth as well.

Morton (2012) utilized interviews of 11 current or former foster youth that had plans to enroll in college to explore the perceptions of these students on the barriers, supports and strategies they were exposed to during their K-12 education. Morton identified thematic issues such as the issue of anger, abuse and disempowerment. This study enhanced the research specifically looking at educational policies because it
provided the perspective of former foster youth surrounding the barriers they faced during K-12 education.

**Student Mobility**

Student mobility is another educational barrier that has impacted both homeless youth and foster youth. According to Rumberger, Larson, Ream, and Palardy (1999), the practice of non-promotional school changes was called school mobility. Transience, or mobility, was said to be a condition of homelessness. Reganick (1997) stated without a sense of permanence and connection to community, neighbors, services, friends and schools, students found it difficult to generate long lasting and supportive relationships, or social capital. As a result of not having these relationships, they had no positive social capital that would provide access to community and permanence. Furthermore, the continued loss of personal possessions as a result of constant moving and mobility may have lead to destructive and aggressive behaviors many teachers see in their classrooms. Behaviors such as intimidation, yelling, foul language, violence, and threats against teachers and peers might be witnessed in the classroom. Reganick (1997) pointed out students experiencing homelessness often have inadequate social skills, such as difficulty sharing and over protectiveness of their limited belongings, insecurity about their substandard clothing, inability to practice good hygiene, and a tendency to develop inappropriate, overly friendly relationships with adults. In the classroom, for example, this type of student may be quiet and reserved, refuse to ask the teacher for academic help when struggling, but because a connection with a coach or a counselor had been made, this may lead to ditching the classroom to spend time with a ‘safe’ adult.
School mobility as it related to youth in foster care had a high impact on academic success. Rumberger et al. (1999) discussed the impact school mobility had on academics, and found students were less likely to complete high school if they were highly impacted by mobility. According to Burley and Halpern (2001), children in foster care experience instability as they are moved from placement to placement. With almost every placement change, foster youth may change schools. An Arizona study found foster youth had spent an average of 3.7 years in care and had an average of eight placements according to Gustavsson and MacEachron (2012). In California, about 70 percent of foster youth had three or more placements (Frerer, Sosenko, & Henke, 2013). Repeated school changes disrupted the educational process and hindered a foster child's ability to learn and succeed academically. Burley and Halpern’s (2001) research estimated foster students lost an average of four to six months of educational progress when they changed schools.

Another issue student mobility caused was education record issues. School records were often lost or are not transferred from school to school, in a timely manner. Often times this resulted in delays in student enrollment or difficulties in receiving needed services for students in special education. Moreover, a lack of continuity was apparent between schools as students adjusted to different curriculum and teachers, and many found they needed to repeat classes or lessons, or they had missed various credits and were severely behind (Burley & Halpern, 2001). School mobility due to disruptions to the home brought about negative implications on a child’s education, health care, and sense of normalcy. Rumberger et al. (1999) shared the voices of mothers concerned about the educational wellbeing of their children after several school moves. These mothers noticed changes in behavior, attitudes, and grades in their children when their family initiated
moves. Students suffered psychologically, socially, and academically from high mobility. Gustavsson and MacEachron (2012) found in their research repeated school changes are linked to grade retention and school behavioral problems. Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) stated poverty coupled with frequent mobility and homelessness directly related to health, emotional, behavioral and academic difficulties among homeless students. The researchers went on to say homeless students were more likely to experience stress, depression, anxiety, worries, a sense of isolation, withdrawal, aggression, antisocial behavior, and substance use. Those experiences could be a pipeline to incarceration for homeless youth.

**Homeless Youth to Prison Pipeline**

Youth who were no longer under the care of a stable adult or program were susceptible to at-risk behavior. According to a study by Gwadz, Gostnel, Smolenski, Willis, Nish, Nolan, Tharaken, and Ritchie (2009), homeless youth entered the street economy through criminal activity such as selling drugs, stealing and sex work. Sex work for example, was typically thought to include male youth pimping younger females, however, an interesting statistic was found when the researchers looked more closely at sex work or sex trafficking. They found females are more likely than males to get involved in pimping someone. The researchers also found out of the 80 homeless youth between the ages of 14 and 23 interviewed in their study, 76.3 percent of homeless youth had been picked up by the police and 58 percent of them had been incarcerated, in jail or a detention center. In that study, they found males, more than females, found themselves incarcerated. Though juveniles were enrolled in the education facilities, they earned continuation style credits via one unit at a time, if they even decided to earn any credits at
all. This negatively impacted their educational outcome, because juveniles may have fallen behind in credits and may have lost the motivation to do well and succeed in school. Those youth now faced barriers to entering the formal economy due to education limits, homelessness itself, past incarcerations, and substance abuse.

**Academic Preparation and College**

Low high school graduation rates, for example, impacted the number of students that matriculated onto college and eventually into the workforce. According to the Black Board Institute, 1.3 million high school students dropped out every year, and of the students who went on to college, nearly a third dropped out after their first year, and 50 percent never graduated. Those numbers were certainly alarming because an educated population was reported to make fewer demands on social services and on governmental aids (Blackboard Institute, 2014). Gustavsson and MacEachron (2012) went on to report only 20 percent of foster care youth who graduated from high school, attended college; as compared to 60 percent of their non-foster care peers. Some foster youth refused to see education as a way to escape a life of poverty, crime, and drugs, and those youth did not seek post-secondary options such as college or trade school. For example, many foster youth glorified street life or rap careers because their friends, role models, or means of social capital came from similar backgrounds and made a living selling drugs or creating mix-tapes showcasing their rap skills. Many of foster youth struggled to graduate from high school and were not typically on counselors’ “college bound” lists receiving information and help with college and post-secondary options. Researchers in a study by Frerer et al. (2013) matched 4,000 foster youth with 4,000 non-foster peers and examined academic risk in post-secondary options. The research found that “despite equally low
levels of achievement, foster youth lag behind other at-risk youth in high school completion, community college enrollment, and college persistence” (Frerer et al., 2013, p. 9). Foster youth and homeless youths’ under enrollment in postsecondary options was one of the long-term consequences of poor academic experiences. For example, the public school graduation rate in the United States was 78 percent and in California, it was 68 percent in 1998. By 2010, the general population graduation rate was 79 percent, and the graduation rate for foster youth was 45 percent (Frerer et al., 2013). According to Frerer et al. (2013), foster youth in California graduated, enrolled in community college and persisted in college at lower rates than non-foster youth did, and many did not fare any better in the employment sector. This negatively impacts the community and the business sector as more foster youth are less education and less prepared to add income and labor into the community.

According to Courtney and Dworsky (2010), 32 percent of foster youth, ages eighteen to twenty, were neither employed nor in school, as compared to 12 percent of nineteen year olds in the general population. This particular group of foster youth was not employed or in school ended up on the streets, in transitional living programs or stayed with multiple friends moving from place to place. The research found emotional and economic issues due to the lack of stability. According to Courtney, Terao, and Bost (2005), though many of the youth were eligible for General Relief and depending on their medical history, Social Security benefits, former foster youth earned significantly less than their same-age peers with over 75 percent of those youth earning less than $5,000 a year and 90 percent earning less than $10,000 a year. The gap may have been attributed to their limited education (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2005).
Special Education Enrollment

Gustavesson and MacEachron (2012) discussed serious educational problems affecting foster youth as well as homeless youth nationwide. These problems discussed included: grade retention, graduation rates, special education enrollment, student mobility, behavior and health problems, and academic performance. As homelessness increased within the youth population, there was an increase in special education enrollment for example. “The National Working Group on Foster Care and Education (2008) indicated that about 23 percent to 47 percent of school-age foster children received special education services at some time, in comparison to the 12 percent annual rate for all school-age children” (Gustavesson & MacEachron, 2012, p. 84). Many of these youth were not in need of special education services, but were so severely behind their grade level due to constant movement during their school year, special education classification was sometimes inevitable. For example, on a basic skills test administered in Iowa almost half of foster youth scored in the bottom quartile and were classified as learning disabled (Gustavesson & MacEachron, 2012). Gustavesson and MacEachron (2012) showed the educational wellbeing of foster youth and certain school policies specifically targeted foster and homeless youth such as McKinney-Vento, Fostering Connects Act of 2008, and No Child Left Behind, could have helped alleviate many of the issues those students experienced in school. They discussed the child welfare system and its connection with schools, foster youth, and homeless youth. The child welfare system informs the schools when a foster child is leaving a school due to a placement change. The social worker, in some cases, is allowed to speak to the child on campus if
they are investing a case, and the social worker is involved in school progress and academic needs of the child.

**Choosing to Leave Foster Care**

Emancipated youth or kids who turn eighteen and chose to leave foster care, could end up as homeless. Foster youth who did not extend their foster care rights through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (AB12), which allowed the court to extend foster care passed the age of 18, had the task of surviving on their own. These youth had to find shelter, employment, educational services, and healthcare on their own after DCFS had provided opportunities to secure many of those needs. According to Courtney and Dworsky (2010), for 29,500 young people who aged out of foster care, finding a safe and affordable place to live was one of their major challenges. For example, a foster youth could be accepted to a four year university, and drop out before they get there due to homelessness in the summer before their fall semester. In a Midwest Study looking at transition aged youth and an extended foster care system, Courtney and Dworsky (2010) found that by age 23 or 24, just under 30 percent of the young people surveyed, reported they had been homeless at least for one night since exiting foster care. “Approximately 6 percent of the Midwest Study participants became homeless within the first month after exiting foster care, 14 percent became homeless within the first year, and 20 percent became homeless within the first 2 years” (Courtney & Dworsky, 2010, p. 4).

As previously stated high student mobility and homelessness severely impacted young adolescents’ educational success. In California, at the age when young people attended college, many foster youth were faced with finding a place to live.
**Homeless Youth Who Chose to Leave the Streets**

Raleigh-DuRoff’s (2004) qualitative research study utilized interviews and found out what factors influenced young homeless adults to leave the streets. Some of the motivating factors included: the help of others, the help of organizations, hope, adolescents’ dreams, the fulfillment of needs, and information for example. The article shed light on young people who were homeless at one point, the reasoning behind becoming homeless, and what influenced these individuals to get off of the streets. According to Raleigh-DuRoff, support organizations and the support of family, friends, and professionals helped homeless youth leave the streets. Participants in the study revealed support organizations provided youth services which included educational support, connections, and counseling. Many of the youth learned life skills and employment training that assisted them in maintaining life off of the street. Friends, family and professionals helped youth with a place to stay; motivated youth to finish their education and leave the streets, and social work professionals in group homes and emergency shelters offered homeless youth case management. Raleigh-DuRoff discussed the reasoning behind why some young adults chose to remain on the streets: freedom, limited success, and distrust of authority.

**Homeless Youth Who Chose to Remain on the Streets**

Homeless adolescents chose to remain on the streets for the following reasons: freedom, community, no chance for success, and a distrust of authority. Though the study utilized a small population, it might have been possible to generalize the findings to other areas of study and homeless youth. Raleigh-DuRoff (2004) pointed out internal factors were the key pieces explaining ways to break down barriers to sustained homelessness.
The participants of the study shared many of them experienced freedom and community on the street and felt like they belonged to their street family as opposed to their families at home. Many of the youth stayed on the streets because they believed they had no chance of success due to mental illness, excessive drug use or they were too young to get a job. Participants shared they stayed on the streets due to distrust of authority such as parents, bosses, and police. Lastly, the study uncovered homeless youth stayed on the streets because of the sense of adventure. For example, a youth in the study shared that selling drugs for money was fun and adventurous.

**Dysfunctional Home Situation**

Whitebeck, Hoyt, and Yoder’s (1999) research found many homeless and runaway adolescents experienced abuse and highly dysfunctional families, which may have lead homeless adolescents to refuse to return home. The youth often experienced physical and sexual abuse directly from caretakers and the abuse negatively impacted the view of home life and safety. According to Whitebeck et al. (1999), 16 percent of adolescent boys and 10 percent of girls had been hit with fists by their caretakers, while caretakers have sexually abused 15 percent of girls. Whitebeck and colleagues found homeless youth and runaways had less supportive parents and guardians, and had higher levels of parent/guardian rejection. Those findings did not include homeless adolescents who refused to return back to homeless guardians.

**Former Foster and Homeless Children**

For the sake of this study and as previously mentioned, adults who have experienced homelessness as a child according to the definition of MCKV and were not in foster care, were referred to as a Non Foster Child (NFC). Adults who were foster
children and received services from the Department of Children and Family Services at some point between birth and 18 years of age were referred to as a Foster Child (FC) (Lenz-Rashid, 2006). Though safe shelter and transitional living services provided instruction on money management, employability, daily living skills and sound judgment were making a difference in homeless youth’s lives, it was important to understand many FCs and NFCs struggled with completing high school while they were dealing with homelessness or foster care due to barriers to their education such as: transportation issues, low academic skills, school mobility, health and immunizations, and documents issues.

**Gaps in the Literature**

This review of the literature found a gap regarding how academic success for homeless and foster youth is impacted by policies in place to assist these populations. There was research on educational policies which impacted each at-risk group separately, but despite the interest in homeless and foster youth, little had been researched about the impact educational policies has had on both former foster and homeless youth and their academic success in the form of high school completion. Research was limited on the impact of AB 1806 for homeless youth in high school, interventions, and resources which included perceptions of youth in regard to their own needs. Homeless youth were the most experienced and well-informed experts in regard to their own strengths, challenges, needs, and goals. Foster youth understood firsthand the difficulties foster care placed on their shoulders. Both homeless and foster youth should be active participants in all collaborative and youth-serving efforts (Julianelle, 2007). This study addressed those
gaps by speaking with former foster and former homeless youth and uncovered how educational policies helped or hindered their academic success.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, polices that only provided assistance to one group, either the homeless population, or the foster youth population, continued to generate barriers to the other group’s education. Research illustrated former foster care youth (FCs) and former homeless (NFCs) youth did, in fact, understand many of the difficulties current foster and homeless youth faced. This was the reasoning behind the support of policy makers utilizing the knowledge and experience of FCs and NFCs to understand what worked and positively impacted their success in high school, and what did not. School administrators, teachers, and policy makers needed to be more involved in influencing policies perpetuating the success of both foster youth and homeless youth. The purpose of this study was to understand how institutional policies impacted academic success in high school for former homeless and foster youth as one population.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Research Purpose

The purpose of this multi-case study was to understand the K-12 educational experiences of former foster and homeless youth as they were impacted by academic policies. This study utilized those experiences to identify specific educational policies that were used to contribute to the understanding of academic support for current foster and homeless youth. Data collected from interviews and document reviews were analyzed, looking for themes that emerged from data collection. Recommendations were made for the improvement of educational policies for homeless and foster youth in K-12 education, utilizing themes that emerged from the data. The educational policies consistently suggested by the participants and the literature review greatly influenced the recommendations.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study asked: How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, or high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts? How do the services and practices of support agencies impact the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? How does social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success?
Chapter Organization

The researcher began the methodology section by describing the research design and tradition. The study included a discussion on the setting and context of the research. The study was conducted in a large urban city in southern California. The characteristics of the participants were described. The researcher went on to describe the research data sample and design. A case study approach with elements of grounded theory was used to investigate the perceptions former foster and homeless youth had towards educational policies designed to assist them in their academic success. The researcher described the methods of data collection, which included a former foster and homeless youth interview protocol and document analysis. The interview protocol was described in detail and the interviewer explained how the protocol was administered to the participant. Lastly, the research concluded with an analysis of the role of the researcher as it related to this study.

Research Tradition and Design

Research Tradition

Grounded theory was chosen as the research tradition in hopes of providing a guiding framework to further research on the educational policies for homeless and foster youth. Grounded theory was a systematic procedure used to generate a theory which explained a process, an action or an interaction about a substantive topic (Creswell, 2012). Historically, grounded theory had been defined as a set of interrelated propositions in an organized way that was deducible by others (Glesne, 2011). Charmaz (2008) stated grounded theory had four tenets 1) minimizing preconceived notions about the data and research problem 2) simultaneously using data collection and analysis to inform each
other 3) continuing to be open to varied explanations or understandings of the data, and
4) focusing data analysis to construct middle-range theories. This allowed an explanation
to be developed for the phenomenon under examination. The ultimate function of
grounded theory was to explain and predict through constant comparative analysis
(Glesne, 2011). Charmaz (2008) spoke to researchers using grounded theory to ensure
emergent theories were generated from the data, account for the data, and were not
forced. Moreover, grounded theory was a research tradition used to explain an
educational process, high school completion, for educational populations that included
foster and homeless youth. Elements from the grounded theory tradition included
theoretical sampling of different groups to highlight similarities and differences of
information and looked at data surrounding the social process of educating foster and
homeless youth (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For this research study, the researcher
chose to not focus on quantitative data addressing academic success as it relates to
homeless and foster youth, but to take a qualitative approach to research. The low
percentages of foster and homeless youth completing high school via a high school
diploma or GED had been addressed in some capacity with quantitative research. A
qualitative approach used the perspectives of former foster and homeless youth to
contribute to the change in educational policy for this group of students. The researcher
did not utilize observations or focus groups as a part of the methodology of this research
as was suggested to use in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2011). Observations were a great
tool to gain open-ended, firsthand information by observing people at a research site
(Creswell, 2011), and focus groups could be used to collect shared understanding from
several former homeless and foster youth (Creswell) however, this study focused on
participants and their past interaction with educational policies, which meant that observations were not suitable for this study. Participants came from different high school backgrounds that may not have experienced a shared understanding of educational policies, which may have stifled focus groups. Moreover, literature supported the use of one-on-one interviews for this type of study due to the confidential information shared (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004).

In order to understand how educational policies impacted high school completion for foster and homeless youth, the former foster youth and former homeless youth perspective was key in this multi-case study. The research uncovered specific educational policies that were beneficial to participants despite certain constraints and qualifications. It was important to uncover barriers to the participants’ education and the policies in place which helped or hindered their success in grades nine through twelve.

**Research Design**

The case study focused on adults who either experienced homelessness during their high school education or were in foster care at any point during that educational period. This study used a grounded theory tradition in addition to a case study design as a way to understand the perceptions of those involved, and utilized emergent themes to directly influence policy, practice, and future research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Those cases allowed the researcher to understand the educational experiences of former foster and homeless youth and the impact that state and federal policies had on their education. This research explored the positive and negative educational experiences of both former foster and homeless youth to improve academic achievement for current foster and homeless youth. Using a case study methodology helped to understand the
complexity of these two groups with the goal to build knowledge that could be applied in similar contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The research utilized a qualitative approach and a case study design. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used semi-structured interviews and document review. Semi-structured interviews were used because they allowed the researcher to uncover rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives to inform emergent themes. Similarly, public and private documents were reviewed and provided valuable information to the research study (Creswell, 2012).

**Research Setting and Context**

**Site Demographics**

Data for this study was collected in a large urban city in California from participants living or working in the city that fit the criterion of the study. Data was collected at Sunrise Transitional Living Program (a pseudonym). Sunrise, a seventeen-bed facility, was located in a large urban city in southern California. Sunrise offered a two-story seven-bedroom house, equipped with couches, dining room table and flat screen television to transitional living residents. The residents shared rooms with two to three occupants and had access to one computer, kitchen appliances, and laundry facilities.

Sunrise assisted 16-21 year old youth in need of housing, employment training and opportunities, educational advancement and life skills. At Sunrise there were six males, and seven females. Fifty percent of the residents were African American, and 50 percent were Latino.
The young adults in the program at Sunrise could participate for up to 18 months, however each resident was required to be actively involved in educational advancement through vocational or college classes and gaining employment experiences through job coaches, internship opportunities and employment options. In the transitional living program, all of the residents experienced homelessness and had lived in emergency shelters or other transitional living programs.

**Site Selection**

This site was selected based on a criterion and snowball sampling of the participants. According to Miles & Huberman (1994), when all cases met some criterion, which was useful for quality assurance, this was criterion sampling. In addition to criterion sample, this research used snowball sampling, which identified participants through other participants’ referrals, or individuals that were interested, but did not meet the research qualifications. The researcher selected participants from the transitional living program, the staff of the program, and from the surrounding city based on the population criterion. The site and larger city was home to many individuals that had experienced homelessness or foster care during their educational career. The focus of the study was to understand the perceptions of individuals that fit the criterion of the study in order to understand academic success of current foster and homeless youth. Therefore it was appropriate to select a site that had a large concentration of adults that experienced homelessness or foster care. The rationale for selecting this site was 1) these individuals were more inclined to help current high school students who experienced the same trauma brought on because of their living situation and 2) these participants held
pertinent information in regards to educational policies that worked with them towards high school completion.

**Access and Research Roles**

The researcher gained access to this site as the former educational specialist for the Sunrise Shelter that serviced homeless youth in the organization, as a Doctoral Candidate, and as a researcher. The researcher was unfamiliar about homeless youth or foster youth before they worked in the field as an educational liaison. This position allowed the researcher to identify several different transitional living programs in southern California that specifically work with homeless youth and former foster youth transitioning to adulthood. The researcher had connections to the director of Sunrise and access to participants because the director allowed the gate to open. Since the researcher was allowed access to this population, the researcher believed their position as an advocate for homeless rights in education granted trust and respect with the participants. Selected participants were more inclined to share with the researcher because of their current role and advocacy for youth currently in high school and middle school. The researcher explained the intent of the research and purpose for the study to the residential manager of the transitional living program. The researcher explained the intent and purpose for the study to the residents and staff of Sunrise, which was to understand how policies directly impacted foster and homeless youth in high school.

**Sample and Data Sources**

Since the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of educational policy on homeless and foster youth’s academic success from the perspective for foster care and homeless alumni, the data sources needed to reflect those participants as well as those
policies. The data sources included six former foster and former homeless youth, the process of graduating from high school, and federal policies designed to assist homeless and foster youth in successfully graduating high school. The types of data the researcher collected included semi-structured interviews and review of federal public documents which instruct school districts on how to assist homeless and foster youth throughout their educational processes.

This study used a mixed sampling strategy which included criterion sampling and snowball sampling. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated criterion sampling was a strategy used to identify and recruit participants and required all cases to meet a criterion. The criterion for selection in this study was participants must be graduates of high school or have attained a GED (tests of general educational development) and had been homeless or in the foster care system during their K-12 education. McKinney-Vento (2001) defined homelessness as any person lacking a fixed, safe and stable living environment. A person was homeless if they inhabited any areas not suitable for living such as an abandon building, park bench or a car. A youth in the foster care system was placed in out-of-home care under the custody of the Department of Family and Children Services.

The researcher was interested in speaking to different individuals who experienced school policies that influenced their access to educational attainment. The researcher sought to uncover the factors impacted their success throughout high school as foster and homeless youth. The researcher used a snowball strategy to identify cases of interest from foster and homeless alumni and from people who know people who meet the criterion of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The population for the sample in this study experienced emergency shelters, other transitional living programs, or life
circumstances which caused them to be homeless. Many of them were former foster youth, which meant they had out-of-home care, had been detained by the state, or lived in a foster home or group home. This population was vulnerable because they experienced high trauma throughout adolescence and many of them were still unstable. The community has become more aware of the disadvantages these homeless and foster alumni faced through the recent news about DCFS, high dropout rates, and college retention.

The researcher contacted the director of the Sunrise Shelter to explain the study in detail and request permission to access to their transitional living program participants. The residents in the Sunrise Shelter were 18-22 years of age. With permission granted, the researcher asked the manager of the program to help identify participants. The researcher requested to be present at a house meeting so she could introduce herself to the residents and staff, explain the study, and leave her contact information. The researcher asked the residents and staff inform their friends about the request for participants. Then the researcher put up a flyer in the shelter to inform the employees and solicited their participation if they meet the criterion until six participants agreed to interview for this study. The researcher was going to post a flyer on Craigslist to enlist more participants in the larger urban community if the participant numbers were too low for the study.

This sampling strategy was appropriate because the database which had information about foster youth and former foster youth was only accessible through the Department of Children and Family Services and was confidential. The database that kept records of students experiencing homelessness was only accessible through the local school district and that information, like the foster information, was confidential, and the
researcher did not have access to either database. Individuals identified themselves and other people with their permission to participate in the study, which supported the criterion and snowball strategies for this study. Overall the researcher contacted ten participants and six agreed to participate in the study. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 51 years old. There were two males and four females. Two of the participants were African American, three were Hispanic, and one participant was Asian and Pacific Islander.

The researcher selected the documents to review through a mixture of criterion and snowball sampling. The criteria included education policies that specifically addressed homeless youth and education, or foster youth and education. The researcher used the snowball strategy to seek out educational policy relevant to participants and their experiences they shared with the researcher. For example, if one participant mentioned a policy that had not yet been researched, the researcher included the policy in the literature review.

The ethical concerns in this study surrounded the issue of confidentiality. Many of the participants had not informed their peers or colleagues they were once homeless or apart of the DCFS system. This was confidential information some may attach a negative stigma. In an effort to ensure confidentiality with all of the participants, the researcher clarified how they protected the identity of each participant. Though some participants may have been open about their past or even current experiences, the researcher protected the identity of all participants. The other ethical concern the researcher had was with interviewing colleagues. The researcher needed to clarify how participation in this study
did not jeopardize their current employment. Participants’ information and confidentiality was secured away from the place of employment.

**Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instruments used in this study included an informed consent form and a semi-structured interview protocol which were developed under case study and grounded theory traditions. Using a criterion and snowball sample strategy, participants who had completed high school and had experienced homelessness or foster care were interviewed. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used semi-structured interviews because they uncovered rich personal accounts, perceptions and perspectives.

**Interview Protocol**

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews. Six participants were interviewed in one-on-one sessions. The interview protocol consisted of 22 questions asking about their high school experiences and their experience while they were in foster care or homeless. The interview protocol was placed in the Appendix C. The interview protocol included a brief description of the study. Following the description, the questions included in the protocol stem from the research questions and come from the grounded theory tradition. For example, participants were asked what educational policies they knew about during their education school career. They were asked about the barriers they faced while in school. Participants were asked about the resources available to them during high school and how did they utilize those resources. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the educational policies in place to help them during their high school career as well. Based upon the responses to these
questions, other probing questions were asked to clarify, expand and reflect on participants’ responses.

**Data Collection Procedures**

**Interviews**

Using a criterion and snowball sample strategy, participants who had completed high school and had experienced homelessness or foster care were interviewed. Once selected as a participant, they were contacted via email or phone to schedule an appointment. All interviews were conducted at a convenient and comfortable location for the interview participant such as a coffee shop. The interview lasted 45-60 minutes and was recorded using an audio digital recording device. The researcher took notes on a printed copy of the interview protocol, pointing out non-verbal behavior such as body language and facial expressions. The researcher conducted six interviews, and scheduled one interview a day. The semi-structured interview and transcription process took over three months to complete.

Before the start of the interview, the researcher reviewed the protocol, the informed consent form, and answered any questions the participants had. Once the informed consent form was signed, the researcher began the interview starting with a short reminder of what the research study was about. The first interview question was an easy to answer open-ended and set the tone for the interviewee. This was a grand tour question (Glesne, 2011). Throughout the remainder of the interview, the researcher asked main questions and probing questions where needed to ensure the research questions were being addressed. The questions were written to gain insight into former foster youth and homeless youth’s perceptions on educational policies. For example, a question in the
interview asked participants how many high schools they attended throughout their entire high school career. The interview protocol asked how quickly their transcripts and academic records were transferred to their new school. Participants were asked how many classes they had to repeat due to missing records. The protocol asked a series of demographic questions such as their age and ethnicity, and questions about the use of certain educational policies during participants’ high school education. Educational policies such as Assembly Bill 216 for example, were used to allow foster youth who had moved schools more than twice during their 11th and 12th grade years the provision to graduate under California’s minimum standards of 130 credits. Lastly, the interview protocol asked participants about their knowledge as it pertains to AB 216 and other federal policies. The researcher transcribed each interview as close to the date of each scheduled interview as possible, as a way to ensure fresh thoughts for the purpose of coding and thematic organizing.

**Document Review**

Lastly, the researcher conducted a document review of all policies mentioned in the interviews and in the literature review. They sought out key points such as dates when policies were implemented, which population the policies stated they would address, and the way in which schools implemented those policies. Documents were collected and used to complete the data collection matrix looking for codes and themes utilizing the social capital conceptual framework. The researcher found relevant information through what the participants mentioned and data that supported or refuted data gathered in the literature review.
Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic Data Analysis

The process of data analysis began with preliminary data analysis, which included reading interview transcripts and document data multiple times. The researcher identified sections of the transcripts that reflected a theme, and notations were made to record those idea. According to Glesne (2011), data analysis done simultaneously with data collection allowed the researcher to focus and shape the study as it goes forth. The researcher constantly reflected on the data as it was collected by memo writing and having a colleague review the continued work. This allowed the researcher to be open to new data points, new avenues they did not originally think about, and categorize data gathered into themes found in the literature.

Interview Data

The primary data collection procedure in this study was one-on-one semi-structured interviews with participants who were former foster or homeless youth. The researcher utilized the literature review to derive themes and codes specific to homeless youth, foster youth, foster youth education policies, level of implementation and graduation rates. The researcher used themes and codes uncovered through the examination of previous studies in the literature review as a guide to the generation of additional codes for the study. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher using naturalized transcription, redacting any personal identifying information from transcripts and coded soon after to ensure the data was fresh in their mind. These interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word and assigned a random digit to de-identify transcripts. The researcher used open coding and organized the data by color codes and themes in a
data collection matrix. Thematic analysis focused certain techniques to comb through the data for themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011). The researcher coded the data and put pieces together to formulate a theory or a critical change in policy. The emergent themes were interpreted through the guided codes from the literature review.

**Document Data**

The second procedure included a document review of educational policies directly related to foster youth as well as homeless youth. The researcher reviewed the McKinney-Vento Act of 2001, Assembly Bill 167/216, Assembly Bill 490, Assembly Bill 1806 and created a document analysis matrix of themes and codes found within these policies. The researcher looked for key points such as the date when policies were implemented, which population policies are said to address, and the ways in which schools implemented these policies. Documents were used to complete the data collection matrix looking for codes and themes utilizing the social capital conceptual framework. The researcher looked for relevant information participants mentioned, or data supporting or refuting data previously gathered.

**Data Connections**

Following the thematic document analysis, data connections were made across interview transcriptions and the document review matrix. According to Glesne (2011), all data needed to be described in a meaningful way for the reader. Key themes emerged from the data were transformed into what is called analysis. Analysis described how certain themes across data connections relate to one another (Glesne, 2011). Lastly, the researcher drew conclusions from the data through interpretation. This interpretation was guided through the social capital lens and conceptual framework.
In this study, there was one sole researcher, writer and advocate. At the start of this research, professionally, the researcher worked daily with homeless and foster youth. They took time and enrolled the youth into local schools and communicated with the schools to ensure educational policies were implemented on their behalf. The researcher advocated for those youth and their rights as homeless and foster youth. The researcher educated the youth on financial aid for college, A-G requirements for high school completion, and educational policies directly impacting them. As this study was conducted, the researcher was also a doctoral candidate and an educational professional, which meant they had academic and scholarly obligations to the field of education.

**Researcher Roles**

**Researcher Bias**

The researcher made a few assumptions about how educational policies and procedures impacted the academics of homeless and foster youth. As an advocate for homeless and foster students in schools, the researcher believed 1) homeless youth were more likely to succeed if they had more policies help and assist their educational attainment during the 9th-12th grade years 2) many of the policies and procedures in place for foster youth could apply to homeless youth and the issues they faced in school 3) homeless and foster youth experienced similar issues and therefore were more at risk of being pushed out than their peers 4) schools were not fully aware of the difficulties homeless youth and foster youth face and therefore needed improvement and 5) homeless youth and foster youth were able to be successful due to factors such as home assistance, community resources, or a friend’s help.
Effects of the Researcher on the Case

Before the researcher became an education specialist, she was unaware these populations needed so much help in the current school system. The researcher believed her position in a homeless/foster youth shelter, allowed her to build rapport quickly as the participants trusted her role as a researcher. According to Glesne (2011), rapport was a relation characterized by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity and coupled with a willingness to cooperate. Participants were more inclined to share with the researcher because of her prior employment as an education specialist for the Sunshine Shelter and advocate for homeless and foster youth education.

The researcher’s position has allowed her to see how foster youth benefit more from policies than homeless youth and the researcher had to control for this bias. They wrote memos throughout the research process as a way to reflect on personal issues and questions that came up in the research (Glesne, 2011). The researcher used their peers to help check interview questions, as a way to catch any leading questions. When interviewing participants, the researcher was careful to limit affirmative actions and positive or negative reactions to their responses.

Effects of the Case on the Researcher

The participants in this study answered in ways the researcher did not think about, which affected the way the data was interpreted. The researcher needed to be sure they were catching themes that emerged from the data, not themes they hoped would emerge. The researcher did not only focus on interviews from former foster and homeless youth (Raleigh-DuRoff, 2004), but they utilized document analysis (Jackson, O’Brian & Pecora, 2001; Lenz-Rashid, 2006). The researcher interviewed participants outside of
their home or work environment to help participants feel as comfortable as possible while discussing personal themes that did and did not arise during the interview. With those strategies the researcher hoped to address biases that had the potential to affect the data.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the methods of the study and research role. This qualitative research study mixed grounded theory and case study designs to understand how educational policies and procedures impacted the academic of homeless and foster youth. In the following chapters, the research will address the findings of the study, discuss recommendations for future research and conclude this study.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter explored the results and findings of the research study. The following research questions were discussed: How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts? How have the services and practices of support agencies impacted the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? How does social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success? The research questions addressed in this chapter utilized the findings from the data gathered through the methodological means of the study.

The researcher collected data utilizing a mixed grounded theory and case study approach. Grounded theory was one of the research traditions used to explain the educational process, or high school completion, for educational populations such as foster and homeless youth (Creswell, 2012). A case study approach, with elements of grounded theory was used to investigate the perceptions former foster and homeless youth had towards educational policies designed to assist them with academic success during their secondary education. The researcher used open coding in this study because it involved a systematic analytic approach in grounded theory that generated categories and coded them, which provided closer attention to similarities, themes and differences between sections. The pertinent education policies emerged from the data were organized in a data matrix (See Table 4.1). Transcriptions of all six interviews were color-coded and
organized on a separate document that included the following sections: Policy, Research Question One, Research Question Two, Research Question Three, Determination, and Difficulty. This research study combined a grounded theory approach with a case study analysis of the data searching for themes, patterns or issues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

The researcher utilized charts generated as a result of data collection and analyses. Data sources included participants’ demographic information, in-depth interviews, and document review. The data found in this study shed light upon issues of homelessness, transiency and educational outcomes, educational barriers, and how useful educational policies specifically addressing homeless youth and foster youth were for the participants of this research study. The purpose of the study was to help fill in the gap of research that did not focus on how federal and state policies may inform academic success for both foster and homeless youth as one at-risk population. There were six findings of this research study:

**Theme result 1:** Participation in the foster care system accompanies homelessness during K-12 education years or schooling.

**Theme result 2:** Participants experienced schools that implemented the use of policy AB 490 and McKinney-Vento, though AB 216 was not used for any participants in this study.

**Theme result 3:** Overall, participants had a support system in place during their high school experience through a close friend, support agency, family member, or coach.

**Theme result 4:** Participants benefited from positive social capital through their experiences as a homeless or foster youth.

**Theme result 5:** Participants in the foster care system and homeless youth wanted to pursue a Master’s Degree, and three wanted to pursue a doctoral degree.
**Theme result 6:** Academic challenges in school relate to instability in home situation, school mobility, missing school records, missing health records, and transportation hardships.

The remainder of this chapter addressed participant’s demographic information and those specific education policies that emerged from the data. Findings of the study were in detail. Lastly, a brief summary concluded the findings section of the research study.

**Participants’ Demographic Information**

The demographic information collected for each participant in this research study included gender, age, ethnicity, number of high schools attended, and foster or homeless experience. Table 4.0 presented this data gathered from the study. A pseudonym and initials were given to each participant.

Table 4.0

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>ETHNICITY a</th>
<th>FOSTER CARE</th>
<th>HOMELESSNESS</th>
<th># OF HIGH SCHOOLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AFRICAN AM</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>AFRICAN AM</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>LATINA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 (1 GED Program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANG</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>ASIAN AM/PACIFIC ISLANDER</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HISPANIC</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>LATINA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Ethnicity descriptors were given by participants*

As presented in Table 4.0, there were six participants. Of the participants, about 2/3 percent were female and 1/3 percent were male. The average age of the participants
was 33. In regard to ethnic diversity, three participants were Hispanic/Latina; two participants were African American; and one participant was Asian American and Pacific Islander. The average number of high schools participants attended was four. Regarding homeless or foster care experience, four experienced both homelessness and foster care; one participant experienced homelessness; and one experienced foster care with no homeless experiences.

According to Creswell (2012), interviews will play a vital role in the collection of data in a grounded theory study. The researcher used each interview to uncover the experiences and perceptions former homeless (NFC) and foster youth (FC) had regarding educational policies specifically designed for foster and homeless youth in schools. Only participants who were comfortable expressing their thoughts in regards to these policies and their experiences in high school were interviewed. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), interviews, in a qualitative study, were said to usually be the major source of the data needed for understanding the phenomenon under review. The quotations used from interviews aimed to accurately represent the participants’ experiences and realities.

Exploring Research Question One

**Theme result 1: Participation in the foster care system accompanies homelessness during K-12 education years or schooling.**

The primary finding of the study was the majority the participants who experienced foster care during their K-12 education, experienced homelessness as well. This finding demonstrated in this particular study, the majority of the former foster population was the homeless population. Based upon participant interviews, there
appeared to be a large overlap between the former homeless (FC) population and the former foster youth (NFC) population.

When asked if the participants had experienced homelessness or foster care Participant NR said, “Uh a little bit of both. Mostly DCFS but after I turned 18 I was homeless for a little bit.” This participant was in foster care during her K-12 education, and became homeless when she turned 18. Even though she did choose to extend her foster care rights past the age of 18, her placement would not allow her to stay as an 18 year old.

Participant CA stated, “I experienced homelessness.” This participant was never a participant in the foster care system. She became homeless during her high school years after a disagreement with her parental figure over her sexual orientation.

Participant GO said, “In my life, yes. At the age of 5, I was put in the system until the age of 11.5.” This participant did not experience homelessness and was one of the only participants to be removed from foster care services before reaching high school.

Participant ANG shared, “Um, I experienced both.” She is referring to being in the foster care system and being homeless. She experienced these two difficulties at separate times in her life, but they both impacted her academic success.

Participant BK shared with the researcher, “…my scenario was slightly different from others for the fact that I was relative care” and when asked if he was ever homeless he went on to say, “Um yea, not necessarily homelessness. I mean I guess you can state that yea, but you know you have friends and stuff like that where you can crash with for like a good period of time, well I didn’t really look at it as homeless you know what I mean” (Participant BK).
Lastly, Participant PAS had this to say:

So, um I turned 18 in my 12th grade year in school and um when I turned 18 my foster mother came to me and said, “We no longer have a check for you and you have to leave.” And I said, and I was still in high school. So my birthday was in November, school wasn’t over until the following year in June. So I am on my birthday, 27th of November homeless.

His story is similar to Participant NR, as they were both asked to leave their foster placements when they reached 18 years of age.

All four FCs described their perception of the homelessness and foster care during their secondary education and what they described as the difficulty, embarrassment, and uncertainty they went through. Participant PAS shared what it was like to be a highly recruited basketball player in high school, and not have a place to live. He commented, “I had a green trash bag with my clothes in it and because I could play a little bit of basketball…I had a trash bag full of letters from major colleges.” He went on to share his experience interacting with his sister already living on the street, and his life in foster care:

I questioned myself all the time why I was in this position and um mind you I had, there were seven of us that were removed from foster care at that that point, five out of the seven were homeless already. When I went down town I already had a big sister down there in a cardboard box. So she was like well you can come stay at my house. When she said I can come stay at her house, I thought she had a place to live, like a house house [sic] and it was just these rows of cardboard boxes homes, that they
called their homes. I’m like this ain’t [sic] no house, this is a box. She said this is my house, and you’re welcome to stay in my house (laughing) so I had to identify myself, but I didn’t want, I wanted more. I did [sic] want to be homeless I didn’t want to fit in that category. I already put myself in the foster care category, cuz I was in foster care for ten years. So you know, I already knew what it felt like to go to a family and they say, these are my children and this is my foster kid. And it made me feel so like alienated from…it made me feel like I had a rash, or I was a disease or something. (Participant PAS)

This participant described his short experience with homelessness. He talked about how his older sister was already homeless and willing to let him share her space with him. He realized he is a foster youth, but he does not want to continue to live his life as a homeless youth.

Former foster participants in this study who experienced homelessness during high school or after they turned eighteen, shared many of their experiences with the researcher through the in depth interview process.

**Theme result 2**: *Participants experienced schools that implemented the use of policy AB 490 and McKinney-Vento, though AB 216 was not used for any participants in this study.*

Interview questions were generated to address the research question: How do institutional policies and practices influence academic success/achievement, or high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts? Utilizing a document review of AB 490, AB 167/216, AB 1806, McKinney-Vento and from the data, Fostering Connections
and Increasing Adoptions Act, Table 4.1 organized pertinent data found in regard to the education policy addressed in this study, the population in which the policy served, and the guiding principles of the education policies.

Table 4.1

*Education Policies That Emerged From Document Reviews and Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICIES</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
<th>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| AB 490   | Foster Youth | • Created new rights/duties related to the education of dependents and wards in foster care.  
• Promoted education stability, pushed immediate enrollment, & education liaisons in every district  
• Ensured proper educational placement, school enrollment and checkout, transfer of academic records |
| AB 216   | Foster Youth | • Exempted pupils in foster care from local graduation requirements  
• Improved outcomes for youth in foster care  
• Identified specific barriers to their educational success  
• Students must satisfy eligibility requirements to graduate under California State minimum standards |
| AB 1806  | Homeless Youth | • Homeless could be exempted from district high school graduation requirement if qualified to graduate under state minimum requirements.  
• Extended to homeless students provision to be issued full or partial credit for the coursework completed at schools attended due to homelessness |
| McKinney-Vento | Homeless/Foster Youth | • Children and youth who “lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” were considered homeless.  
• LEAs must enroll students in homeless situations immediately regardless of possession of normal enrollment documents such as previous school records, immunization records, birth certificate, proof of guardianship, or other documents |
| Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act | Foster Youth | • Made federal funds available for foster care, guardianship, and adoption assistance until age 22 |

The document review helped guide the researcher to find education policies that would most likely impact FCs and NFCs, and allowed the in-depth interviews to generate education policies that were most helpful for participants specific to this study. Table 4.2, Table 4.3, and Table 4.4 are separated by education policy, and all demonstrated and organized information participants knew about the individual policies before the
interview. The tables organized direct quotes from participants discussing whether their previous schools actually implemented the use of these policies. Lastly, the three tables captured data that revealed potential opportunities for assistance through the use of one of these policies that were missed by the participants’ schools.

Table 4.2

*Participants’ Knowledge of Assembly Bill 167/216*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Knowledge of Policy Before Interview</th>
<th>School Implemented Use of Policy</th>
<th>Missed Opportunity for Policy Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td>“Yea so basically for young adults who, I think it’s in their sophomore year or junior year, if they’ve been moved uh I think my more than twice in one school term…they are allowed with the option to graduate with fewer credits…focus basically on the priority classes…eliminate like the electives…It’s a pretty cool thing that’s in place…”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No: “…I knew I was gonna [sic] graduate high school…I knew I had the ability to do it…I knew I wanted to you know pursue college”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>“216 is the one that like to um like to graduate with less credits? Yea, that would, I would have really fit good in that category back in the day.”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Yes: “No, not at that time…Basically it says there are some different requirements…as long as you complete the state requirements um which would allow you to get like your basic English, Math and the other requirements… you can graduate with 130 credits.”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANG</td>
<td>“No…Don’t forget, I’m already in my 30s. This was a long time ago.”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No: “…I was like I have to get that diploma, I have to get it no matter what…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>Yes: “Yea I heard about that, but I didn’t do that one.”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No: ““Cuz [sic] I felt like I could do better. I felt like I could do it, I don’t care if I have been moving around too much I’m as good as these other kids ya [sic] know yea.” (Smiling)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 described the participants’ knowledge and understanding in regard to AB 167/216. Overall, the participants were familiar with AB 216, but none of their schools implemented the policy to assist with their academic completion. Only one participant
attended school during the time when the policy was available, and she refused to apply it to her situation.

Table 4.3

Participants’ Knowledge of Assembly Bill 490

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Knowledge of Policy Before Interview</th>
<th>School Implemented Use of Policy</th>
<th>Missed Opportunity for Policy Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>No: “Like I said my aunt …handled all that paperwork…never…had…go down and do it with her…I wasn’t really familiar with the process…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>“I went to school in the 80s…it would have saved me a lot of hardship and time cuz [sic] things would have kind of opened the door for me …Given me a better opportunity to get credits or things would have followed me a little faster or better…I think people just started really look at the foster care system and really looking at how kids are really moving from placement to placement…”</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes: “They weren’t sent fast enough…Foster parents have tendency to be very cruel and rude if a kid leaves their place, they were really the keeper of those records and because they would get mad because a kid would leave or run away…it would take a little bit longer to get in school.” Yes: “I was upset, it was frustrating cuz [sic] I had taken a class before and I never got credit for it…it made me mad…because I had to take the class again…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANG</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No/yes: “It took a while sometimes. And a couple of schools… gave me some kind of test you…or they tried to sit with me to try to figure out where I was…Sometimes when I left the school I took my records with me because then I figured out the game.”</td>
<td>Yes: “I know I had to go a couple times to the clinic and sometimes I had to get shots done again because I couldn’t get immunization records so they’re like no you have to. So even though I had it, I couldn’t go through. So I had to go it.” Yes: “At that time it was very frustrating um cuz [sic]…it’s like oh why do I have to this, I already did it um you know the good thing is…I could pick up pretty fast because I had been in so many schools kind of like just savvy about academics like I knew and if I didn’t know I’d study….or ask the teacher for help.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>“Yea maybe a week. I’m not really, I don’t remember exactly I mean because it’s been so long, but I remember their being a delay and that’s why I couldn’t start you know?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes: “Yeaa always got into school pretty quick within like the first couple of days of moving somewhere…”</td>
<td>Yes: “It took a while” Yes: “I had to repeat the CAHSEE though. Like I passed it my first time but they didn’t have the records of it…and they were like trying to make me take it again and I was like no I’m not sitting in that room again…. (laughing) you guys need to call somebody, I’m not doing that.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 described the participants’ knowledge and understanding in regard to AB 490. The majority of the participants had no knowledge of AB 490 before the interview. All of the participants could have benefited from the implementation of AB 490 and every school discussed in the interviews missed an opportunity to implement AB 490 and help facilitate timely transfer of academic and medical records.

Table 4.4

Participants’ Knowledge of McKinney-Vento

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Knowledge of Policy Before Interview</th>
<th>Made Use of Policy in High School</th>
<th>Missed Opportunity for Policy Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BK</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes: “They slept in the living room…but when you’re going through it, you don’t really know the law or the technical terms for whatever. So it was just like a way of getting by…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes: “So everybody knew that I was in a rough situation, everybody knew that I was a foster kid um the coach didn’t find out I was homeless until later after something had transpired…they wanted to call all of our parents… they said… give me your phone number to your home, I said man I live by myself, he said what are you talking about? I said I have my own place, I’m 18 and I got a place to live by myself so you can’t call my parents, call me” (laughing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Yes: “I don’t they just mentioned it like um I don’t remember what law it was but yea they said like if you’re homeless like you can attend any high school so that’s why they didn’t question…I’m not really sure how they did it with my mom and stuff but it was like I was impressed with that law…so I guess it was like empowering like I have a right to attend school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANG</td>
<td>“No, no”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO</td>
<td>“Uh a little bit. I mean from my job and learning and through different training…”</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NR</td>
<td>“No, but that makes sense” (smiling)</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3 described the participants’ knowledge and understanding in regard to McKinney-Vento and none of the participants knew about McKinney-Vento or how the school should have used it to assist the homeless population in their schools. Though the only homeless participant in the study had not heard of the policy, one of the schools she attended relies on the policy to help enroll her into school.

In an effort to alleviate and minimize many of the barriers that put homeless youth and foster youth at greater risk for educational failure, Assembly Bill 167/216, Assembly Bill 490, McKinney-Vento, and Assembly Bill 1806 were legislation this study found to be most useful in outlining specific provisions for homeless youth and foster youth in school districts. These policies were impactful in the treatment and provisions granted to homeless and foster youth. AB 1806 went on to grant provisions to homeless youth that paralleled foster youth.

With some provisions, AB 167/216 allowed a foster child the opportunity to graduate under California minimum state graduation standards of 130 credits. The legislation stated there must be movement or a transfer into a district or multiple high schools within the district while the student was in their eleventh or twelfth grade year in high school. However, not all of the foster youth who actually qualified for AB 167/216, graduated under the provision. There were strict guidelines in place to guide educational facilities in making the determination in regards to a foster youth and AB 216. In order to qualify, the foster youth must have met important eligibility criteria: movement of two or more high schools or districts after their tenth grade year, educational rights holder agrees to waiver, academic advisor deems the child cannot reasonably complete the district requirements in the time allotted, and the child agrees to waive their right to attend a four
year university directly after high school (California Education Code, 51225.1, 2013). This research study found that those foster former youth who qualified for AB 216, were not able to utilize the policy because of a lack of consideration by the school staff, or for many of the participants, AB 216 did not exist when they were in high school. Participant GO stated:

Because of being in the system I was moved around a lot. I was living with different families at that time, so during that process I went to probably about 11 schools. And I was really behind, and just the different subjects math, in particular... I was just really behind in my credits and um I actually dropped out for a little while and then I was put on home studies. So um I was just, I remembered being tested sixth grade math when I was in tenth grade…it affected my high school just \textit{sic} years because I felt so inadequate. I felt like I could never catch up to everybody else. But it goes back to just moving around so much. Just never being able to stick at one school long enough to catch on and learn with the group.

Another participant who did qualify for AB 216 at the time she attended high school refused to graduate under California’s minimum state standards. When asked why she refused to take advantage of that particular option, Participant BG stated, “Cuz \textit{sic} I felt like I could do better. I felt like I could do it, I don’t care if I have been moving around too much I’m as good as these other kids ya know yea.” (Smiling)

While AB 167/216 offered provisions towards graduation requirements for youth in out-of-home care, this bill did not yet assist youth experiencing homelessness.
Homeless youth experienced movement and transfers to different high schools which caused severe damage to their education, however those youth were not included in the provisions provided by AB 167/216 (Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simheni & Nathaniel, 2006). Participant CA is the only participant who did not experience foster care. She shared the following in experience from high school:

Um, I consider myself very adaptable so it was like when I first, the first school that I went to um I, it was it was something I wanted to like um kinda [sic] take on. Like, I was like ready for it and I was like ok I’m gonna [sic] take this on and do what I need to do and…so it was like I have to do this GED program, which was…that one was out of my comfort zone. Like what am I doing, like this is not where I’m supposed to be um so it was like, I was like the smartest one there, cuz [sic] the majority of the people there, the students there didn’t want to do their work necessarily so it was like I was the weird one so they were gonna [sic] like have me um volunteer and do like tutoring. So, but I was a little discouraged when I was there. And then _____, my first day there um was like they had really low expectations of me I think it was because maybe I was homeless or because it was 95% Latino, I’m not sure which one it was, but it was like oh just pass three of your classes and you’ll be good. And I was like just pass three of my classes? And I ended up getting like A’s and B’s in all of them. But anyway yea
Exploring Research Question Two

Theme result 3: Overall, participants had a support system in place during their high school experience through a close friend, support agency, family member, or coach.

The services and practices of support agencies were found to positively impact the success of high school for the sole homeless participant in the study. Participant CA lived in an emergency shelter for youth during her high school years and explained that the shelter staff attempted to utilize the educational policies to help the participant complete high school. Participant CA stated, “They tried enrolling me in a high school closer” to where the shelter was located, however the school refused to enroll her. She went on to say:

They couldn’t enroll me. They were trying to figure a way without my parent and I think there’s a way to do it but it got like too complicated because my mom was still involved and it was like they didn’t have custody cuz [sic] I wasn’t like part of like DCFS I was just like homeless.

(Participant CA)

This former homeless youth shared a story in regards to school enrollment information as a homeless youth, Participant CA stated, “I believe the shelter also gave me that information.”

Not only did the shelter staff assist in enrollment activities with the former homeless youth, they provided a safe environment for the former homeless youth as well. At the shelter we didn’t really talk about homelessness, because it was like everyone was. So like it was the norm at the shelter. So it’s like you don’t really talk about you’re homeless so…but I had like maybe one or two and
so it was like I didn’t talk so much about being homeless, I talked about the risk of going back to home and like being unsafe and not being in a stable environment. So I had like maybe two people which were like the staff or like the RCs and um I felt very protected by one of them cuz [sic] like the police wanted to come and take me away or they wanted to investigate there was one RC that stood up and said she does not feel safe and she took out a law that had you are not allowed to come in or you’re not allowed to take her if she does not feel safe. So it’s like she used the law to make me feel safe and the fact that she stood up for me against the police, which was like the ultimate authority in my eyes was like I am definitely safe here. So she’s the one that like felt safe with in terms of that. (Participant CA)

This study found that not only did participants have support through shelter or group homes they had social support through friends, coaches and mentors, family members, and mentors.

They convinced me because they saw that I had potential or whatever they um convinced me to attend regular high school… I would I like it was like a big deal that they…they had a low expectation for me at first and they changed it. So it was like the fact that some person believed in me and said you’re not like… just because like…they kind of were very objective about the situation like they they [sic] weren’t necessarily feeling sorry for me because I was homeless. (Participant CA)
The former homeless youth shared her story about a teacher that believed in her academic ability at school. She said:

One of the teachers… but she would tell me like I would tell her everything I wanted to reach and the goals I wanted reach in my personal life and like being stable and stuff. Like that was my most important thing and she’s like um and I would always tell her like the problems that I had at home because I eventually had to go back home and like um she was like your ticket, your golden ticket is your high school diploma. That’s your golden ticket. She would also remind me that. And she like gave different scenarios she like when you get your high school diploma, and you get good grades you’re gonna [sic] be able to apply to university. If you apply to universities, guess what you get be like you get to live in a dorm, you get to be you, you get to exhibit who you are and like it’s your, it’s your way out. Or when I was like homeless, it’s like you’re homeless now, but you’re not gonna [sic] be homeless when you get this…it’s your golden ticket. So she reminded me like it’s your golden ticket. It’s like your way out. You may not like it right now, but this is your way out. Like your golden ticket. (Participant CA)

One participant talked about how he chose to keep his foster youth status private from both school staff and peers.

Was my business, outside of school. I wouldn’t walk around like yea, I’m a foster you (laughing) like you know what I mean. Or nothing like that. It wasn’t like you know my social workers didn’t like come to school and
like you know take me out to go do you know what I mean. Um it was just something that I kind of just kept to myself so like you know I mean.

(Participant BK)

All six former foster youth interviewed in this studied stated having someone to support them through their experience with foster care or homelessness, would have helped tremendously. The participants were asked if they were able to talk to any individual on their school campuses that held position such as a teacher, principal, counselor, etc. This research found four out of the six participants found someone on campus they genuinely felt safe speaking to in regards to their homeless or foster experience. Of the two participants who did not have a ‘safe adult’ to speak to on their campuses, Participant BK did not speak about his situation to anyone on campus. When asked if a counselor, principal, or teacher identified him as a foster youth, Participant BK shared, “Um not to my knowledge. I would say no not at that time, it wasn’t like you know programs available as far as like um you know AB 216 and all those, those weren’t around. Like I said I was already um doing my A-G and all that stuff. So I was on track to graduate. Um nah [sic] I don’t think that I was identified as a foster youth or anything like that...” He went on to say that he did not feel the need to tell people his situation because his care provider was his aunt. “Um not necessarily, um when people ask I basically would be like I live with my Aunty, like you know what I mean. So that kind of like the cover up. It wasn’t like oh I live in foster care, like you know what I mean?”

Participant ANG, stated she wished she had someone to speak to with her in regard to her home situation. She even became emotional during the interview as she shared some memories of what she endured as a high school student:
I think knowing that….if the school knew that I was in foster care um but if they were um good about it, if they reacted in a good way to it. Rather than um put a…label, like I’m afraid that where I went to school that I would have been stigmaed /sic/ labeled, that’s why I never told anybody. But I think there would have been, the counselors were not even aware. I feel that if people were trained more on how to work with homeless foster youth um the counselors would…if a counselor would’ve talked to me and um you know understood…cuz you know there were signs, there were signs and um but they didn’t want to read the signs. It was very much like let’s not get into it um for example, one of my teachers wanted me to…he was offering extra credit and um in the science class and he said so you know because I had come into the school so late and I had wanted every extra credit, so I could get an A in the class so you have to stay after school and then label the parts of the skeleton and some extra credit activity he had after school. So I called home and I left a message um letting my dad know that there’s this extra credit thing, I’m going to stay after school and I’m going to do this and I’ll take the late bus home you know so on and so forth. Well my dad called the school, he talked to the counselor and he said what is this after school thing you guys are doing you know because she doesn’t know what’s happening in the classroom. So he told her, you better ask her to call me and this and that, and so when I called back, I just got yelling on the phone like you think just being so smart, you’re so sneaky, you’re trying to stay after school, you must have
a boyfriend there, what are you trying to do. And the counselor is sitting right there and I’m on the phone and the tears were just ready to come out, so I said don’t worry I’ll be home on time. And you know I burst out crying and the counselor knew there was something off but no it was just like they didn’t want to deal with it yea. (Participant ANG)

She went on to share a bit about what can make a teacher or an adult on campus safe to speak to:

Um just caring, very caring like how are you doing you know they took interest in my work, always complemented, gave me stickers you know just like how are things, how is everything. You know you’re a new study here, how are you doing, can I help you with anything. And then after a while I felt comfortable and you know things weren’t the best at home you know my dad can get very upset you know he drinks and some days he drinks and gets very mad and takes it out on me and things like that that I shared with him um so I think that feeling that since of comfort and caring and knowing that somebody truly cares about your wellbeing um beyond the classroom I think that may have helped me. (Participant ANG)

Another participant stated that support was critical to her success in school. Without support she felt as though she may not have graduated.

Um, not really. I think basically, support is always really good like bottom line support has been very helpful. Um I did really bad when I didn’t have that much support, trying to get though school, but uh even like one person could make a big difference. In like these kinds of situations you
know? So yea… Support like ok move around a lot you have different friends they always like yea we can hang out and stuff you know, but the ones that are going to sit there and tell you no we’re not hanging out today you got to do work you know. Like oh you’re feeling sad about school you know what it could be worse. Like that lady who told me don’t do ugly girl [expletive] like that was good that was good for me that was encouraging. Like all my teachers that were like you got this you know, even though you don’t see it you know, we think you got this…I’m just putting it out there. You know you they just throw stuff out there and it sticks eventually. And you start to believe in yourself because other people believe in you, you know. So yea, it’s good, support. (Participant NR)

This study found that assistant principals, teachers or counselors were the ‘safe adults’ that the participants spoke to. PAS stated, “…everyone knew I was a foster kid.”

For Participant CA, she was able to confide in a teacher the reason why she was late every morning and he communicated with his colleagues. She shared that in order to attend regular high school and not a GED program:

I needed to go to the one that my mom wanted me to be at or the one that was like my home school which was like which was um two hours away um two or three hours away so I had to take like three or four buses I had to leave LAYN at like five in the morning and then I would arrive to school late every day at like at 8:30 in the morning and teachers would get mad at me until I explained it to somebody and I explained it to one of the teachers and they would of the teachers explained to…it was like
embarrassing for me to say oh it cuz [sic] I’m homeless like I can’t make it to school on time so the professor I mean the teacher said that I could get here at whatever time I want but it did not take away the weeks they gave me a hard time about it and I was like missing the beginning of class… (Participant CA)

**Exploring Research Question Three**

*Theme result 4: Participants benefited from positive social capital through their experiences as a homeless or foster youth.*

This research study found social capital for 100 percent of the participants was experienced as a collective value of all social networks and what arose from those networks. All six participants gained positive social capital through their experiences as homeless or foster youth during their high school academic process. Stablein (2011) defined this study’s conceptual framework, social capital, as actual or potential resources linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships. Participant PAS shared in his interview, the coach who scouted him to play basketball at the junior college turned out to be the person he was able to gain a valuable resource. PAS expanded his social capital and basketball network through his need for stable and safe housing, and the coach’s value, or resource, from him was his ability to play basketball. He shared:

______College knew because they ran my grades, and so I called that coach from _______ College Junior College and I said, “I’m homeless and I need a place to go.” I was already downtown and uh he said “I don’t know what I could do, but I’ll try my best to find something for you.” So couple days went by, I called him and he said “I found a place for you” I
said ok and he said “um but you gotta [sic] come check it out.” So he came to pick me up, took me to Reseda and uh rung the doorbell, and when he rung the doorbell, the smell of this house was just the worst smell I’ve ever smelled in my life. It smelled of feces and urine and just it was bad. I said aww nah [sic] dude, no coach I’m cool, I’ll go back to my cardboard box. He said, “No you need to give it a chance.” He said, “Let’s see what the lady is talking about.” Caucasian lady, six foot five African American man standing at the door and she’s looking me and I’m looking at her and I got my nose covered up right. She said come on in, I go in the house and um she loved cats she had 40 wild cats that can come in and out as they pleased. So they would come from outside stand in the middle of the living room floor and just urinate or just poop. I’m looking at this like oh my goodness. I just know this coach didn’t do this to me. Right? So she’s telling me what’s being presented, she’s saying ok, “I pay for your room, I’m paying for your food and she said by the way let me take you back to the room.” I was like if it’s any worse then what I’m smelling and what I’m looking at now, I already know I’m not staying here. So she takes me back to the back of the house and she opens this door and here’s this immaculate room. Beautiful! No smell, no nothing, right? But I still got these mixed emotions, because my job is to take care of the cats the animals and clean up behind them. And you know I’m like hey I’m going to be cleaning up poop all and this house smells I can’t bring no body over…So nevertheless I surrendered he said give it a chance I said you
know what I I [sic] don’t have nowhere to go any way might as well give it a chance. (Participant PAS)

Participant CA was able to enroll in high school because of the efforts of the emergency shelter as shared previously, and furthermore, in her adult career, the emergency shelter became a place of employment.

Ok right now I am working as a residential counselor at the shelter I was living in as a high school student. While I was in high school, being there like living there impacted my life in so many different ways. Emotionally, spiritually, um because they treated me like any other human being and the fact that they did that made like shed a different light on me and like it created hope because I was like I guess you could say like suicidal when I was at home. So when I was living at the shelter, it was like fresh air… I think also the fact that they provided therapy because they’re really big on reunification and I think that that was essential for me because um I didn’t believe in like psychologists before like I thought they were all out to get money and so when I saw the psychologist and she was actually like caring and like cared about the situation that actually influenced my career now so I became a psychology major and then I ended up, I work as a residential counselor, and now I’m looking into going into either law school program in psychology and law which will enhance my academic path like to be a to influence policies to be like an administrator at like a nonprofit organization or like influence policies. I’m going to be going to Washington DC and like learning more about how policies can change in
order to like benefit like minorities such as homeless LGBT youth. So it influenced me a lot and the fact that the professor or the teacher like reminded me that that was my golden ticket. The influence they had on me, like I want to be an influence on other people or children that are like experiencing homelessness (Participant CA)

For some participants who were in foster care, group home, case managers support staff, helped with college and resources and were key pieces to their social capital.

Um, I talked to ______. Even when I wasn’t a part of DCFS I could still email her call her whenever I needed to. Um yea she helped me out a lot, getting through high school period. And then also a lot with the high school application process for college and understanding that stuff ‘cause I didn’t think about college before her ... So yea um she helped me out with my um, the essay you have to do for the admission?

BN: The personal statement

NR: Yea the personal statement and you know it got really personal. Yea she found out a lot about me and she was just easy to talk to so it, after that I was like I can go to her for anything. Yea.

BN: Wow, makes sense, almost done. Um I know you said she was easy to talk to um what made her safe for you?

NR: Um like I could tell her even if I was angry or if I did something like not really thinking all the way through, she wouldn’t be like no, no that’s bad. She’d be like “Oh I see, I see where you went with that yea hmm, but
was that good?” I’m just like, and she’s like “and why, why was that the best?” You know she wasn’t like no you’re wrong, you’re dumb why’d you do that. I was like hey you know like really think about it you know. So I guess like not judgmental and um she would like share some stuff about her. So it wasn’t like I was just talking the whole time, it was like we were bonding kid of yea. And she sang with me a couple of times, so that was cool. Yea. (Participant NR)

Though Participant BK’s aunt was incredibly supportive in terms of a safe living environment, this research found she provided him with a network of resources and knowledge. From the interview, the researcher found Participant BK gained access and opportunity to participate in the sheriff’s program in high school, the provision to play and connect with sports, especially basketball, and the exposure to community college and higher education.

I’m thankful for her thinking logic, but it was for of us, we all went to different schools. So I went to _____, my cousin went to _____, my brother went to San ____. So it was just her way of basically like giving us our own identity like you know what I’m saying? And she knew we were all close and stuff like that so it was smart of her um everyone was like wait, why do ya’ll /sic/ live in the same house but ya’ll /sic/ go to a different school? Well that was the answer so um I thought it was cool. Like you know what I mean though we all know the same friends and all that type of stuff it was cool. It was like it wasn’t really you know. You don’t really ask back then, like why are we…it was like I overheard her, I
think I heard her saying and mention that, and I thought hmm yea that’s pretty cool so.

During the interview, he went on to say:

And like I said my aunt we used to go to her class with her and stuff like that while she was going to ____ and transferred to Cal State got her masters and that stuff like that so the example was there you know what I mean? Um but a lot of other examples were there too. I think she she [sic] pushed sports and stuff, not pushed it on us um it was just like a way of life you know what I mean it was like um uncommon to not have it. And it was like really a passion. (Participant BK)

Participant ANG used her experiences to help her impact current student outcomes:

Oh it’s impacted it majorly because you know I feel like I did it with all the stuff that was wrong in my life, I think, very passionate about making sure my students do completely do what they need to do. And I feel that they see that in me that see that they can talk to a teacher about it they see that I care, I really want them to succeed. And I feel like this is their only way out. Graduation is their ticket out. So I really push it.

Participant GO learned about an opportunity to continue her education after she dropped out of high school through her social network of supportive individuals:

When I was told that I was so far behind on my credits, I just remember feeling so frustrated and angry you know just angry. Angry at my situation
uh thinking no I want to do this and I need to do this for myself not for anybody else. Cuz [sic] there wasn’t anybody in particular that was pushing me to graduate, or really… not that nobody cared because maybe someone did, but didn’t tell me, but I just remembered making up my mind like I want to graduate, so I’m going to graduate. And I just…when I was told that um you, they gave my test and I was told that I was so far behind that I was probably have to stay in high school a year longer, possibly two. I was just, I remember I felt…I almost felt like stupid but then I remembered like you know this isn’t my fault. I know that I’m not stupid and I can remember um in fifth grade, I made honor roll in that particular school. And I remember this one teacher always stuck out to my mind because he…no she pulled me aside and she told me you are so smart, you are so smart you are one of the smartest kids in my class and I want you to know that. And when she told me that, I was like I’m not stupid, this isn’t, this sucks you know. So, I mean I just that kind of pushed me and that thought you know, I would tell myself, I’m not stupid.

Though positive social capital was found to be a key in the development of each participant’s academic success, this research study found some of the participants had gained negative social capital as well. Negative social capital is the exposure or affiliation with a network of gangs, street life, and other at-risk behaviors and Bantchevska, Bartle-Haring, Dashora, Glebova, and Slesnick (2008) believed it to be an important predictor of at-risk behaviors. PAS shared:
Um well believe it or not I lived in South Central LA, and um my home school was _____High School and uh the first time I arrived at this… one particular my last foster home placement, um _____ High school was my high school in my neighborhood and because there were three other boys in the house that were gang bangers, I went to school with them my second day in the foster home and um we got chased out of school because they were in a different gang neighborhood so they were shooting at us. Them and me because I was with them going to school. So I told my social worker that couldn’t attend that school because um we had to go through all of these gang neighborhoods to get to school and because these guys were in the same house that I was, I was guilty by association in their gang stuff. And even though I wasn’t a gangbanger I wanted to be a professional basketball player, um they put me on a mandatory school busing program. So I was bused from South Central LA to San Fernando Valley. (Participant PAS)

Other Findings

**Theme result 5:** Participants in the foster care system and homeless youth wanted to pursue a Master’s Degree, and three wanted to pursue a doctoral degree.

The majority of participants wanted to pursue higher education. When asked about their long term education goals, the majority of the participants responded with clear and direct goals which included: completing an associate’s degree, obtaining master’s degrees, and three of the participants had plans to go on to pursue a doctorate degree. One of the participants shared that she would like “to get the highest amount of
Participant ANG). Participant CA shared that her “educational goals would be either to attend uh PhD program or a law school.” Another participant shared:

Well I just completed my long-term education goal. That was to complete my Master’s in Marriage and Family Therapy. Um Which I just completed about a week ago. So that’s as far as I’m gonna [sic] go. (Participant PAS)

Similarly to Participant PAS, Participant BK had a specific goal in mind as well. He expressed a desire to go on to higher education, but knew what level of education he was willing to achieve.

Long-term educational goals for me would be basically my masters, I thought about a Doctors and I’m like ain’t [sic] gonna [sic] be able to do it. So um not like I’m not going to be able to do it, but I have no interest in doing it. Like I love education and all that good stuff and I feel like self education is just important as you know credential learning and stuff so um yea that’ll probably be my pinnacle of education that I want to obtain. (Participant BK)

Participant GO had goals to return to community college and eventually complete her bachelor’s degree. She stated her, “Long-term educational goals would probably be to go back to college, and finish the degree that I started in Child Development. And that’s it…my AA and then my BA.” Participant NR is currently earning a bachelor’s degree in “Kinesiology, yea sports medicine specifically. Like rehabilitation therapy and stuff like that.” When asked what her long-term educational goals were she expressed:

I wanna [sic] get a doctorate in something. I don’t know what yet, but I’m
for sure going to keep going to school after my bachelors. (Participant NR)

Not only did all of the educational goals of the participants include a path to higher education, this study found two of the participants were in school earning their bachelors degree at the time of the study. Furthermore, two of the study’s participants had already obtained a master’s degree at the time of their interviews, and one participant was pursuing a doctorate degree.

**Theme result 6: Academic challenges in school relate to instability in home situation, school mobility, missing school records, missing health records, and transportation hardships.**

All participants faced difficulty in school as a direct result of their homeless or foster experiences. When asked if there was ever a moment when they thought they were not going to graduate, the participants shared the following:

I remember being enrolled in high school for a week and then not returning. And I enrolled in another high school, went for maybe two days and then didn’t return. After that I probably stopped going for six months and I put myself into a home study program and that’s when I started just caring more about graduating and then eventually in 11th grade, I put myself through like a private Christian home school. But it was kind of like a learning center so you would have to like go not necessarily turn in your work but it was like a school. Like you’d stay there from a certain time to a certain time and yea, but it was like you working at your own individual pace. Nobody was working on the same exact thing. So that
helped me because it was more private. I felt less humiliated and um less intimidated to learn and actually catch up so that really helped me to do it I guess. (Participant GO)

She went on to say:

This is not my fault and I know that I can graduate if I put my mind to it. So, I mean yea it was kind of like a shock when it, when I was told that Imma [sic] have to stay in school probably ‘til I’m nineteen are you kidding me you know. And I was so, I remember speaking to the person in charge, what can I do, what can I do to at least graduate when I’m 18. And they said well we can give you double the amount of books that you know is required of you and you’re going to have to just work on them on your own time and commit to it. And I’m like ok. She’s like well let’s start you off with extra work for six months and let’s see how you do. I did it. And then she’s like ok you can do it, we’re going to give you more. So then they gave me more. So I ended up doing two years worth in one, junior year yea and I’m like it’s the same thing like you know what I mean? (Participant GO)

NR was removed from a stable group home during her senior year of high school. The group home did not adhere to the foster youth policy that allowed foster youth to remain in the group up at age 18, as long as they had not completed high school. Yea! Yea especially after we got kicked out of the Sunshine Shelter and I didn’t know where I was going to live. I was really worried about my
school work. I, I ended up breaking down in class like to my teacher. And he completely understood, just because he had a lot of foster kids before that ya know? Some of the other teachers didn’t, but luckily like he did have experience with that and he gave me until the very, like the day right before graduation to turn everything in just because that was like so not fair. And it was like out of my control kinda ya know? (Participant NR)

Participant CA stated:

Yea, when I was in the GED program. I thought I wasn’t…like I was just like well this is it like I’m not attending high school anymore um so I was just going to get my GED. Like I said well I need to do something I can’t just be sitting here and not doing anything so then um I started doing the GED thing because I thought my mom wasn’t going to give permission for me to attend any high school because they were doing an investigation um I couldn’t go back so it was…yea they I ended up I was like ok I’ll just do GED but yea I thought… I wasn’t gonna [sic] finish like it was already set, I was just gonna [sic] do GED for that.

Participant ANG feared she would not graduate. She shared:

Yea that was um definitely when things got really difficult I didn’t know if I was going to graduate so and um and that was so important to me. To graduate, because it was going to be something tangible that I’ve achieved and that I could take with me. And for some reason I felt like once I have the diploma I could do like anything. Without that I was like, kind of handicapped. And so I was like I have to get that diploma, I have to get it
no matter what, like so it was very difficult when I…Sometimes it came to um and that’s probably the reasons why I went back home. Because I was like I have to graduate, this is not going to work out, I can’t work and support myself, so I have to go back home and deal with what’s going on so I can graduate. (Participant ANG)

Surprisingly, some participants had no doubt that they would graduate from high school without fail.

I knew I was gonna [sic] graduate high school um I knew I had the ability to do it and I knew I wanted to you know pursue college just because of sports wise [sic] um so I mean it was in the conversations. I don’t remember like how many times I spoke about it or whatever but a few times. (Participant BK)

Not only were participants in this study struck with difficulties in their academic lives, this study found less than half of the participants did not experience consistency in extracurricular activities. Under AB 490, foster youth were allowed to participate in extracurricular activities, however many of them could not. Former homeless participants experienced difficulty. When asked if foster care or homelessness impacted participation in extracurricular activities, one participant simply said, “No” (Participant GO). Another participant shared a bit more with the researcher, and stated, “Um well I couldn’t participate in many of my extracurricular activities. Um I had to I guess it was like dropping out of high school I was considered a high school dropout…” (Participant CA). She shared in her interview:
I had a lot of advice from like people who were older than me that had been through high school. So they told me like ok this is what you need to do. You need to like join clubs, you need to do this, but then that was kinda [sic] like interrupted when I like experienced homelessness…

(Participant CA)

Other participants responded with:

Yes, I couldn’t really finish, I couldn’t really get uh any real like medals and stuff because I moved around so much you know. Because of different circumstances of being in DCFS, you get moved around especially the older kids. So yea it would have been easier to do those if I had stayed in one spot you know. (Participant NR)

Well I as in clubs and anything that was during school time I was involved in, and anything that was after school, I was not involved in because I was not allowed to stay after school. (Participant ANG)

One participant spoke about how he played basketball during lunch hour:

One day I was playing basketball at lunch with some friends and uh the varsity coach saw me play. And he said, “Hey I want you to come try out for the team next year,” and I said “I tried out for your team man and your freshmen coach cut me.” And uh he said, “Well I don’t know what he was doing, but I want you to come into the Gym every day at lunch time and I want to work with you on some fundamentals and some foot work.” And I was like, “My lunch time?! What!?!” Miss the girls in the quad and lunchtime and my lunch? He said, “If you really want to be a basketball
player, I want you to come in this Gym everyday at lunchtime.” So I thought about it, I said let me go and see what this guy is doing over here in this Gym. And So I went into the Gym, he never gave me a basketball, we worked on footwork for three months and worked a part time job after schools. (Participant PAS)

That participant shared his experience working as a stock clerk and trying to keep up with schoolwork.

After I got off the late bus from school then I was what we call a stock clerk at a market on a corner from where I lived. And So I…I would get off the school bus at seven and stock the shelves at the store ‘til 11 O’ Clock. Then I would go get some sleep, get back up at five, get on the school bus at 5:30am…I did it doing my school hours, between me waiting for…in between me waiting for practice, uh in between me going to um classes. I did a little bit of it at lunch time, so it was pieces, I would have to piece up, and then I if would stock the shelves really fast I would pick up and do a little bit of homework there. But mind you, I was behind in credits anyway so it really wasn’t…it was just something that I did to try to hold on. You know what I mean? So it wasn’t like I was trying to do the homework to get an A, I was just doing it to turn something in.

(Participant PAS)

Another male participant played basketball consistently in high school and did not let foster care negatively impact his experience. He stated, “I did consistently, basketball in high school. That was the most consistent sport was basketball. I did track but I wasn’t
really interested in that, I just did it just because. But it was more so uh basketball” (Participant BK).

**Chapter Summary**

In summary, this chapter presented six findings of six participants. Findings were organized in accordance to the research questions. Data from document review and individual interviews shed a light on former foster and homeless youth perceptions of education policies and the impact they had on their academic success. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) case study research marks individual passages or excerpt from the transcriptions and groups them together in thematically connected categories. Excerpts from interviews transcribed in this study were grouped by relevance to the study’s research questions.

The primary finding of this study was the majority of the former foster youth in this study experienced homelessness during their educational career. Five shared their experiences as former foster and homeless youth and their perceptions of academic success. Several participants discussed becoming homeless around the time they turned eighteen years of age. Although all of the participants experienced homelessness or foster care during their education career, they each expressed a desire to succeed academically.

The second finding of this research study was three participants interviewed experienced a school site that implemented educational policies that reflected AB 490 and McKinney-Vento. Participants were able to identify some education policies that were useful for FCS and NCS in their own educational careers, or they discussed policies they thought would have been instrumental for their situation if implemented in the past. AB 216 was not used for any participants in this study, and many of the participants
stated they could have benefited from the use of AB 216. In addition to understanding the perceptions of the participants towards the policies, this research study found only one of the selected educational policies assists both homeless and foster youth, and that was the McKinney-Vento Act.

The third finding was five participants had a support system in place during their high school experience. These support systems were in the form of a close friend, support agency, family member, or coach. More than half of the participants thought support systems were critical to their academic success. One participant shared they longed to have better support during their foster youth experience, and another participant revealed their own perception in regard to the importance of support as a homeless or foster youth.

The fourth finding was that 100 percent of the participants gained positive social capital through their experiences as homeless or foster youth. The participants experienced the collective values of social networks and the benefits that developed as a result of those social networks. Though all six participants gained positive social capital through their experiences as homeless or foster youth during their high school academic process, one participant gained negative social capital through their experience living and attending school with foster youth involved in gangs.

The fifth finding was five participants wanted to pursue higher education, and three wanted to pursue a doctoral degree. The majority of participants wanted to pursue higher education in spite of their inconsistent and difficult educational background. An overwhelming majority of the participants shared clear and direct goals which included: completing an associate’s degree, obtaining master’s degrees, and three of the participants had plans to go on to pursue a doctorate degree.
The last finding the chapter explored was all six participants experienced difficulties in school directly related to their home situation and movement from place to place. Participants described thoughts of not qualifying for graduation, they described the issues that arose when participating in extracurricular activities, and they discussed their reasons to press on and continue towards their goal to graduate high school at the time. Many indicated that they thought that they were not going to graduate. This chapter revealed how 100 percent of the participants expressed the motivation to reach their academic goals no matter what difficulty, school policy, or living situation was placed in their path.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, the research study will analyze and interpret data found in chapter 4 of the research study. Chapter 5 will conclude the research study and make several recommendations for future areas of study. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretative insights into the findings of the previous chapter, analyze the major findings, and offer recommendations for further research. This chapter sought to develop a holistic understanding of what former homeless and foster youth experienced during their high school maturation, and the summary of the study reviewed the most important facets of the research. The discussion included pertinent discoveries from data analysis, and took into consideration the literature on former foster youth and former homeless youth, educational policies, and barriers to education. The implications of these findings were intended to fill in the gap in the research, which is missing the perceptions of former foster youth and former homeless youth as one population experiencing the impact of educational policies designed for their academic success. Limitations of the study are noted in this chapter. This chapter concluded with a reexamination of the researchers’ assumptions identified in the first chapter, recommendations for future research, and a summary incorporating acknowledgement in regards to the possibility of researcher bias and interpretation of the findings.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to understand how institutional policies influenced the academic success of both foster and homeless youth by exploring their
perceptions of former foster and homeless youths’ academic success. The goal was provide research necessary to view the homeless youth and foster youth population as one, and increase educational attainment for this population as determined by academic success. This research study used grounded theory mixed with aspects of a case study design to collect qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews and a document review. Participants in the study included former homeless and/or foster youth. The data were coded, analyzed, organized by categories and by the research questions guided by the theoretical framework of Chapter 2. The research study was based upon three research questions:

1. How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts?

2. In what ways do the services and practices of support agencies impact the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth?

3. How does social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success?

The mixed grounded theory and case study method and procedures utilized in this study were those based on the work of Charmaz (2008) and Bloomberg and Volpe (2012). Data sources included demographic information, in-depth interviews and document review. Participants in the study were employees at the Sunshine Shelter, teachers, college students, and employees of a county foster youth agency. The theoretical framework of social capital guided this research. Based on research by Stablein (2011) and Bantchevska et al. (2008) this study found support and social capital
were important predictors of academic success for homeless and foster youth. The focus was on the participants’ perceptions of educational policies and social capital they utilized throughout their educational experience and graduation process as homeless and foster students. Through the use of a mixed grounded theory approach, this study identified several key pieces critical to the successful process graduating foster and homeless youth.

**Major Findings**

Major findings from the study were presented for the following: (a) demographic information of the participants discussed in the introduction of the chapter, (a) findings related to research questions in the following discussion, and (b) other emergent findings to follow.

**Discussion: Research Question One**

The findings of the study were directly in line with the study’s research questions. The first research question sought to determine how institutional policies influenced academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts. To address this question, this research study first had to identify homeless youth and/or foster youth. Five participants were in the foster care system during their K-12 education, and four of those five experienced homelessness either during their high school education or at some time before the age of 21. According to AB 12, extended foster care expires at the age of 21, and foster youth would then be exited from the system (Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, 2008).

Participant NR lived in a group home when she turned 18 and she stated, “DCFS was like
they gotta [sic] go after their 18th birthday. We didn’t really get to finish high school there, even though that was the plan.” Participant PAS shared a similar story about his foster home, “I turned 18 in my 12th grade year in school and um when I turned 18 my foster mother came to me and said, ‘We no longer have a check for you and you have to leave.’ And I said… I was still in high school.” This demonstrated four participants experienced homelessness as a direct result of foster care services ending. It could be determined that transition aged youth could end up on the streets due to incomplete transition plans. Participants in this study did not state DCFS had transition plans put in place for them as they approached the age of majority.

This study suggests schools that have foster students enrolled should not expect these students to only experience one set of traumatic experiences. It could be said that students who experience foster care in their educational career, may be susceptible to homelessness. Moreover, it could be said students who experience homelessness, can be taken into the custody of the Department of Children Family Services.

The first major finding that was a direct response to the research question was three participants experienced a school that implemented policy that reflect AB 490 and McKinney-Vento during their educational careers. Assembly Bill 216 was not used for any participants in this study, which meant no participants graduated under the California minimum state standards of 130 credits. Under AB 490, Participant NR expressed how she enrolled into new schools when she said: “…yea I always got into school pretty quick within like the first couple of days of moving somewhere like the first week.” However, when asked how quickly transcripts and immunization records were sent to her school, she stated, “Um, it took a while.” Shea et al. (2009) and Hahnel and Van Zile (2012)
shared that Assembly Bill 490 required education agencies to designate a foster care education liaison to ensure proper school placement, facilitate enrollment for foster youth and ensure transfer of school records for foster youth. Participant NR, made no mention of an education liaison for any of the school sites she enrolled in. This certainly pertains to the research about AB 490 liaisons and their roles and duties, by Shea et al. (2009). According to this research study, six percent of the AB 490 liaisons surveyed had no foster youth enrolled in their district or County Office of Education, and seven percent did not know how many foster youth were in their district or COE. AB 490 was designed to correct some of the educational problems foster youth experienced that severely impacted their education outcomes, however the participants in this study did not experience many of those corrections.

The first research question also addressed McKinney-Vento, a law which allowed homeless youth and youth who were waiting for foster care placement to enroll in their local school or stay in their school of origin. This law also required schools to enroll students even if they did not possess transcripts, immunization records, or proof of residency at the time of enrollment (McKinney-Vento-Law into Practice, 2008). This research study found one participant was homeless during their educational career, and five participants experienced homelessness in addition to foster care. According to McKinney-Vento, there are supposed to be LEAs in the districts and designated individuals on each high school campus to assist with enrollment and other needs of the homeless student population. These designees are in place to provide a seamless transition from one school to the next for the student experiencing homeless. Participant CA stated, “I’m not really sure how they did it with my mom and stuff but it was like I
was impressed with that law. Like oh because you’re homeless you’re allowed to go to any high school so I guess it was like empowering like I have a right to attend school.”

For one school, this former homeless youth was able to enroll, but for another school she had this to say, “…they tried enrolling me in a high school closer which was _______ school, but they didn’t let…my parent’s like signature. So they couldn’t enroll me because my mom wasn’t present so they gave me the option to go to the GED program [Pseudonym] which is what they also linked it to the Sunshine Shelter.”

A recommendation could be made that while some schools do implement the laws of the McKinney-Vento Act, other schools mentioned in the study, had not demonstrated complete understanding and implementation of MCKV. The sole former homeless participant in this study shared her experience with one school refusing to enroll her without parent or guardian consent, and another school applying the law correctly but was inconveniently two hours away from her homeless shelter. Participant CA stated, “…the one that was like my home school which was like…um two or three hours away so I had to take like 3 or 4 buses I had to leave the Sunshine Shelter at like five in the morning and then I would arrive to school late everyday at like at 8:30 in the morning.”

From the perspective of the former homeless youth, the school that would have been in their best interest to attend refused their enrollment, and therefore, creating another barrier to their education.

**Discussion: Research Question Two**

The second research question asked in what ways do the services and practices of support agencies impact the academic success/achievement of high school homeless and foster youth? The research found five participants had a support system in place during
their high school experience through the means of a close friend, support agency, family member, or coach. The findings in this research study went beyond the support agencies addressed in the research question and found that participants were impacted by several categories of support: Support agencies, close friends, family members and coaches and mentors. These categories are in line with previous research studies. Raleigh-DuRoff found that support organizations and the support of family, friends, and professionals helped homeless youth leave the streets. The study applied those categories of support to foster youth as well.

**Friendship.** This type of support was said to be important for both former homeless youth and former foster youth. While one participant, who experienced both homelessness and foster care, stated she did not have any strong friendships, many of the other participants in the study did make reference to friendship being key in navigating new schools and making the appropriate steps to succeed in school. Participant BK said, “…seeing a few friends and stuff’ like that which made it a little bit easier you know with routine, you start getting adjusted and get used to it. Um I don’t think it was like really difficult to manage it was just like you know going from one period to the next. Every year it gets different, like you know what I mean you got new people, you got new classes.” One participant shared how it was difficult to maintain friendships: “Yea, and I never had the same friends cuz I moved and I’d get a new friend and after a while I couldn’t keep in touch with them or they’d move. I usually would get like one or two good friends, like people I could talk to, hang out with at lunch time” (Participant ANG). This study found that this difficulty came from school mobility and inconsistent school
placement. This particular participant went to four different schools during her high school career.

For another former foster youth and homeless youth, friends were easier to connect with, one participant shared, “It was kinda cool (giggling) it’s because like I was always like the new kid, and the new kid was kind of a good thing I guess. And everybody was always trying to talk to me and it’s like “oh ya know hey how’s it going?” Yea I don’t know you tell people you’re in foster care, a lot of people are like oh what’s that? That’s so weird!” She went on to share how difficult it was to not have those strong friendship connections during high school, “…it was kind of awesome yea, I was kind of a celebrity on accident. [I] Walk in [they’re] like “Who’s that” ya know like [expletive] I’m the best ya know (laughing) I don’t know. Yea it was kinda [sic] not awesome when I’m sitting there and I see everybody’s known these people forever and they’ve known their people for since like kindergarten, and I just like showed up so I don’t know like really where to go” (Participant NR). This study demonstrated that friendship for foster youth and homeless youth though difficult to maintain due to inconsistent educational enrollment, was one of the key facets of support in their high school completion process.

Support Agencies. This research found that support agencies such as the Sunshine Shelter and some schools offered participants in the study resources, safety, advocacy, and in some cases respect. Raleigh-DuRoff’s (2004) qualitative research study on what factors influenced young homeless adults to leave the streets, encouragements such as: the help of others, the help of organizations, the fulfillment of needs and information were helpful for the homeless youth to acquire the necessary resources and tools needed
to improve their situation. Several participants shared their stories of how a support agency guided them through the school experience as a homeless or foster youth.

Participant CA spoke about her high school counselor’s support, “I was in AP courses, but when I moved to the other one [high school] like I was going to be in regular ones [classes] so it was like a discrepancy. Like there wasn’t communication on that and I wanted to aim low like whatever it doesn’t matter, I wanted to take it easy. But thankfully there was another counselor who noticed that and said ‘I’m going to enroll you in AP courses.’” She went on to share what she believed to be an important piece of advice given to her by her teacher, “…my teacher found out…and…she was like your ticket, your golden ticket is your high school diploma.”

During the study, one participant was working at a homeless youth shelter and frequently spoke to youth in regards to their success in high school and in life. She shared with the researcher:

I don’t disclosed that I experienced homelessness but I said you can reach your goals, there’s always going to be like obstacles. But you can reach it and just like positive reinforcement. So like letting them know that they can make, these are the opportunities that are gonna [sic] happen so it’s like the fact that’s even…planting a seed that they can make it um I think is a big deal because of how they talk to us before like you’re not gonna [sic] make it. It’s like oh then why even try if we’re not gonna [sic] make it. So the fact that it’s like you’re talking like this is your golden ticket out.

(Participant CA)
The participant used her homeless experience to help and support current homeless youth who exhibited negative impacts of homelessness.

A conclusion could be made for this study that support agencies and supportive schools are necessary for the success of homeless and foster youth. According to Raleigh-DuRoff, support organizations and the support of family, friends, and professionals helped homeless youth leave the streets, and this study shed light on the perceptions of the participants that received help from agencies to continue and succeed in school despite their homeless or difficult foster situation. Participants in the study revealed support organizations provided youth services which included educational support, connections, and counseling. “I was like I guess you could say like suicidal when I was at home. So when I was living at the shelter, it was like fresh air... I think also the fact that they provided therapy because they’re really big on reunification and I think that that was essential for me because um I didn’t believe in like psychologists before like I thought they were all out to get money and so... I saw the psychologist and she was actually like caring and like cared about the situation” (Participant CA). The shelter became a provider of stability through structure, therapeutic experiences, and caring adults.

Many of the former foster and homeless youth in this study learned life skills and employment training which assisted them in maintaining life off of the street. Shelters such as The Sunshine Shelter for example, provided residents with life skill groups to work on financial planning, hygiene, and conflict resolution. Many of these groups provided life skills that were not developed or learned during adolescent development due to the disruptive nature of the home situation of participants. In terms of life skills one participant said, “I understood how to take of myself. I understood how to kind of
develop into the person that I am now. Like there was some self care like I would get up and brush my teeth, take a shower twice a day and do all that stuff that a young should have learned at 10, 11, but I didn’t because I was a foster kid, you know…” (Participant PAS). Participant PAS was one of the few participants in this study to mention employment and job skills. He said, “I got off the late bus from school then I was what we call a stock clerk at a market on a corner from where I lived. And So I… I would get off the school bus at seven and stock the shelves at the store ‘til 11 O’ Clock. Then I would go get some sleep, get back up at five, get on the school bus at 5:30am” (Participant PAS). Friends, family and professionals helped youth with a place to stay, they motivated youth to finish their education and leave the streets, and professionals in the support agencies offered homeless and foster youth case management.

Family Members. This study demonstrated how family members that are no longer the caregiver for youth are still involved in the process of academic success and create a supportive experience for former foster and homeless youth. An implication could be made that some family members of the participants did support the youth through encouragement and living arrangements when they were in foster care or homeless. Though some participants shared experiences about their family members that were not supportive “like my mom didn’t agree with my lifestyle, like being with a girl” (Participant CA) or Participant ANG’s father who refused to believe she had tutoring after school, other participants in the study shared stories of supportive members of their family. Participant ANG stated, “…you know my grandfather said to me when I was very little that you can do anything that you put your mind to that you can achieve. And that kind of stuck with me for a long time. Um though things got very difficult, I always
remembered that.” Participants perceived familial support to be another key for successfully navigating educational experiences as a homeless or foster youth.

**Coaches and Mentors.** Coaches and mentors were important sources of support of participants. These caring adults were usually separate from family members, and some provided participants with encouragement, motivation, and resources.

Yes, um I had a like a mentor and her name was Jill [pseudonym]. And she was someone major in my life that I had met probably around, I was like 15 and she was already in her 30s. But she just really helped me through a lot and she was there. And I um I just remember oh she’s so proud of me, but I was happy to have her there….She was just someone that came into my life at the right time. And who I felt comfortable with um who encouraged me to see past the walls that I built up, and see past the situation and just an encourager, a cheerleader you know in my corner. Someone in my corner who actually I felt like genuinely concerned and that cared for me. (Participant GO)

The majority of participants in this study had an adult figure in their life that provided mentorship, coaching and guidance. It is important to draw out the benefit of having adults that encouraged homeless youth and foster youth to succeed despite educational barriers. For former foster youth or homeless youth who are athletes, their coaches take on more parental roles.

One day I was like walking down the quad of the Pierce College, and I see my coach from _____ State. I was like oh man that look like my coach, he must’ve came to see me, wow! Man, I was like hey coach! And he
snatched me by the collar and he says this university has invested a lot of money in you. You will go to that speech class and you will pass those two speeches and you will go to that English class and you will get a good grade a passing grade on that English test. And he let me go and he said I’ll see you later. I said how the [expletive] did this guy go check my grade or talk to my teachers like that… (Participant PAS)

Participant PAS had experienced a coach that insisted that he do well academically so that he could play basketball at the college level. This coach filled in a parental role that this participant had open as a homeless foster youth.

It was recommended that social support through friendships, support agencies, family members, and coaches and mentors are key components of a former foster youth or homeless youth’s academic success. Participants interviewed in the study perceived these supportive structures as encouragement, motivation, resources, and advocacy similar to the functions of support found by Raleigh-DuRoff (2004) in their study of homeless youth on the living on the street.

**Discussion: Research Question Three**

The third research question addressed in the study was how did social capital impact homeless youth or foster youth’s perceptions of high school success? This study found all six participants gained positive social capital through their experiences as homeless or foster youth. This study found a lack of social capital caused a former foster or homeless student to suffer academically. This finding was in support of the study by Reganick (1997) found it to be difficult for transient students to generate long lasting and
supportive relationships, or social capital. An implication could be made that foster youth and homeless youth who obtain social capital could be more inclined to experience academic success. It was important to look at the experiences of foster and homeless youth and their ability to navigate the process of graduating high school successfully, while utilizing school policies and procedures designed specifically for them. Social capital connected individuals to resources and knowledge. According to Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni and Israel (2006) and Shea, Zetlin and Weinberg (2010), homeless youth and foster youth were more likely to experience poor grades, educational disability, school behavior problems, low achievement test scores, truancy and increased school dropout. All six participants in this study experienced academic difficulty, however, participants in this study utilized resources acquired from social networks and social circles to gain significant training in sports, living arrangements, school programs, and access to educational facilities.

Stablein (2011) stated that social capital, positive social capital, could support the academic success of homeless and foster youth. Social capital for 100 percent of the participants was valued in their education process. All of the participants in this study gained positive social capital through their experiences as homeless or foster youth during their high school academic process. According to Stablein (2011), social capital was the actual or potential resources that were linked to a durable network of institutionalized relationships. The participants in this study shared multiple examples of how potential resources critical to their academic success were linked to them through channels such as coaches, mentors, teachers, and friends.
Other Findings. This research study found five participants wanted to pursue higher education beyond a bachelor’s degree, and three participants wanted to pursue a doctorate degree. This finding is not in agreement with research reviewed in the literature. According to Gustavsson and MacEachron (2012), only 20 percent of foster care youth who graduated from high school, attended college; as compared to 60 percent of their non-foster care peers. Frerer et al. (2013) found foster youth in California graduated, enrolled in community college and persisted in college at lower rates than non-foster youth did. Contrary to their findings, 100 percent of the participants in the study not only graduated high school, but went on pursue a college education. The research went on to find, eighty-three percent of former foster youth and former homeless youth in this study wanted to pursue an education beyond a bachelor’s degree. One participant in the study was completing a Doctorate in Education.

Though previous research found that the public school graduation rate in the general population was 79 percent in California by 2010, and the graduation rate for foster youth was 45 percent (Frerer et al., 2013), former foster youth and the sole former homeless youth in the study, exceeded that percentage. It can be concluded from this research that foster youth and homeless youth may have higher educational goals then the system will allow them to complete. Several participants suggested they wanted to succeed in their educational careers because they were dissatisfied and displeased with how their lives were as foster and homeless youth, because the system they were in generated educational barriers in the form of school mobility, traumatic experiences, transportation, and support from school personnel.
Other Findings Continued. Another important finding that emerged from the study was all six participants experienced difficulties in school directly related to their home situation and movement from place to place. Participants shared with the interviewer how many schools they attended during their process of completing high school, and the average number of schools attended by participants in the study was four. Reganick (1997) stated that without a sense of permanence and connection to community, neighbors, services, friends and schools, students found it difficult to generate long lasting and supportive relationships, or social capital. Both Rumberger et al. (1999) and Burley and Halpern (2001) discussed the impact school mobility had on academics, and found students were less likely to complete high school if they were highly impacted by mobility. Interestingly enough, one participant who wanted “to get a Ph. D in something” attended seven high schools during her educational career. A concluding thought for this finding supported the idea foster youth and homeless youth possessed the ability to succeed in school, but when faced with severe and repeated educational barriers, educational policies are helpful, however the support of teachers, friends, mentors and personal motivation was the key to the success of these participants.

Limitations

The findings of this qualitative study were limited to the perceptions the educational experiences of six foster and homeless youth alumni who were academically successful in their K-12 educational careers. It was clear the findings of the research study were impacted due to the small population size. The study focused on one urban county in southern California and cannot be generalized to the greater population of
former foster and homeless youth. Results may be transferred to another context if there were similar experiences to the ones described in the study.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study reviewed the importance of considering foster youth and homeless youth as one at-risk population, while analyzing the impact of social capital and social support on academic success in the lives of former foster and homeless youth. More research is needed on how foster youth and homeless youth are similar in educational experiences, difficulty and need.

Though this study was limited to adults who experienced homelessness or foster care in their K-12 education and were academically successful, there are many foster youth and homeless youth who do not successfully complete high school or beyond. These students should be given the assistance needed to succeed like their non-foster or non-homeless peers. The process of graduating high school was often interrupted or stifled by a one’s experiences with homelessness or foster care. Though few education policies such as the current AB 167/216, AB 490, and McKinney-Vento were in place to impact academic success in the form of school completion, A-G requirements, or G.E.D completion, this study found participants were more impacted by other factors in their academic success, or graduation process, than they were by education policies. Current foster youth and homeless youth who are failing high school or are experiencing difficulty due to educational barriers (Mawhinney-Rhoads & Stahler, 2006; Shea et al., 2010; Hernandez Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006) could succeed if they had an increase of positive social capital and supportive adults such as mentors, counselors, group home staff, etc.
Further research should continue to focus on educational policy and implementation. There is a need for the timely transfer of transcripts, immunization records, partial credits, and Individualizes Education Programs (IEPs). For example, though Assembly Bill 490 and McKinney-Vento are in place, foster and homeless youth still experience delays in enrollment, incorrect scheduling, duplications of credits, and even the loss of earned academic credits. Students who are not sixteen or older cannot access their own records without their educational rights holder due to the laws of FERPA, however foster youth progress reports issued directly to them could be helpful in elevating the loss of academic records due to school mobility.

School district foster youth liaisons or child welfare and attendance personnel are important in supporting the academic success of foster youth and homeless youth, however participants in this study did not have access to these individuals who had been placed in the districts under AB 490. This study recommends more research on the function of foster youth liaisons, homeless youth liaisons, child welfare and attendance personnel, and county education liaisons. Many participants discussed wanting a person to follow and track each and every foster youth and homeless youth, so they do not get behind and lost in the system.

This study suggests more research on the academic success of homeless youth and foster youth who have mentors or coaches. All of the former foster and homeless youth interviewed in this study, had a supportive adult that helped guide, motivate, and pushed them to succeed even with all of the educational barriers they faced. Perhaps, new studies can review these supportive adults and develop mentorship programs district or countywide. There are mentorship programs developed by specific agencies, but all foster
youth and homeless youth do not have access to these agencies, and therefore cannot benefit from them.

Lastly, the literature found there were 35,000 foster youth receiving DCFS services and 10,000 homeless youth on the street on any given night (layn.org), it is recommended the study be replicated countywide across California to help increase the academic success of foster youth and homeless youth. Every foster and homeless student is different, and each county will have different needs. It is important to go beyond federal and state legislation, and support the students directly at their level of need.

**Chapter Summary**

This qualitative mixed case study and grounded theory research study explored the perceptions that former foster youth and former homeless have towards educational policies that impacted their academic success. The theoretical framework proposed that social capital was linked to one’s academic success. The literature implied that homeless youth and foster youth face external barriers to their educational progress in school, in the form of: school mobility, transportation, street life, health and immunization records, and academic preparation. According to six participants interviewed in this study, social capital combined, with self-determination was highly influential in their academic success. Participants felt educational policies could have done more to help in their situation, but the impact was not felt during their educational process. The underlying conclusion of the interview data in this research study was the majority of former foster youth population in this study experienced homelessness. Lastly, educational policies that will impact academic success for this at-risk population are needed in K-12 education.
Chapter 5 concludes this research study. There were six findings produced by this research study:

**Finding 1:** Five participants were in the foster care system during their K-12 education. Additionally, four those five participants experienced homelessness.

**Finding 2:** Three participants experienced a school that had implemented the use of policy AB 490 and McKinney-Vento. AB 216 was not used for any participants in this study.

**Finding 3:** Five participants had a support system in place during their high school experience through a close friend, support agency, family member, or coach.

**Finding 4:** All six participants benefited from positive social capital through their experiences as a homeless or foster youth.

**Finding 5:** Five participants wanted to pursue a Master’s Degree, and three wanted to pursue a doctoral degree.

**Finding 6:** All six participants experienced difficulties in school directly related to their home situation, school mobility, missing school records, missing health records, and transportation hardships.

Recommendations for the study invite all educational leaders to participate in future research to increase the academic success in foster youth and homeless youth. The study suggests additional research to be conducted on the same population across several counties in California.
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Appendix A

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look at Policies and Procedures Directly Related to Foster and Homeless Youth High School Success

Dear Participant,

I am writing to inform you about a dissertation study that is being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) regarding educational policies that have impacted homeless youth and foster high school completion. Brianna Nix, a doctoral candidate, is conducting the study as part of the Ed. D. degree requirements. The purpose of this research study is to understand how institutional policies influence both foster and homeless youth as way to contribute to the understanding of academic success as determined by high school completion. This study may enact change in the way policies for homeless and foster youth are implemented in high school. Your participation in this study would be to participate in one 45-60-minute one-on-one interview. Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Brianna Nix at Brianna.Nix.315@MY.CSUN.EDU or (909) 319-5926. Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

Best,

Brianna Nix
Appendix B

California State University, Northridge

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look at Policies and Procedures Directly Related to Foster and Homeless Youth High School Success

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look at Policies and Procedures Directly Related to Foster and Homeless Youth High School Completion, a study conducted by Brianna Nix as part of the requirements for the Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. The researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

RESEARCH TEAM

Researcher:

Brianna Nix

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Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Jody Dunlap

Michael D. Eisner College of Education
PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to understand how institutional policies impact high school success for foster and homeless youth, as a way to contribute to the understanding of academic success this specific population.

SUBJECTS

Inclusion Requirements
You are eligible to participate in this study if you are at least 18 years of age or older, have experienced homelessness during your K-12 education or were in foster care at any point during your K-12 education, and have graduated high school with a diploma or obtained a GED.

Exclusion Requirements
You are not eligible to participate in this study if you have not completed high school or a GED, have never been homeless during your school experience, or if you have not been a part of the Department of Children and Family Services during your education experience.

Time Commitment
This study will involve approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes of your time over the course of 1 week.
PROCEDURES

The following procedures will occur: We will schedule an interview time, and meet for a 45-60 minute one-to-one interview.

RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: fatigue, boredom, mild emotional discomfort, embarrassment, or muscle soreness. To minimize potential risks, I plan to interview for one hour, and allow the participant to stand and stretch as needed. This study involves no more than minimal risk. There are no known harms or discomforts associated with this study beyond those encountered in normal daily life.

BENEFITS

Subject Benefits

You may not directly benefit from participation in this study.

Benefits to Others or Society

This study may enact change in the way policies for homeless and foster youth are implemented to increase high school completion.

ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT

Compensation for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this research study.

Costs

You will be responsible for parking or transportation fees.
Reimbursement

You will not be reimbursed for any out of pocket expenses, such as parking or transportation fees.

WITHDRAWAL OR TERMINATION FROM THE STUDY AND CONSEQUENCES

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study you should notify the research team immediately. The research team may also end your participation in this study if you do not follow instructions, miss scheduled visits, or if your safety and welfare are at-risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Subject Identifiable Data

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed at the end of data collection.

Data Storage

All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected.

Other privacy options

The audio recordings will be stored on a password-protected computer; then transcribed in a word document stored on the computer. The participants will be given the opportunity to read the transcription to check for accuracy and the transcriptions will be erased at the end of the study.

Data Access

The researcher and Dr. Dunlap named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally
identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

Data Retention

The researchers intend to keep the research data for approximately 1-2 years and then it will be destroyed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects, 18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.
I agree to participate in the study.

___ I agree to be audio recorded
___ I do not wish to be audio recorded

___________________________________________________  __________________
Participant Signature                                      Date

_____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Participant

_____________________________________________________
Researcher Signature                                       Date

_____________________________________________________
Printed Name of Researcher
Appendix C

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Impact of Policy on Education: A Look at Policies and Procedures Directly Related to Foster and Homeless Youth High School Success

I. Pre-interview Session: Introduction/Background

Welcome and introduction:

Good morning/afternoon/evening. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.

Before we begin the interview session, I would like to give you the opportunity to read and sign the Consent to Participate in Research.

Purpose of the first interview:

As we discussed, this one-on-one interview is intended to collect information for a research study explores former foster youth and homeless youth perceptions on educational policies in high school. During this interview, we will talk about your experiences in high school and your interaction with several educational policies that are specific to homeless and foster youth.

Timing:

Today’s interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Are there any questions before we get started?

II. Interview Session

Main Questions:
1) What are your long-term educational goals?

2) How often did you talk about high school graduation?
   a. Who did you share these conversations with?

3) What is your current age?

4) Please share your ethnicity. In high school was your ethnicity the majority in the school?

5) During high school, were you involved in any sports or other extracurricular activities?

6) Did you experience homelessness or were you a part of DCSF during high school?
   a. Describe what it was like to be a homeless/foster youth during high school?

7) Has a counselor or principal ever identified you as a homeless/foster youth? Did you ever self-identify?
   a. Describe that experience.

8) How many high schools did you attend?

9) If you have attended multiple high schools, please reflect upon one of your first days of school?

10) Were you denied admission to a high school because you did not have a guardian with you, lacked immunization records, lacked transcripts, or because you were emancipated?

11) When you moved to a new school, how quickly were your transcripts and immunization records sent to your new school?

12) Have you ever had to repeat a class due to missing records on your transcripts?
   a. Please describe how you felt when you found out you needed to repeat a course.
13) Was there ever a moment when you thought you might not graduate? Please reflect on that moment.

14) McKinney-Vento is a law that protects homeless and foster youth, are you familiar with this law?
   a. Please tell me a bit more.

15) Were you ever presented an option to graduate early?
   a. An option to enroll at a continuation school?
   b. An option to transfer to a school closer to where you were most stable?

16) Are you familiar with AB 167/216?
   a. Please tell me a bit more.

17) Describe how you felt when you completed high school.
   a. Did you participate in graduation?
   b. Was there anyone significant in the audience?

18) Share two pieces of advice given to you by a teacher, a mentor friend, or someone Important.

19) Is there one person at a school or facility that you felt safe talking to about your concerns directly related to your homelessness/foster care?
   a. What made that individual safe for you?

20) If there was any policy in place that was designed to specifically help you, what would it say?
   a. How would that policy have helped you complete high school?

21) Please describe what you are doing now. How has your high school experience impacted this new life point?
22) If you could speak to a youth currently experiencing homelessness or in foster care in high school, what would you say to them?

Closing Questions:

I would like to give you a final opportunity to help us examine these issues. Before I end today, is there anything that I missed? Do you have anything else to add at this time? Have you said everything that you wanted to say? Have you shared everything that is significant about these experiences with me? If there is anything else that you recall after our interview session, I invite you to share it by contacting me.

III. Post-Interview Session: Debriefing and Closing

Thank you for participating in today’s interview session. I greatly appreciate you taking the time and sharing your ideas with me. I also want to restate that what you have shared with me is confidential. No part of our discussion that includes names or other identifiable characteristics will be used in any report or document. Finally, I want to provide you with a chance to ask any questions that you might have about this interview. Do you have any questions at this time?