AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CONTINUATION
HIGH SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES
IN STANISLAUS COUNTY

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of
California State University, Stanislaus

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of Master of Social Work

By
Shonna Hoover
May 2014
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of Susan Hoover, my mom. Without her believing in me I would have never believed in myself.

This work is also dedicated to the countless students who are struggling to find a sense of belonging in our current educational system – may you always keep your hope alive.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my thesis chair Dr. Kilolo Brodie, who without her advice, assistance, and endless availability this study would not have been possible.

To my best friend, and fiancé Daniel, you are my rock. I love you with all of my heart. We did it!

I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to the staff at the continuation high schools that helped make this study possible.

Finally, I wish to thank the students involved in this study for their time and honesty. Without their words, this work would not be complete.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.......................................................................................................................... iv
Acknowledgements........................................................................................................... v
Abstract............................................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

I. Introduction to the Study ................................................................................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem................................................................................................. 1
   Purpose of the Study........................................................................................................ 4
   Significance of the Study................................................................................................ 5

II. Review of the Literature ................................................................................................. 8
   Continuation High Schools in California............................................................. 8
   Characteristics of At-Risk Students....................................................................... 11
   Youth Engagement...................................................................................................... 12
   Teachers’ Influence on Engagement....................................................................... 14
   Approaches/Interventions............................................................................................ 17

III. Methodology.................................................................................................................. 20
   Overview.......................................................................................................................... 20
   Research Design........................................................................................................... 20
   Sampling Plan.............................................................................................................. 21
   Instrumentation............................................................................................................ 22
   Data Collection............................................................................................................. 23
   Data Analysis................................................................................................................ 23
   Protection of Human Subjects................................................................................... 24

IV. Results............................................................................................................................. 26
   Introduction.................................................................................................................... 26
   Sample Overview.......................................................................................................... 27
   Summary.......................................................................................................................... 35

V. Discussion.......................................................................................................................... 37
   Overview of Major Findings....................................................................................... 37
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications of the Major Findings</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Student Survey</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Memorandum of Understanding</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Informed Consent</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Assent Form</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to engage continuation high school students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences. Using the lens of social justice to focus on engagement and student voice this exploratory study examined the perceptions of 32 continuation high school students at three continuation high schools located in Stanislaus County. A survey was utilized to meet the goals of this study. The questionnaire focused on students’ perceptions concerning: 1) their existing internal supports, 2) barriers in pursuing their education, and 3) elements of their education in traditional high school and continuation school that have motivated them to complete their schooling. The findings reveal significance related to students’ stories and shared experiences. The findings suggest four major themes as related to student engagement practices and factors which influence students’ success in high school: 1) school structure, 2) positive environment, 3) personal attention, and 4) educational barriers. This study resulted in three major conclusions. First, comprehensive high school policies, as related to programs and structure, must be revisited and redesigned in order address the needs of all students. Second, the current structure of continuation high schools is working to engage students. Finally, teacher education programs must be redesigned to incorporate elements of developing interpersonal skills and building meaningful student relationships within the classroom setting.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

In the state of California, Education Code Section 58500 allows school districts to provide alternative schools and programs for students (Leginfo, 2013). It is necessary to provide options to meet the diverse needs of our young people and this requirement may be met through a variety of high school programs. One such option is the continuation high school, an alternative high school program, established in 1919 under California Education Code.

According to the California Department of Education (2013), continuation high schools were originally designed to provide a flexible schedule for working students. This provision now includes students unable to maintain the course of study at a regular high school and who therefore fall behind in school and are deficient in academic credits (California Department of Education, 2013). Continuation schools are a high school diploma program for students 16 through 18 years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are “at risk” of not completing their schooling (California Department of Education, 2013). In 2012 there were approximately 500 continuation high schools in California, serving more than 115,000 California high school students.

State law requires school districts and county offices in California to provide alternatives to the comprehensive high school for “students vulnerable to academic or
behavioral failure” (EdSource, 2008, p. 1). For most California districts, continuation schools are used as a dropout prevention program; students are typically referred to continuation schools because of credit deficiencies, truancy, or behavior problems (California Department of Education, 2013; EdSource, 2008). For many students who end up attending continuation school, it is not necessarily an educational choice, but more often the only option besides dropping out of school entirely (EdSource, 2008).

Every year a significant number of California’s public school students, (disproportionately low-income and minority students) leave the educational system before completing high school (Losen & Wald, 2005). On average, only 71% of all California students who enter ninth grade graduate in four years with a diploma (Losen & Wald, 2005; Swanson, 2005). Moreover, a statewide “graduation gap” of up to 30 percentage points separates Black (57%), Hispanic (60%), and Native American (52%) students from White (78%) and Asian (84%) students (Swanson, 2005). These extremely high dropout rates, particularly for minority students, have serious consequences.

The detrimental consequences of dropping out of high school have been recognized for decades. Research demonstrates that dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, poor, incarcerated, unhealthy, and single parents with children who will drop out of high school themselves (Bridgeland, DiIlulio, & Morision, 2006; Stuit & Springer, 2010). Yet, high dropout rates not only “imperil individual futures but also profoundly impact our communities and nations due to the loss of productive workers, the earnings and revenues they would have
generated, and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care, and social services” (Bridgeland, et al, 2006, p. 2). The average dropout can expect to earn an annual income of $20,241, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012). That is a full $10,386 less than the typical high school graduate, and $36,424 less than someone with a bachelor’s degree. Of course, simply finding a job is also much more of a challenge for dropouts.

While the national unemployment rate stood at 8.1 percent in 2012, joblessness among those without a high school degree measured 12 percent; among college graduates, the national unemployment rate was 4.1 percent (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Among those between the ages of 18 and 24, dropouts were more than twice as likely as college graduates to live in poverty (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Dropouts experienced a poverty rate of 30.8 percent, while those with at least a bachelor’s degree had a poverty rate of 13.5 percent. According to a recent study among dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24, incarceration rates were a whopping 63 times higher than among college graduates (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). The same study found that as a result when compared to the typical high school graduate a dropout will end up costing taxpayers an average of $292,000 over a lifetime due to the price tag associated with incarceration and other factors such as how much less those with lower levels of education pay in taxes.

Students who arrive in continuation high schools have experienced life-changing events or have felt ostracized in some way which has resulted in them being termed “at risk” (Loutzenheiser, 2002). Students are labeled at-risk when they have
characteristics such as poverty, dysfunctional families, substance abuse, early sexual experiences, health and fitness deficits, and a range of other factors that influence their lives (Splittergerber & Allen, 1996; Stuit & Springer, 2010). Because these at-risk characteristics do not represent what would be accepted as “normal” within the traditional high school system, these students find themselves in a subculture of their own, feeling excluded and disconnected from the institutionalized traditional high school experience (Archambault, Janosz, Morizon, & Pagani, 2009).

By providing continuation high school students an opportunity to share their perceptions of engagement with self, school, and success, one can further understand the disconnect that exists for many students in today’s schools. It is expected that this research will also provide much needed insight into understanding the link between continuation high school students’ learning process and their commitment (or lack of commitment) to school (Archambault et al., 2009). Because students who experience acceptance and connection are more highly motivated and engaged in learning, they also become more committed to school (Walker & Greene, 2009). Which is often not the case for students’ enrolled in a continuation high school program.

**Purpose of the Study**

A review of the literature suggests that critical information can be gleaned from listening to the authentic voices of students using a social justice lens because this perspective is necessary when evaluating the impact of one’s experience on one’s educational outcomes (Lalas & Valle, 2007; Marshall & Oliva, 2006). The purpose of this study is to give voices to the voiceless by engaging continuation high school
students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences.

It is hoped that the results of this study will provide continuation high school personnel with a data base from which teachers and administrators could potentially use to change, modify, and/or reform current practices so that students are afforded the best chance for success in continuation high schools. Based on the extant literature the following research questions were formed:

1. What do continuation high school students perceive as existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships)?
2. What do continuation high school students perceive as barriers (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education?
3. When comparing a continuation high school environment to a traditional high school environment, what elements have motivated students in their decision to complete their education?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study will be to provide insight about what engagement means for continuation high school students based on the perceptions and voices of these students who have experienced education in a continuation high school setting. The student perspectives of those who have disengaged from the system have traditionally not been heard (Joselowsky, 2007). By incorporating the voices of continuation high school students within this study, an opportunity exists for the improvement of continuation high school educational environments. It is only
through eliciting as many student perspectives as possible that we can begin to get a sense of what students know, feel, and need in their schooling experience (Lalas & Valle, 2007). By being attentive to students’ voices in this study, educators can increase their social awareness regarding policy, curriculum, and instruction in order to better meet the needs of all students (Lalas & Valle, 2007).

It is hoped that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge that should form the foundation for intervention and support systems provided to “at risk” students. Especially minority students who are shown to drop out of high school at disproportionately higher rates than their White counterparts. In giving students the opportunity to share their authentic experiences it provides the groundwork for transforming the education system to better meet the needs of all students. With students expressing their diversity of experience through their shared stories, it is anticipated that educators may glean an understanding of cultural proficiency which may or may not currently be present in today’s continuation high school settings (Lalas & Valle, 2007).

Increasing diversity in continuation high school classrooms requires that school social workers increase their awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. School social workers must develop competencies that include heightened self-awareness, knowledge, and practice skills consistent with the NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (NASW, 2013). They must also recognize racial and ethnic barriers within the local education agency and develop strategies to lessen and overcome these barriers on students (NASW, 2013).
It is expected that by identifying the key factors that influence school engagement in continuation high school students that this study can assist social workers and policy makers in reforming current policies and practices.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review will examine (a) continuation high schools in California, (b) the characteristics of at-risk students, (c) youth engagement, (d) teachers’ influence on engagement, and, (e) approaches and interventions to high school drop-out. Reviewing the literature related to continuation high schools and specifically to the engagement experiences of at-risk students will detail how students have engaged/disengaged from the traditional school system and the degree to which they have found academic success.

Continuation High Schools in California

In California, continuation high schools have been in operation since 1919 as a mandated alternative for students who needed a more flexible school day or week and a program different from that of the traditional high school (California Department of Education, 2013). In general, continuation high schools were designed to better meet the needs of students aged 16 and older who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory attendance, and are deemed at-risk of not completing their education due to credit deficiency (EdSource, 2013). Today, continuation schools educate between 10 and 15 percent of California’s high school students and currently, there are approximately 500 continuation schools within the state, which serve about 115,000 students (EdSource, 2013). Among those students within continuation high schools in California, 55% are Hispanic, 11% are African
American, 4% Asian, 27% White (California Department of Education, 2013), and the English Language Learners (21%) represent a larger percentage than average statewide English language enrollment (14%) (EdSource, 2013).

Many continuation high schools have student enrollment of approximately 200 students, and the average class size is 20 students (Ruiz de Velasco, & McLaughlin, 2012; Stuit & Springer, 2010). The smaller school and class sizes allow staff and faculty to work more closely with students. Knoeppel (2002) notes that “One of the very best things we do in continuation education is come to know our students” (p. 3). As a result, students’ academic and personal needs are better met (Ruiz de Velasco, & McLaughlin, 2012). Since most of the students who attend continuation high school are credit deficient, continuation high schools often offer students accelerated credit accrual strategies so that students have an opportunity to graduate (Stuit & Springer, 2010; Knesting, 2008; Ruiz de Velasco, & McLaughlin, 2012). Moreover, unlike traditional comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools can adapt and modify how the curriculum is delivered to students. Teachers are able to implement a plethora of instructional strategies to best meet the needs of at-risk students (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991; Ruiz de Velasco, & McLaughlin, 2012). Knoeppel (2002) explained, “Because of their flexibility, continuation high school teachers often reach the most difficult students” (p. 4). Students who are identified as at-risk are often those who do not fit the mainstream mold; their cultural and life experiences, learning styles, learning disabilities, or behavior are considered unacceptable in traditional comprehensive high schools (Gray & Herr, 2006). Kratzert
& Kratzert (1991) noted, “Often, a continuation school education is the only chance for many students to graduate” (p. 13). Continuation schools are able to design programs that allow for maximum flexibility to best meet students’ needs and provide them with opportunities to obtain high school diplomas.

Most continuation high school students are also faced with many barriers, such as issues of mobility, inconsistent school enrollment, unstable home environments, violence, and substance abuse (Gray & Herr, 2006; EdSource, 2013). These factors are reported by continuation high school students at far higher rates than their comprehensive high school peers. For example, 17% of students in continuation school report changing where they lived two or more times in the past year, as compared to only 7% of students in comprehensive high schools (EdSource, 2013). Almost half (47%) of continuation students report that they have been enrolled in their current school for fewer than 90 days, and continuation high school students in foster care or living with a relative other than a parent (11%), was also higher than those students attending comprehensive high schools (4%) (EdSource, 2013). Additionally, rates of regular and heavy alcohol and drug use by continuation high school students were at least two times that of the comprehensive high school students and “between 11% and 14% of continuation students report that they have either engaged in or been a victim of violence, such as fighting at school, carrying a gun, being a gang member, or being threatened or physically hurt” (EdSource, 2013, p. 3). These situations greatly affect all students and their ability to engage in school, whether or not they are attending a continuation or comprehensive high school site.
Characteristics of At-Risk Students

Many continuation high school students are considered to be potential dropouts who are at-risk and have reached their last destination for a chance at academic success. Bulger & Watson (2006) contend that at-risk refers to students’ background characteristics, internal characteristics, and environmental factors, and that it no longer simply refers to race and class; at-risk encompasses a variety of limitations to learning including technology, access to support services, and transportation. From a wider social justice perspective, students who are at-risk are seen as having a number of personal deficits that hinder their success, such as learning disabilities, poor motivation, or low intelligence (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Other, less obvious risk factors have included lack of connectedness or the experience of positive, caring student-teacher relationships (Bulger & Watson, 2006). Large traditional comprehensive high schools, especially serving students of color and from poverty, have failed students. Researchers agree that the following factors directly affect the success of students: poverty, nontraditional families (i.e., single parents, grandparents as guardians, stepparents), academic challenges (i.e., students in special education), older students due to retention at one or more grade levels in their schooling, racial ethnicity, and personal and/or family problems (Bridgeland, et al, 2006; Bulger & Watson, 2006; Joselowsky, 2007). Typically, at-risk students have dropped out of school based on disengagement from school as a result of years of discouragement and academic failure (Cassidy & Bates, 2005). Students who have experienced traumatic personal events outside of school or encountered major health
issues often have ended up designated as at-risk (Bridgeland, et al., 2006; Joselowsky, 2007).

At-risk students have fallen behind, have had little opportunity to retake failed classes, and have been unable to recover lost credit (Walker & Greene, 2009). Regardless of the particular factors that contributed to their vulnerability, what at-risk students have in common is struggling academically and experiencing failure in courses (Zvoch, 2006). These students’ hope of obtaining a high school diploma diminishes, and they experience an increased disengagement in school since these at-risk factors perpetuate discouragement over time (Knoeppel, 2002). These marginalized students, who often arrive in the continuation high school setting, have had their social class, skin color, sexuality, and the experiences of their lives push them outside the norm of society (Loutzenheiser, 2002). These students feel the lack of acceptance from peers and teachers, and these perceptions leave them with a sense of not belonging, not being a part of the school culture, and not fitting into the student climate. When schools, and specifically teachers, do not acknowledge students’ differences both academically and socially, they are coercing students into a pattern that fits only some of them; it is a pattern where taking classes and competing for high test scores is the only practical path in education (Swanson, 2005).

**Youth Engagement**

Youth engagement has been explained as meaningful youth involvement and youth participation (Walker & Greene, 2009); personalization (Archambault et al., 2009); school connectedness (Joselowsky, 2007); and the student’s relationship
within the school community (Loutzenheiser, 2002). Joselowsky (2007) defined youth engagement and effective educational programs as “effective programs that engage young people in a variety of ways, so that they are not just physically present, but intellectually immersed, socially connected, and emotionally centered” (p.260). Traditionally defined, engaged students tend to be actively involved in their schools; they are in leadership positions in school government, involved in school clubs, or participating in other school activities such as sports (Joselowsky, 2007). However, these tend to be only a handful of students (very often the same students), who generally have good grades, regular attendance, and few discipline problems (Joselowsky, 2007; Loutzenheiser, 2002). Chances for engagement are limited and often inaccessible to most students, unless teachers specifically reach out and use their interpersonal skills to “build a bridge” over the learning and membership impediments that can keep students from obtaining educational engagement (Lalas & Valle, 2007).

When students are given opportunities to build their social-emotional learning skills, they build pathways of success which lead to greater academic achievement. As opportunity replaces discouragement, learning becomes more valued by more students; this in turn, leads to more risk reduction, asset building, and greater attachment and engagement in school (Joselowsky, 2007). This type of learning experience engages those students who are often “pushed out” of the traditional comprehensive high school settings, those students who are at-risk for dropping out
and who often arrive in alternative education settings such as continuation high schools.

In their study of at-risk high school students, Singh, Chang, and Ditka (2008), identified factors related to self-concept and school belonging that related to the school engagement of the students. Their qualitative study included questions related to self-concept, school belonging, academic engagement (on effort), and academic engagement (on enjoyment of learning). They concluded that school belonging was significantly related to both dimensions of academic engagement for the at-risk group of students whereas students’ self-concept was not related to their engagement levels (Singh et al., 2008). This study supports the notion that engagement for students exists because of the structure of the school and what happens within it; in other words, if students feel they belong within a particular school setting, they will engage and obtain higher academic achievement. All in all, if students are cognitively and socially engaged, they are likely to be behaviorally and academically engaged. Teachers need to rely on all types of engagement to determine whether or not their students are engaged.

**Teachers’ Influence on Engagement**

Teacher support can be used to affect positive change in student engagement (Walker & Greene, 2009). In fact, in a study of Latino middle and high school students, Brewster and Bowen (2004) found the strongest effect on student engagement was between perceived teacher support and level of perceived school meaningfulness; the levels of meaningfulness increased as levels of perceived teacher
support increased. Further research on the perceptions of students as related to caring or effective teachers, could indicate that by building caring relationships with students, school engagement is enhanced. As an example, Cothran and Ennis (2000) found that students’ engagement levels were flexible and responsive to teacher’ actions; from students’ perspectives, engaging teachers communicated, cared, and enthusiastically presented active learning opportunities. Cushman (2005) found that students respond best to knowledgeable, challenging, imaginative, and caring teachers.

However, in the Indiana 2006 High School Survey of Engagement (HSSSE) of 81,499 students, Yazzie-Mintz (2007) described “the engagement gap” as the difference in perceptions between students and teachers regarding their academic engagement. Yazzie-Mintz’s (2007) study revealed a “disparity between what is academically challenging and what is intellectually challenging to students” (p. 1). The engagement gap was described as the contrast between the system of accountability and the student’s relationship within the school community. The engagement gap ultimately represents this difference in perception, teachers engaging students through standards and accountability versus the need for students to be intellectually, academically, socially, and emotionally engaged with the life and work of their high schools (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). This gap indicates a desire for a different kind of schooling and the challenges that educators face in understanding and strengthening student engagement; it is ultimately about fostering relationships where students feel they are an important part of their high school communities.
(Joselowsky, 2007; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007), in order so they may engage at all levels. Unfortunately, in the current era of accountability, various studies have found that traditional high schools struggle to engage students because they are focused on one thing, the achievement gap (Joselowsky, 2007), as opposed to the students’ relationships within their school experiences and school communities (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Although teachers intend to be caring and supportive with the lessons and practices they use to engage students, an engagement gap exists because students want more than the standardized curriculum teachers are presenting; students want curriculum that is relevant, meaningful, and transformative (Walker & Greene, 2009). In alternative settings, such as continuation high schools, the aim is to provide individualized attention in order to engage students and to promote success, but to do so within the context of the required academic standards. Noddings (2006) emphasized this link between care and academic achievement when she stated that, “achievement without positive affect is morally and aesthetically empty; positive affect without achievement is delusional” (p. 42). She clearly described the purpose of continuation high schools when she emphasized the following qualities of education:

Education seeks multiple aims. Not only does it reject the idea of a uniform project, it also rejects the notion that its only aim is either academic or vocation, i.e., to prepare precisely the mathematician, artist, or diplomat. An education worthy of its name will help its students to develop as persons, to be
thoughtful citizens, competent parents, faithful friends, capable workers, generous neighbors, and lifelong learners. It will try, too, to develop aesthetic, ethical and spiritual sensitivity. It offers programs and activities designed to enhance these ends and it tries to choose means compatible with them. Where possible, it avoids coercion; it prefers the language of invitation, altering, encouragement, guidance, sharing, advice, and trying-out to that of requirement, compulsion, prescription, testing, and assignment. (Noddings, 2006, p. 339)

Research is showing that for students, the context of school engagement matters; the learning environment is a critical factor in both motivating students and in meeting their educational goals (Marshall & Olivia, 2006). Continuation high school students are held to the same requirements for graduation as those in the comprehensive high school settings, but within a smaller, more personalized setting; this has an effect on school engagement. Although Whitney (2005) did not study continuation schools specifically, her research on smaller school environments supported the structure of continuation high schools in regards to the benefits of smaller, more personalized learning environments. It was within this smaller setting that students could find teachers who demonstrated care through their understanding, patience, and ability to set clear limits (Whitney, 2005).

**Approaches/Interventions**

Research shows a number of approaches that can have an impact on preventing students from dropping out of high school (National Association of Social
Work, 2008). For example, the National Association of Social Work (2008) notes that some continuation high schools have been effective as dropout interventions. For instance, interventions to build strong student-teacher relationships were shown to help discourage students from dropping out. As well as social-cognitive skills training at school and improved parental management skills at home. Research suggests that these techniques are moderately effective in reducing classroom disruptiveness and can potentially prevent suspension (Marshall & Olivia, 2006). The National Association of Social Work also suggest tutoring and counseling programs, as well as formal mentoring programs, which can have a large positive effect on students' grade-point (averages), self-esteem, classroom behavior and problem-solving abilities. Marshall & Olivia, (2006) also suggests numerous school-based interventions which include: decreasing school size, monitoring diverse interdisciplinary curriculums, exploring teaching expectations and practices, supporting use of individualized assessments to avoid competitive grading, involving teachers and staff in addressing student needs, developing alternatives to grade retention, implementing violence prevention and anti-bullying programs; and developing school-wide positive behavioral support systems. While there are proven methods to address the nation's dropout rate, the National Association of Social Work suggests placing the issue in the public spotlight as an important first step in making changes for the better.

The National Association of Social Work (2008) notes that early intervention is critical, social workers can build relationships with teachers and help monitor a student's behavior and help address changes if things aren't working. School social
workers play a critical role in any efforts to keep students from becoming dropout statistics. School social workers not only provide direct services to children who require basic needs or exhibit challenging behavior, but also lead prevention efforts that support children through building the capacity of family members, other school staff, and community agencies to improve student outcomes (National Association of Social Work, 2008; Marshall & Olivia, 2006).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study was to engage continuation high school students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences. The guiding research questions for this study were: 1) What do continuation high school students perceive as existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships)?, 2) What do continuation high school students perceive as barriers (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education?, and 3) When comparing a continuation high school environment to a traditional high school environment, what elements have motivated students in their decision to complete their education?

It is only through eliciting as many student perspectives as possible that we can begin to get a sense of what students know, feel, and need in their schooling experience (Cook-Sather, 2002). Therefore, the employment of an exploratory research design was deemed most appropriate. An exploratory design is frequently used when there is limited research data on a certain topic and the researcher is interested in learning more about it (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

Research Design

The design for this exploratory study utilized a mixed method approach. According to Rubin and Babbie (2008), a mixed methods research design is a
procedure for collecting, analyzing, and “mixing” both quantitative and qualitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem. A mixed method approach was selected with the desire to collect data based on the personal accounts and experiences of continuation high school students in California’s Stanislaus County. A survey was utilized to meet the goals of this study. The questionnaire focused on students’ perceptions concerning: 1) their existing internal supports, 2) barriers in pursuing their education, and 3) elements of their education in traditional high school and continuation school that have motivated them to complete their schooling. In utilizing an exploratory research design, this study can help establish a platform for researchers, school administrators, community constituents, and at-risk students to communicate collectively and promote the best educational environment possible within the continuation high school setting.

**Sampling Plan**

In this study, this researcher used a nonprobability sampling method. Non-probability sampling was used to recruit participants as it was feasible for this mode of inquiry. This study does not have the means to gather the names of everyone in this specific population (continuation high schools in Stanislaus County) which is needed for probability sampling. As a result, every individual who attends continuation high will not have an equal chance of being selected for the study; therefore the results of this study cannot be generalized to the targeted population (Rubin & Babbie, 2008).

This researcher used purposive sampling as the focus is on experiences and perceptions of continuation high school students. Three continuation high schools in
Stanislaus County participated in the completion of this study. Throughout this study, this researcher will be referring to the three continuation high schools as schools A, B, and C. Permission to conduct research at these three schools was obtained by the proper school administrator(s) prior to submission for approval by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus. For a complete review of the memorandum of understanding, see Appendix B. This researcher recruited 32 continuation high school students to participate in the survey. As incentive to complete the survey each participant who volunteered to take the survey was entered into a raffle and was eligible to win one of three $25 gift cards. There was one winner from each participating school.

**Instrumentation**

The questions that will be asked of the participants during the survey were derived in part from the literature reviewed. Another important source in the creation of the tool was the voluntary discussion group of ten students who attend school A. As well as helping with the design of the questions, the students who participated in the discussion group also pretested the survey. The design of the questionnaire was to investigate the themes or characteristics that have helped, hindered, and motivated students to finish the requirements for a high school diploma, as perceived by current continuation high school students. The participants who chose to participate in the survey, and who were not part of the discussion group at school A were asked a total of 22 questions, (a combination of open and closed-ended questions) were used. For a complete review of the questions, see Appendix A.
Data Collection

This researcher was the sole person that collected the data. With prior approval from the appropriate school staff this researcher presented the research proposal to each class from schools A, B, and C. This researcher informed all potential participants that an informed consent/assent form was required if they decided to participate in the study. With assistance from the teaching staff this researcher handed out the appropriate forms (informed consent/assent) to all students who decided to participate. All potential participants were reminded that if they did not return the informed consent/assent form on the day the survey was to take place they would forfeit their opportunity to participate in the study.

On the day the survey was to commence all students who decided to participate and had a signed informed consent/assent form were instructed by their teachers to meet at the predetermined location (empty classroom) at the appropriate time. The surveys were distributed during normal class time and took no longer than 25 minutes to complete. The time line for collecting data was January 6th, 2014 through January 31st, 2014. Prior to the start of the survey, the participants submitted their signed informed consent forms and, if under 18, their signed assent forms to this researcher.

Data Analysis

This researcher applied Neuman’s five-part plan for identifying themes from the data collected. Neuman’s five-part plan includes sorting and classifying the data, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and interpreting and elaborating data.
(Neuman, 2009). After the data was collected, this researcher used Neuman’s five-part process for conducting qualitative analysis. The first step, in Neuman’s five-part plan for creating themes is sorting and classifying the data. In this step, the data was organized around the research questions. The second step is open coding. In this step, this researcher created themes based on the types of questions asked and organized the data into categories. These categories were developed and guided by the literature and the responses from the participants. The third step is axial coding; during this part of the analysis this researcher took a second look at the data and the previous codes to check if categories can be combined or deleted. Next, this researcher looked for cases and quotes to illustrate the themes (selective coding). The final step of Neuman’s plan is interpreting and elaborating the data. In this step, this researcher related and compared the data to past literature. The data is presented in a narrative form. The Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) was used to analyze the questions in the survey that were quantitative. SPSS was used to gather univariate statistics and will be presented along with the qualitative data analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

During initial contact with potential participants, this researcher explained the nature and purpose of the intended study; once this researcher explained the study to the participants this researcher informed them of their rights and responsibilities as a participant in the study. Prior to the commencement of the survey, this researcher verbally explained the goal of the intended study and answered any questions raised by the participants. This researcher explained that participation in this study was
voluntary. In order to ensure protection of human subjects, participants were asked to sign an informed consent/assent form (See Appendix C, & D) explaining the nature of the study and inform participants that they have a right to terminate participation at any time without any consequences. This researcher does not anticipate any potential harm to come to the participants as a result of their participation in this study.

To ensure that no harm is done, the names of participants will not be included in the study. The data collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in a secure room accessible only by this researcher. Transcribed notes and any other hand written notes pertaining to the study will be shredded six months after the completion of the study.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions continuation high school students’ had about their high school engagement experience. This study was designed to capture the factors that supported these students in the completion of their high school diploma as well as the barriers that may have hindered their success in completing their high school education. The study was also designed to compare the continuation high school environment to the traditional high school environment.

A mixed method approach was used to analyze the data from the survey. The Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) was used to analyze the questions in the survey that were quantitative. SPSS was used to gather univariate statistics and will be presented along with the qualitative data analysis. Newman’s five-part plan consisting of sorting and classifying, open coding, axial coding, selective coding, and interpreting and elaborating was used for creating the themes from the questions in the survey that were qualitative. The data will be presented with information about the results along with percentages to display the statistical results of the survey. The major themes found in this study were: school structure, positive environment, personal attention, and educational barriers. Student responses to their perceived educational barriers fall within four categories: school, family issues, outside influences, and self. The guiding research questions for this study were:
1. What do continuation high school students perceive as existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships)?

2. What do continuation high school students perceive as barriers (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education?

3. When comparing a continuation high school environment to a traditional high school environment, what elements have motivated students in their decision to complete their education?

**Sample Overview**

The sample consisted of 32 continuation high school students. Three continuation high schools in the Central Valley participated in the survey. Sixteen (n=16) respondents attended continuation high school A, eleven (n=11) respondents attended continuation high school B, and five (n=5) respondents attended continuation high school C. Fourteen of the respondents were female and 18 were male. The respondents’ identified their race/ethnicity to be Hispanic (n=24), White/Caucasian (n=7), and Other (n=1). Fifty percent of all respondents were between the ages of 15 and 16 when they first enrolled in continuation high school with half of all respondents entering in the 11th grade.

**School Structure**

The students in this study perceived that small school size affects the entire school experience and overall success in high school. The continuation high schools in this study were unquestionably smaller than most traditional high schools. The student enrollment of the 3 continuation high schools in the sample ranged from 60
students to over 250 students; students said that the small school created a completely different culture and atmosphere than the traditional high schools. One student tells of her experience being nameless for an entire year in a traditional high school class. “They [my teachers] didn't know me. Even after a whole year my teacher still didn’t know my name. But at the continuation school it’s different, everyone knows everyone, kind of like a family.” In larger high schools students explained that they felt lost. They felt like another face in the crowd. "The large high school is too stressful because you're one of a thousand and you feel like no one knows you.” Comments such as the previous statement were a repeating theme in all 3 schools sampled.

Another factor in the continuation high school structure that appealed to many of the students were the shortened class times offered by the continuation school. One student explained how he was still able to work and help out his family while still being able to go to school stating that, “if it weren’t for the short hours here at the continuation school I wouldn’t be going to school.” Another student compares her class hours at traditional high school to the continuation high school, stating, “I was in school for like 7 ½ hours and with my anxiety issues I just couldn’t cope. But her at the continuation school I have more control of my issues and it really makes a difference only having to be in school for 3 ½ hours.”

All of the participating students attended at least one traditional high school before enrolling in a continuation high school. Because the students all had experience in both school structures, they used comparisons between the two to
explicate their thoughts. Students repeatedly made comparisons using the size of the schools and the shortened class time as definers in their statements.

**Positive Environment**

The theme of a positive school environment was mentioned within many contexts. It emerges from students' responses to "what" or "who" made the difference in students' success in continuation high school. A positive school environment evolved as a theme as numerous students communicated that the school environment influenced their success at the continuation high school.

One student believed that the continuation school is created better than the regular high school, “I would change the way it’s [traditional high school] set up because not many kids get individual time with the teachers at regular school and here at the continuation school it’s a lot smaller and you get all the help you need.” Another student agreed stating that “I would make it [traditional high school] like the continuation high school, because it’s just way better.”

The perceptions of students included the assorted people who create the positive environment. Though their comments usually reflected teachers, students also mention principals, security people, and office staff. "They didn't judge me and told me straight out, it's up to you if you want to graduate. We're just here to help you." Another student explained, "Over here [continuation school], the teachers do whatever they can to help us. They try to set a positive environment for us."

Students stated that the positive environment is linked to success. "When I came I saw that I had a second chance and how fast I was catching up. I thank
everybody who helped me because now I do want to graduate and I am determined to." Another student said, "I feel that I've been successful because of the positive environment they [teachers and staff] make me want to learn. They just try real hard to help me succeed."

The positive environment of continuation school also allows for more personal attention. One student said that she received, "one on one attention because it's a better environment…” Another student explained her opinion about the environment quite succinctly. "Traditional high school was annoying and felt like a chore but continuation feels better, I get more help and I like coming to school."

**Personal Attention**

Personalized attention took many forms and included private issues of students as well as academic assistance. One student said that at continuation school, "teachers are more concerned about me and make me feel like I belong here and matter to them as a student and at traditional high school they don’t give you second chances; it was horrible they didn’t really care.” Another student agreed, "One-on-one attention for as long as you need it. They [continuation high school staff] pay more attention to you and make sure that you're on track and getting those credits."

Concerning the benefits of continuation high school, one student said that, “this is a smaller school compared to the big high school with two or three thousand students. They [teachers] can take more time with one person because they don't have a lot of people to deal with.” Students perceived that school size affects their access to people and services. Students believed that teachers are able to be more attentive to
the students' needs at a continuation high school. "They [teachers] can concentrate on more people because there's not that many to concentrate on." In traditional high school, students believed that they could not talk with a teacher without an appointment. One student made reference to a former private high school. "I went to private school before this. It was always harder to talk to a teacher." It was more difficult, she said, "Because you had to make an appointment because they were always busy." Another student from a public high school said, "Sometimes you gotta make an appointment (to see a teacher) if you want to get any help. Shoot even with an appointment you still might not even get a chance to talk to your teacher." Another student agreed stating that,

When you have less people, the teachers help more because they know us. There are thousands over there (regular high school) so the teachers can't really get to know the students. That really makes a big difference, especially when you need help.

In addition to the relationships with the teachers, students talked about the time spent and relationships with other staff members. Staff members at a continuation school included the principal, counselors, and security people. "It's a lot easier for the teachers and principal to encourage students one on one. In regular high school, there's so many students that they just can't worry individually like they do here where everyone knows everyone." Another student agreed that attention is a critical factor. “I know there are students here that probably don't get the attention at home,
and when they come here [to continuation high school] they feel more comfortable. The teachers and principal just care more here.”

As students explained the personalized attention at the continuation high school, more comparisons to the regular high school surfaced. One student tells of his experience,

I had the same teachers for a whole year [at the traditional high school]. And the thing was they never knew my name. I would never stand out because I was doing good but yet not bad. And for me, I have to have attention. I have to have teachers notice me. So what I was starting to do was fail, fail, and that's how they got to notice me, which is how I ended up here at continuation school.

Another student used a comparison to illustrate the attention given by continuation staff members. "Everybody here just talks to you friendly and everything. At big high schools they wouldn't do that." One student transferred back to the regular high school only to choose the continuation high school once again.

I've been here [continuation] three years. I went back [to traditional high school], but I chose to stay here because I felt if I went back to regular high school, I'll fall back down again only because I don't get that personal attention that I get here.

One student believed that "it's the smaller enrollment" that allows teachers to tutor students. Other students agreed, "I don't know, there's like not that many people in classes. So it's like a small group so you can do your work."
The quantitative analysis also supported the reoccurring theme of personal attention within the continuation high school setting with 84% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that teachers at the continuation high school were interested in them. While only 44% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teachers were interested in them at the traditional high school.

**Educational Barriers**

Within continuation high school settings, many of the students are considered to be potential dropouts who are at-risk and have reached their last destination for a chance at academic success. Bulger and Watson (2006), contend that at-risk refers to a student’s background characteristics, internal characteristics, and environmental factors that encompass a variety of limitations to learning including technology, access to support services, and transportation. Question 11 in the survey asked respondents about the factors in their life that have been obstacles to their success in school. This question was posed to the students in this study in order to understand, from their perspectives, what factors they find to be limiting to their success. Student responses fell within four categories: school, family issues, outside influences, and self. The student responses are summarized in Table 1.

| Participant 6 | I have a fear of interacting with teachers from third grade |
| Participant 8 | Math |
| Participant 19 | My obstacles would be the English work |
| Participant 21 | Homework always took hours a day and sometimes I wouldn’t finish it |
Participant 22           English
Participant 24           My struggles with math
Participant 27           The school was just too big
Participant 30           English is hard and the teachers didn’t understand that

Category #2 Family Issues

Participant 10           My mom and dad turned to drugs and we moved a lot
Participant 16           Family issues have been a big obstacle since I was young
Participant 17           Going to Mexico for a year because of family issues
Participant 23           My parents’ divorce was a major factor
Participant 26           Mainly fighting with my dad in the past
Participant 31           The only obstacle is that I have to work to help my family which makes it hard because I work nights

Category #3 Outside Influences

Participant 1           Moving to another country for a year
Participant 3           Anxiety disorder/depression
Participant 4           Leaving my old house, fighting depression
Participant 9           Medical issues
Participant 18           Moving to a different city
Participant 32           Dyslexia

Category #4 Self

Participant 2           Was very unmotivated
Participant 5           Basically, my homework because I didn’t do it, it was boring
Participant 7           I have a short attention span and get bored easily
Participant 14           Not believing in myself. Being told I would never be anything but a mistake
Participant 15  That I don’t understand the material covered and lose interest
Participant 28  I talk too much and get distracted easily
Participant 29  My biggest obstacle is that I find school boring and draining

Two students said they were unsure about the obstacles facing them by indicating, “I don’t know” or “none” One student even commented, “I don’t understand the question” which could have been the reason why it was left blank. Two students, while not naming the obstacle that influenced their success, did explain how they were able to overcome the obstacle(s). For example, one student stated, “I think the support of my parents and the teachers that work with you make things a lot easier. I don’t ever let anyone tell me I can’t do something.” Similarly, the other student recommended, “You just have to have the power to work hard. Don’t ever give up and do whatever you have to do to make it.” The evidence of their positive attitudes and resiliency in spite of the obstacles they have faced indicate a development of their own cognitive development. The students found adaptive strategies, namely their personal motivation and dedication to learning, to persist in school in spite of the challenges they have faced in their diverse lives.

Summary

This chapter discussed the results of this study on student perceptions regarding their schooling experiences in contrasting high school settings. The data sources were explained and the quantitative and qualitative results were presented and analyzed. A brief explanation regarding the emerging themes from this study was also discussed. Overall, the results of this study brought greater understanding of how
students feel about their schooling experiences in contrasting high school settings and helped to explain what factors influence the engagement practices of today’s high school students. Chapter five will discuss the summary of findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Overview of Major Findings

An analysis of student responses indicated a number of important findings relating to the perceptions of students who have attended continuation high school. Based on the voices of the students in this study, the most significant finding was that a relationship with just one teacher could potentially make the difference between a student’s ability to engage in school, and feel a sense of belonging, or to disengage from school altogether. The continuation high school students in this study felt teachers were the most influential factor regarding their connection to school. Students emphasized the importance of teachers in terms of motivating them to succeed and also indicated the desire to have caring teachers available to talk to. Similarly, Cushman (2005) found that students respond best to knowledgeable, challenging, imaginative, and caring teachers, while Brewster and Bowen (2004) found that teacher support in the form of listening, encouraging, and respecting students relates to the academic engagement of students.

Another significant finding in this study was that students revealed components about the differing school settings which signified their engagement or disengagement practices. Students indicated that the school size at both traditional and continuation high schools impacted their feeling of belonging on the campus. Archambault et al. (2003) and Losen & Wald (2005) also found that students’ social
engagement is increased when students feel a sense of belonging. Students in this study shared that there was a disconnect between teachers and students and not enough one-on-one help at the traditional high school while the smaller continuation high school gave a feeling of greater connection on campus. Swanson (2005) contends that the current high school structure must be changed in order to provide opportunities for personalized attention and long-term relationships between teachers and students, which supports the results of the students in this study.

Students recognized the importance of the smaller, more personalized setting in continuation high schools which provided them opportunities to fully engage in their education. In other words, students perceived that teachers in the smaller setting of a continuation high school were able to form relationships with them that allowed for a nurturing environment to flourish. Thus, students felt more supported in terms of the impact of their lived-experiences on their educational outcomes. From a social justice perspective, when teachers care enough to understand students’ lives, backgrounds, and cultures they in turn can build caring relationships with students and further foster engagement (Freire, 2000). All teachers must respect and want to help children obtain a genuine education regardless of their social class; that is what will enable social change, widen students’ possibilities in life, and ultimately, engage students in school (Archambault et al., 2009).

Students also shared their appreciation for the personalized attention and strong relationships shared with the teachers at the continuation high schools. In this study, students’ commented on the absence of positive connections with most adults
they came into contact with at the traditional high schools. These students had limited opportunities to feel success in their large high school classroom experiences because they lacked positive student/teacher connections (Ruiz de Velasco & McLaughlin, 2012). Students commented on how the teachers in the traditional high schools were often unapproachable and rigid. Students’ also commented that requests for help often went unfulfilled or students would not approach the teachers with problem issues.

Personal attention and relationships have been linked to a number of characteristics of a continuation high school. These characteristics were important for the students’ great sense of acceptance. After feeling like an unsuccessful outsider, students were relieved to finally feel accepted in their academic environment. Students were valued for “who they were” by their peers, teachers, and administrators. Students commented on how they were a true part of the school community and members of the inclusive culture. This sense of acceptance was created by the caring faculty and staff and by the small design of the school. More importantly, in order for the acceptance to be widespread and inclusive, students shared their acquired skills of acceptance with new students to continue fostering a positive educational environment.

One surprising finding in this study was that students were adamant that their own decision making processes were the most influential in their abilities to be successful and engaged in high school. Joselowsky (2007) supports this finding in that when students who have traditionally been voiceless in schools are given an opportunity to critically examine their knowledge and modes of inquiry, learning
becomes meaningful. Similarly, by affirming students and giving them opportunities to have a voice in their own learning decisions, students are able to be reskilled to be critical thinkers and are empowered in the learning process (Walker & Greene, 2009). Students in this study acknowledged their past mistakes and took ownership of their own choices to decide to change and were, thus, empowered to be successful in high school. Students acknowledged that the continuation high school was viewed as their “last chance” or “second chance” at graduating from high school and they were determined to push themselves to take advantage of that opportunity in order to move forward.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations within this study. The first major limitation was the sample size (n=32), the study would be better represented if applied to a larger population. Also, the sample consisted of predominately Hispanic participants and this researcher is unsure if the results would be the same across different ethnic backgrounds. Another limitation is the time restriction for data analysis with completing this study as it would have been helpful to add more qualitative sections. For example semi-structured interviews or focus groups with participants would have been useful to gather more information on students’ engagement experiences within the continuation and traditional high school setting.

**Implications of the Major Findings**

The findings from this study are important for school social work practitioners who work with adolescents because it captures the unique voices of continuation high
school students. School social workers could use this knowledge to better advocate for student environments that meet the educational needs of all students. Yazzie-Mintz (2007) concurred that by listening to what students say about their perceptions of their school experiences and engagement, educators may better understand what high school students need and school improvements can be made. These findings could also be used by the social work field, in general, in helping recognize racial and ethnic barriers faced by students within local education districts. By being able to recognize these barriers social work practitioners can develop strategies to lessen and overcome these barriers on students.

Traditional high school policies, as related to programs and structure, must also be revisited and redesigned in order address the needs of all students. Marshall & Olivia (2006) contend that the current high school structure must be changed in order to provide opportunities for personalized attention and long-term relationships between teachers and students. High school policies must be redesigned to incorporate elements of developing interpersonal skills and building meaningful student relationships within the classroom setting. Students clearly indicated both positive and negative experiences with their teachers in both the traditional and continuation high school settings. However, they identified with the continuation school as a place that fostered all of their dimensions of engagement due to the perceived traits of their teachers as well as the relationships they formed with them.
**Future Research**

Based upon the conclusions and findings in this study, there are several recommendations for future research. First, it would be valuable for future researchers to expand the study to a larger population base. Second, because this study only involved continuation high school students, administering the survey to at-risk traditional high school students could provide further information about how to best engage high school students in varied settings. Additionally, the students in this study emphasized the importance of teachers in their high school engagement practices. A follow-up study on teachers and their perceptions of engagement in both continuation and traditional high school settings would provide another unique perspective to compare to the student perceptions in this study. Furthermore, by researching teachers, additional information could be compiled about how to enhance our current teacher education programs to better meet the needs of all students.
REFERENCES


APPENDICES
1. How old were you when you first enrolled in continuation high school?

2. What grade were you in when you were FIRST ENROLLED in continuation high school? (example - junior, sophomore, etc...)

3. List the reason or reasons why you were enrolled in continuation high school.

4. What does the continuation high school provide for you that the traditional high school did not?
5. Please explain how your two high school experiences (traditional high school and current school) have been different for you?

6. What is the best thing about continuation high school for you?

7. Who do you turn to for emotional support? (Check all that apply)
   - Parent
   - Friend
   - Teacher
   - Others not mentioned (please specify):

8. How do the people you listed (above) support you?

9. Please list with whom you live, (example - parent and step-parent, or grandparents only)
10. Are the people you listed (above) supportive of your education? (Please explain)

11. What factors in your life have been obstacles to your success in school? (Please explain)

12. What factors in your life have supported your success in school? (Please explain)

13. What motivates you to stay in school? (Please explain)

14. If you could make the CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOL experience better, what would you change?

15. If you could make the TRADITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL experience better, what would you change?
16. What are your plans once you graduate (example- attend college, work)?

17. Please indicate how important the following factors are in motivating you to stay in school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Not at all Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Size of the campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of the classes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in extracurricular activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal motivation and enjoyment of school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other factors not mentioned (please specify):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Please answer the following questions as they relate to your experience at a TRADITIONAL high school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most teachers at the school were interested in me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I felt as if I did not belong there.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There was at least one teacher or other adult at the school that I could talk to if I had a problem. □ □ □ □ □

People at the school were friendly to me. □ □ □ □ □

I was included in lots of activities at the school. □ □ □ □ □

I felt very different from most other students at the school. □ □ □ □ □

I could really be myself at the school. □ □ □ □ □

Other students at the school liked me the way I was. □ □ □ □ □

I felt like a real part of the school. □ □ □ □ □

I felt motivated to come to class. □ □ □ □ □

19. Please answer the following questions as they relate to your CURRENT school:

| Most teachers at the school were interested in me. | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Sometimes I felt as if I did not belong there. | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| There was at least one teacher or other adult at the school that I could talk to if I had a problem. | □ | □ | □ | □ |
People at the school were friendly to me.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I was included in lots of activities at the school.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I felt very different from most other students at the school.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I could really be myself at the school.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Other students at the school liked me the way I was.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I felt like a real part of the school.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

I felt motivated to come to class.  

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

20. What grade are you currently in?

21. Ethnicity (mark one):

- [ ] African American
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Hispanic
- [ ] White/Caucasian
- [ ] Other: __________
22. What is your Gender?

- Female
- Male
APPENDIX B

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

PURPOSE:
This document will define the agreement between the researcher and school A. The purpose of this memorandum of understanding is to serve as a tool that will guide the research to be conducted by Shonna Hoover. Ms. Hoover is a Master of Social Work (MSW) student at CSU Stanislaus. Ms. Hoover’s research will be monitored by her MSW thesis chairperson Dr. Kilolo Brodie. Additionally, supervision of this proposed study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus.

SCOPE OF STUDY:
The purpose of this study is to engage continuation high school students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences. By providing continuation high school students an opportunity to share their perceptions of engagement with self, school, and success, this researcher hopes to explore and gain a better understanding of continuation high school students perception concerning: 1) their existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships) 2) barriers experienced (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education and 3) their experiences in a continuation high school environment compared to a traditional high school environment.

The data collection for this study will occur in two phases:

Phase one will involve an informal discussion with 8-10 students from school A. The purpose of the discussion will be to engage students in the development of the research tool (survey questions) that will be utilized in the study. As an incentive for student participation lunch will be given to those who participate. Once this researcher completes the development of the survey, the same 8-10 students will pretest the survey to make sure all questions are clear and that no further modifications to the survey are necessary. Once the final revisions to the survey are made, phase two of the data collection process will commence.

Phase two will involve distributing the survey to three continuation high schools including school A. Only participants who have signed an informed consent (or if under 18 have an informed consent signed by a parent or guardian) will be considered for participation in the survey. As an incentive, each student participant will be entered into a raffle and be eligible to receive one of three gift cards worth $25 each. There will be one winner from each school that participates.
SCHOOL A AGREES TO:
- Allow specified CSU Stanislaus Master of Social Work student permission to complete group discussion, pretest of survey, and distribution of survey to students.
- Make provisions for on-site space to conduct the group discussion.
- Make staff aware of the forthcoming research (i.e., announce in meetings, a memo)

THE RESEARCHER SHONNA HOOVER AGREES TO:
- Inform the participants of their role in this study as well as the purpose of the study.
- Present the participants with an informed consent form and obtain their signature and if the participants are under the age of 18 a signed parental consent form will be used.
- Conduct this research on a voluntary basis with no expectation of payment from school A.
- Safeguard the information received from the research participants and maintain confidential record keeping.
- Submit a copy of the thesis to school A upon completion of Master’s degree requirements (approval by the CSU Stanislaus Graduate School and thesis committee).
- Adhere to this MOU and the CSU Stanislaus protocol for research and informed consent.

AGREEMENT TO BE SIGNED & DATED BY:
- Principal – School A
- Shonna Hoover – CSU Stanislaus, MSW Student

____________________________________
Shonna Hoover, MSW Student

____________________________________
Principal – School A
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

PURPOSE:
This document will define the agreement between the researcher and school B. The purpose of this memorandum of understanding is to serve as a tool that will guide the research to be conducted by Shonna Hoover. Ms. Hoover is a Master of Social Work (MSW) student at CSU Stanislaus. Ms. Hoover’s research will be monitored by her MSW thesis chairperson Dr. Kilolo Brodie. Additionally, supervision of this proposed study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus.

SCOPE OF STUDY:
The purpose of this study is to engage continuation high school students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences. By providing continuation high school students an opportunity to share their perceptions of engagement with self, school, and success, this researcher hopes to explore and gain a better understanding of continuation high school students perception concerning: 1) their existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships) 2) barriers experienced (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education and 3) their experiences in a continuation high school environment compared to a traditional high school environment.

The data collection for this study will occur in two phases:

Phase one involved an informal discussion with 10 students from a local continuation high school. The purpose of the discussion was to engage students in the development of the research tool (survey questions) that was developed for this study. Once the study is approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus phase two of the data collection process will commence.

Phase two will involve distributing the survey to three continuation high schools including school B. Only participants who have signed an informed consent (or if under 18 have an assent form signed by a parent or guardian) will be considered for participation in the survey. As an incentive, each student participant will be entered into a raffle and be eligible to receive one of three gift cards worth $25 each. There will be one winner from each school that participates.

SCHOOL B:
- Allow specified CSU Stanislaus Master of Social Work student permission to complete distribution of survey to students.
- Make staff aware of the forthcoming research (i.e., announce in meetings, a memo)
THE RESEARCHER SHONNA HOOVER AGREES TO:
- Inform the participants of their role in this study as well as the purpose of the study.
- Present the participants with an informed consent form and obtain their signature and if the participants are under the age of 18 a signed assent form will be used.
- Conduct this research on a voluntary basis with no expectation of payment from school B.
- Safeguard the information received from the research participants and maintain confidential record keeping.
- Adhere to this MOU and the CSU Stanislaus protocol for research and informed consent.

AGREEMENT TO BE SIGNED & DATED BY:
- Principal– School B
- Shonna Hoover – CSU Stanislaus, MSW Student

____________________________________
Shonna Hoover, MSW Student

____________________________________
Principal– School B
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

PURPOSE:
This document will define the agreement between the researcher and school C. The purpose of this memorandum of understanding is to serve as a tool that will guide the research to be conducted by Shonna Hoover. Ms. Hoover is a Master of Social Work (MSW) student at CSU Stanislaus. Ms. Hoover’s research will be monitored by her MSW thesis chairperson Dr. Kilolo Brodie. Additionally, supervision of this proposed study will be approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus.

SCOPE OF STUDY:
The purpose of this study is to engage continuation high school students in an opportunity to share perceptions of their high school engagement experiences. By providing continuation high school students an opportunity to share their perceptions of engagement with self, school, and success, this researcher hopes to explore and gain a better understanding of continuation high school students perception concerning: 1) their existing internal supports (e.g., family, friends, and other meaningful relationships) 2) barriers experienced (e.g., family, work, learning disabilities) in pursuing their education and 3) their experiences in a continuation high school environment compared to a traditional high school environment.

The data collection for this study will occur in two phases:

Phase one involved an informal discussion with 10 students from a local continuation high school. The purpose of the discussion was to engage students in the development of the research tool (survey questions) that was developed for this study. Once the study is approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSU Stanislaus phase two of the data collection process will commence.

Phase two will involve distributing the survey to three continuation high schools including school C. Only participants who have signed an informed consent (or if under 18 have an assent form signed by a parent or guardian) will be considered for participation in the survey. As an incentive, each student participant will be entered into a raffle and be eligible to receive one of three gift cards worth $25 each. There will be one winner from each school that participates.

SCHOOL C AGREES TO:
- Allow specified CSU Stanislaus Master of Social Work student permission to complete distribution of survey to students.
- Make staff aware of the forthcoming research (i.e., announce in meetings, a memo)
THE RESEARCHER SHONNA HOOVER AGREES TO:

- Inform the participants of their role in this study as well as the purpose of the study.
- Present the participants with an informed consent form and obtain their signature and if the participants are under the age of 18 a signed assent form will be used.
- Conduct this research on a voluntary basis with no expectation of payment from school C.
- Safeguard the information received from the research participants and maintain confidential record keeping.
- Adhere to this MOU and the CSU Stanislaus protocol for research and informed consent.

AGREEMENT TO BE SIGNED & DATED BY:

- Principal–School C
- Shonna Hoover – CSU Stanislaus, MSW Student

________________________
Shonna Hoover, MSW Student

________________________
Principal- School C
Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Master’s degree in Social Work at CSU Stanislaus. This researcher hopes to learn about the engagement experiences of continuation high school students and the factors that have influenced and/or motivated them to complete their high school education. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide continuation high school personnel with useful insights into the value of current continuation high school programs that support students in the completion of a high school diploma. If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in a survey. The survey will be composed of twenty-two open and closed ended questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. The survey will be held on school campus and will be administered during normal class time.

There are no foreseen risks to you for your participation in this study.

It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. The surveys will be maintained in a locked file cabinet and only the researcher will have access to the file key. The data will be kept confidential at all times even when presenting the study as the data will not identify the participants. Upon completion of the research, the original surveys will be destroyed.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure(s) described above. As an incentive all participants will be entered in to a raffle and be eligible to receive one of three gift cards worth $25. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. You may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Shonna Hoover at (209) 667-3091 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Kilolo Brodie at (209) 667-3126. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Campus Compliance Officer by phone (209) 667-3794 or email IRBAadmin@csustan.edu.
Sincerely,

Shonna Hoover, Master of Social Work Student

Participant signature and date
Dear Parent/Guardian:

Your son/daughter is being asked to participate in a research project that is being done to fulfill requirements for a Master’s degree in Social Work at CSU Stanislaus. This researcher hopes to learn about the experiences of continuation high school students and the factors that have influenced and/or motivated them to complete their high school education. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide continuation high school personnel with useful insights into the value of current continuation high school programs that support students in the completion of a high school diploma.

If your son/daughter is under the age of 18 and wants to participate in this research, your permission is required, but if you do not want them to participate they do not have to. The survey will be held on school campus and will be administered during normal class time. The survey will be composed of twenty-two open and closed ended questions and should take no longer than 30 minutes to complete. There are no foreseen risks to your son/daughter for their participation in this study. It is possible that your son/daughter will not benefit directly by participating in this study.

The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. The surveys will be maintained in a locked file cabinet and only the researcher will have access to the file key. The data will be kept confidential at all times even when presenting the study as the data will not identify the participants. Upon completion of the research, the original surveys will be destroyed.

There is no cost to you or your son/daughter beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure(s) described above. As an incentive all participants will be entered in to a raffle and be eligible to receive one of three gift cards worth $25. Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits. Your son/daughter may withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

If you agree to let your son/daughter participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research project please contact
me, Shonna Hoover at (209) 667-3091 or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Kilolo Brodie at (209) 667-3126. If you have any questions regarding your child’s rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Campus Compliance Officer by phone (209) 667-3794 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,

Shonna Hoover, Master of Social Work Student

Parent/Guardian signature and date

Student signature and date