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by

Yolanda M. Calhoun

December 2016

A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE
ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS
INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education in Professional Leadership

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College of Education

December 2016

Dedication

I am dedicating my dissertation in memory of my beloved father, Floyd Lee Calhoun, Sr. Dad, you were the epitome of what every child wants as a father. You were a God-fearing, family man who taught me the value of education, religion, family, and finances. Although you were a man of few words, your actions spoke volume. Oh how I would give anything to have you here with me to share this moment in my life. I can hear you from heaven cheering me on and bragging to all the folks nearby saying, “This is my “Baby Girl””. I miss you so much. You will forever be in my heart.

Acknowledgement

My story throughout this process is a testament of my faith. I trusted God to guide me through this expedition and now I am about to accomplish one of the greatest goals of my life. I thank God for blessing me with the wisdom and knowledge to arrange words on paper to form my thesis. I also thank Him for His favor. He has shown me that “No weapons formed against me shall prosper.” I am a believer that, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

When I started this journey four years ago, I had no earthly idea that my life would change so drastically. The week that I made my final decision to return to school to work on my doctorate degree, I was blessed to become a foster parent of two wonderful children, Kevin and Stephen Omot. I had to learn quickly how to balance my life as a mother, educator, and student. Kevin and Stephen, the night I met the two of you, I knew God placed you in my life for a reason. Kevin Anena, you are my only daughter. I have watched you blossom into the smart, beautiful person you are. Stephen, the bond that we have formed is undeniable. I see so much of me in you that if I didn't know any better, I would have thought that I gave birth to you. It is astonishing to see how you have developed into the amazing young man that you are. One year later, I was blessed with another son, Amori Freedom. Amori, your smile can brighten anybody's day. You are blessed with a calm spirit. Your experiences in life have formed you into a man with many talents. You have proven to yourself and to others that the sky is the limit to what you can accomplish. I look forward to seeing what God has in store for you. This summer, as I was experiencing some turmoil in my life, the Lord placed Ablel Misgena and Mulue Mezgeb in our home. Ablel and Mulue, the two of you have shown me what

survival really means. During this journey, I wanted to give up, but every time I saw each of you, I was reminded that quitting is not an option. No one will ever understand the joy the five of you have brought into my life. I love you all.

To my amazing mother, Helen M. Calhoun, you have always supported me in every endeavor in my life. It started with the first key I played on the piano to the last key on the keyboard that I will strike in completing my dissertation. You are like my identical twin; whatever emotion I feel, you feel it too. It is your hugs and words of encouragement that help me through difficult situations. I am forever grateful to have you as my mom, friend, and confidant. I love you.

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I want to thank the members of my cohort that has inspired me along the way, in particular, Dana Arreola and Gladys Moton; I can now join you in saying, “We did it.” Finally, Dr. Archie Blanson, thank you for sharing your expertise with me during my internship and most of all for always being a sounding board whenever I needed someone to talk to.

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Abstract

Nationwide, there has been an enormous amount of attention paid to the importance of college readiness for high school students. The Early College High School Program was created to address the problems of low college enrollment and students' lack of preparation for college. The targeted population includes low income youth, English language learners, first-generation college goers, students of color, and other young people underrepresented in higher education. In 2004, Educate Texas made a proposal to open 15 early college high schools in Texas. According to the Texas Education Agency, 44 new early college high schools opened during the 2014-15 school year. Since its launch in 2002, some of the early college high schools surcease.

Participation in an early college high school program comes with benefits and challenges, both of which affect the success of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Despite the promise of Early College High Schools, only 23.3 % of the graduates earned an associate's degree or technical certificate and 77% of the graduates attended some form of postsecondary education in 2010. The purpose of this study was to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, this study explored students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and the factors influencing program completion. Strategies that are

perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree were also examined.

A purposeful sample of 28 students from one Early College High School in the Houston metropolitan area was selected to participate in this study to learn about their perceptions of that early college high school program. Participants were 10th-12th grade students who were enrolled in the Early College High School during the 2015-2016 school year. Three focus groups were conducted using semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data collected from the focus groups were transcribed and coded inductively into emerging themes.

Findings from this study indicate that there are benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school. These benefits include the relationships students build with their teachers and peers, college preparation, attending college at no cost, and the head start experience to college life. The challenges include the competitiveness among the students, a strenuous workload, the ability to be self-driven, and the struggle in maintaining a balanced life. In addition to the benefits and challenges, the students also identified factors that influenced their successful completion of the program, such as family support and self-determination. The students never lost sight of the purpose of the program, which was to earn an associate's degree. During the process, they remained steadfast and they redefined success as surviving four years of the ECHS program by earning college hours and a high school diploma. Throughout it all, their resilience prevailed, leaving them feeling a sense of self-accomplishment.

The findings may be used to inform school and district leaders about what early college high school programs offer, as well as about the challenges. This study also will

contribute to the body of literature on the experiences of participants of early college high school programs.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Nationwide, there has been an enormous amount of attention paid to the importance of college readiness for high school students (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). Indeed, Congress' used federal stimulus dollars to leverage state commitments to advance education reforms that focus on rigorous college and career readiness standards (US Department of Education, 2009). Though it is a national policy priority in the United States, there is still much to learn about the factors and experiences that predict college readiness for underrepresented student of color attending college (Strayhorn, 2012).

At the same time, news related to high school performance throughout the United States continues to be overwhelming negative. For example, it is estimated that only 70% of our nation's ninth graders graduate within 4 years (Swanson, 2009). Furthermore, those who do graduate are often seen as underprepared for postsecondary education or work (Diploma Project, 2004). For instance, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2010) reports that nearly 60% of high school graduates in the United States are not academically ready for college. As a result, after enrolling in an institute of higher learning, many students learn that they must take remedial courses in mathematics and English for non-credit.

The Early College High School Program was created to address the problems of low college enrollment among certain student groups, and those students' lack of preparation for college. Early College High Schools (ECHS) generally are designed based on the principle that combining a rigor academic study with an opportunity to save time and money would be a strong motivator for students to strive and overcome

intellectual challenges (Jobs for the Future, 2004). Students who attend an ECHS do not pay tuition or for books, they earn college and high school credits simultaneously, and they graduate with a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

The creation of ECHS model was triggered by the results of a study in the New York City education system indicating that only 70 percent of the students were graduating with a diploma, and only 32 percent were prepared to do college level work (Early College Design, 2004). The ECHS program was launched in 2004 to provide students with average to low academic performance an opportunity to take complete college courses simultaneously with earning a high school diploma (Jobs for the Future, 2004). In 2010, there were over 5,000 students who graduated from an early college high school program. Data revealed that of the 5,000 graduates, only 23.3% of them actually earned an associate's degree or technical certificate and 77% of them attended some form of postsecondary education (Early College Design, 2010). With less than a fourth of the graduates earning an associate's degree, what is the benefit to attending an Early College High School (ECHS)?

This study addressed the question of whether there is a benefit to students attending an ECHS by examining students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an ECHS program. It also examined factors and strategies affecting students' successful completion of the program.

Background of Problem

In today's society, earning a postsecondary degree is considered the primary means of increasing one's cultural capital and achieving upward mobility (Barnes & Slate, 2013). Indeed, participation in higher education provides benefits to the student,

the economy, and to the society as a whole; however, there are barriers that historically have made it harder for low income students and students of color to pursue higher educational (Wobmann & Shutz, 2006). As a result, students of color continue to be underrepresented among students seeking college degrees (Ovink & Veazey, 2010). One reason is that the traditional comprehensive high school model, derived from the factory model of the early 1900's, has left many students, particularly students of color and low income students, disengaged (Olsen, 2010) and unprepared for the rigor of college work (Conley, 2007).

Despite of the various interventions that have attempted to close postsecondary enrollment gap, research shows that African Americans and Hispanics continue to enroll in college less well prepared to learn at a rigorous level (Perna et. al 2008). For example, while more than 90% of tenth graders expect to enroll in college, only 70% will likely enroll. Once enrolled in a four-year college, only about one-half of all students will graduate. Similarly, of those students attending a two or four year college, only one-fourth will complete a bachelor's degree. Finally, students who do not enroll in college, as well as those who do not complete degrees, are disproportionately low income students (Deil-Amen & DeLuca, 2010). In an effort to understand and address low enrollment and performance trends among students of color, steps have been taken to close the disparities in academic access and achievement in higher education (Mudge & Higgins, 2011).

The Early College High School initiative is one of those efforts as it aims to create secondary schools that develop a college bound/college ready awareness among historically under-achieving and underrepresented high school students (Cravey, 2013). These students are mostly first-generation, low-income students of color. On a global

scale, this population historically has been disadvantaged for several reasons, including their academic preparation, access to information, family environment, lack of motivation, and financial resources (Mudge & Higgins, 2011).

College readiness is one of the most significant barriers to student success in college. Conley (2007) defines college readiness as a student's ability to make inferences, interpret results, solve complex problems, conduct research, and analyze conflicting explanations. The four components of college readiness include key cognitive strategies, academic knowledge and skills, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness (Conley, 2007). The purpose of the ECHS program is to provide these skills and information to students in a progressive, developmental fashion, with the ultimate goal of student graduating with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Fleischman & Heppen (2009) argued that exposing students to college campuses and college-going cultures through an ECHS program also potentially could make the transition to postsecondary education a lot smoother, as well as increase student success while they are still in high school. Although the program appears to be successful, the success rate is not as high as advocates had hoped.

Statement of the Problem

There are many underrepresented students that are very capable of going to college, but do not consider themselves as having the ability to go to a university or even greater than that, earn a bachelor's degree (Saenz & Barrera, 2007). Academically, students lack motivation and self-efficacy which leads to students feeling overwhelmed; then self-doubt becomes the foe (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2006). Personal attributes,

educational goals, and commitment to learning prior to entry to an educational setting all contribute to student success (Tinto, 1975).

The Early College High School Initiative began in 2002. The ECHS program was designed to provide teenagers who are first generation, low-income, students of color an opportunity to earn an associate's degree while attending high school. Today, there are over 230 early colleges in the United States serving over 50,000 students (Early College High School Initiative, 2012). Early college high school students have outperformed their peers in a traditional high school setting nationwide, with a graduation rate of 90 percent compared to 78 percent of the students who graduate from a traditional high school (Early College Design, 2014).

Students typically demonstrate successful completion of high school by earning a high school diploma. In the ECHS setting, success is measured by students earning over 60 college hours to graduate with an associate's degree at the end of their high school career. Nationally, 94 percent of the ECHS students earned college credit; however, only 30 percent of the students graduated with an associate's degree (Early College Design, 2014). Although the ECHS program offers many benefits to the students; there are several factors that impact their success such as lack of parental support, circumstances, and the lack of preparation (Berger, Adelman & Cole, 2010). Notably, students are accepting the challenge of participating in the ECHS program, but all of them are not reaching the mark that was set forth to earn an associate's degree while simultaneously earning a high school diploma. With 70 percent of the ECHS students not completing the required college credits to earn an associate's degree, Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) argued

that research is needed to provide data addressing the academic gap of students unsuccessfully completing the program with 60 or more college credits.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, this study explored students', perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and the factors that influence program completion. The researcher also looked at strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree.

The results from this study will provide the district leaders and stakeholders a micro level perspective of the early college high school experience as it relates to the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the program. It also serves as a gateway for the approval and implementation of another early college high school program in the near future.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant both for policy makers and practitioners. For example, at the federal level, this study is important because President Barack Obama has proposed to cover the cost of community college tuition. His proposal could result in an influx of students taking advantage of a free education without considering the benefits and challenges that goes along with attending an institute of higher learning. Attending colleges requires commitment, self-determination, and hard work and if students are not willing to put in the time to be successful in college, it will be a waste of money.

As various school districts embrace the opportunity to implement an early college high school program, it is important to acknowledge and understand the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the program as well as the dynamics that contribute to a successful completion of the program. This study explored the students' perceptions of the factors and strategies that influence successful completion of the program. As district leaders explore the idea of implementing other ECHS programs, the data drawn from this study could contribute to a place of action in increasing the number of students graduating with an associate's degree.

The Early College High School initiative has only been in existence for a few years and the research base examining the ECHS program is relatively limited. The ultimate goal of the program is for all students to graduate in four years with a high school diploma while simultaneously earning an associate's degree. Although the majority of the students master the goal, there is a small percentage that is a few hours short of successful completion.

This study increased awareness of the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the ECHS program. It examined the factors that have an impact on students successfully completing the program with an associate's degree. It also provided strategies that will increase the overall success rate of the program.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine the perceptions of students that participate in an early college high school program. The following research questions were developed to accomplish this task:

1. What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?
2. What are students' perceptions of factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school?
3. What strategies do students perceive will increase the rate of student success in this program?

Research Design

This study provided stakeholders pertinent information regarding the Early College High School (ECHS) program. It examined the micro-level perceptions of the participants regarding the factors that are related to a student's successful completion of the program. This study used a qualitative research design which aims to gain a better understanding through the analysis of first-hand experience, honest reporting, and quotes of actual conversation (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative approach was suitable for this study because of the aim to uncover and understand the participants' perceptions about an early college high school. Specifically, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews of focus groups was collected and then used to examine the students' perceptions of the factors and strategies that influence the successful completion of an early college high school in Texas. The student's perceptions of the benefits and challenges were also examined as it relates to participating in the program.

This study comprised a case study as the researcher examined the experiences and perceptions of participants in one early college high school. A case study seeks to ensure that the topic of interest is thoroughly explored and the essence of the real life experience

is revealed (Yin, 2003). It also allows for multiple facets of the students' experiences to be understood through a variety of lenses and not just a single lens (Stake, 1995).

An invitation to participate in the case study was extended to all students, grades levels 10th-12th. Participants included a stratified sample of students from each grade level. The researcher randomly selected 36 students to be invited to participate in one of three focus groups. The focus groups were conducted using semi-structured protocol, which allowed each participant an opportunity to reflect on their perceptions of the ECHS program, factors and strategies that impact successful completion of the program. The participants responded to questions based on their own experiences of the ECHS program. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were coded using priori codes to reveal a thematic content analysis of the students' experiences.

Assumptions and Limitations

Although the information provided in this study holds important implications on the effectiveness of the Early College High School Program, there are important assumptions and limitation present in this study. The assumptions were 1) the participants were first generation college goers attending an early college high school, 2) the participants answered the questions openly and honestly without the influence of biases of others, and 3) the interpretation of the results accurately reflects the participant's perceptions of the early college high school program.

Limitations are factors, often beyond the researcher's control that may affect the results of the study or how the results are interpreted (Creswell, 2007). Stating limitations of the study provides a method to acknowledge possible errors or difficulties in

interpreting results of the study. The generalizability of the study is a function of the research design, subject sample, and the analysis employed. The limitations were the sample size of the study was small and it was based on the perceptions of students which relied on their self-report. The sample size only included 10th-12th grade students; 9th grade students were excluded due to lack of data regarding their progress in the program. It was also a singular study consisting of the students' perceptions of an ECHS program in an urban school district in Texas; therefore, the perceptions may not be similar to the experiences of other students in a different district (urban or suburban), region, or state.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure understanding and uniformity of the terms used throughout this study.

College Readiness: The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed without remediation in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program (Conley, 2008).

Early College High School: Early College High Schools (ECHS) are innovative high schools located on or in close proximity to a college campus that allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and 60 college credit hours (Texas Education Agency, 2013).

Extrinsic Motivation: The outer drive that propels a person toward a goal (Greene, 2001).

First Generation College Student: Students whose parents have not had any college or post-secondary experiences (Saenz & Barrera, 2007).

Intrinsic Motivation: The inner drive that propels a person toward a goal (Greene, 2001).

Leader: A person that leads; directing, commanding, or guiding head, as of a group or activity (Arcaro, 1995).

Parental Involvement: Positive influence, commitment, and active participation on the part of the parent in a child's academic progress (LaBahn, 1995).

Quality Leader: A person who measures his or her success by the success of the individuals within the organization.

Resilience: The ability to hang tough through adversity and persevere despite mistakes, setbacks or outright failure (Greene, 2001).

School Climate: The set of internal characteristics that distinguish one from another and influence the behavior of each school's member (Hoy & Miskel, 2005).

Self-Determination: The characteristic of a person that leads them to make choices and decisions based on their own interests and preferences, to monitor and regulate their own actions and to be self-directing and goal-oriented (Wehmeyer, 2014).

Social Factors: External forces that may affect academic achievement (parental involvement, home environment, school environment, self-expectation, teacher expectations, and peer relations).

Students of Color: Students who are not classified as non-Hispanic whites (Boser, 2011).

Succeed: The ability to complete entry-level courses at a level of understanding and proficiency that makes it possible for the student to consider taking the next course or level in the sequence of the subject area (Conley, 2008).

Underrepresented Students: Immigrants, students of color, and low-income students that have lower odds of completing a postsecondary education program.

Urban School District: A school district that constitutes or encompasses a city or town whose schools are administered by a local school board located in a metropolitan area and is comprised of schools that service students who live in poverty or similar conditions.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Education in America has been viewed as the key to upward mobility throughout generations. Indeed, it is critical for those who desire to be successful in the labor market (Cafferty & Engstrom, 2000). However, historically, educational opportunity has not been distributed equally among racial and ethnical groups. The purpose of this chapter is to help readers understand the educational context that created the need for early college high schools, and to review existing programs.

Achievement Gap

The achievement gap in education is defined as a continuous disparity of educational measures of the performance between groups of students (Education Week, 2011). The groups are categorized by socioeconomic status, gender, and race. The achievement gap is revealed in grades, standardized test results, dropout rates and college completion rates (Education Week, 2011). The focus is typically on the uncompromising performance gap between African Americans and Hispanic students, who are usually at the lower end of the performance scale, and their white peers (Education Week, 2011). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 called for the development of accountability systems that hold the schools accountable for closing the achievement gap among student groups (Billig, 2005). While there are many schools still struggling to address the challenge, others have been successful in closing the achievement gap between groups (Billig, 2005).

The state of Texas is currently ranked 33 in the nation in education grades K-12. This ranking includes the following indicators: demographics, economic well-being,

education, family and community, and health (Kids Count, 2016). Listed below are tables that represent each indicator of the Texas ranking by race over five years.

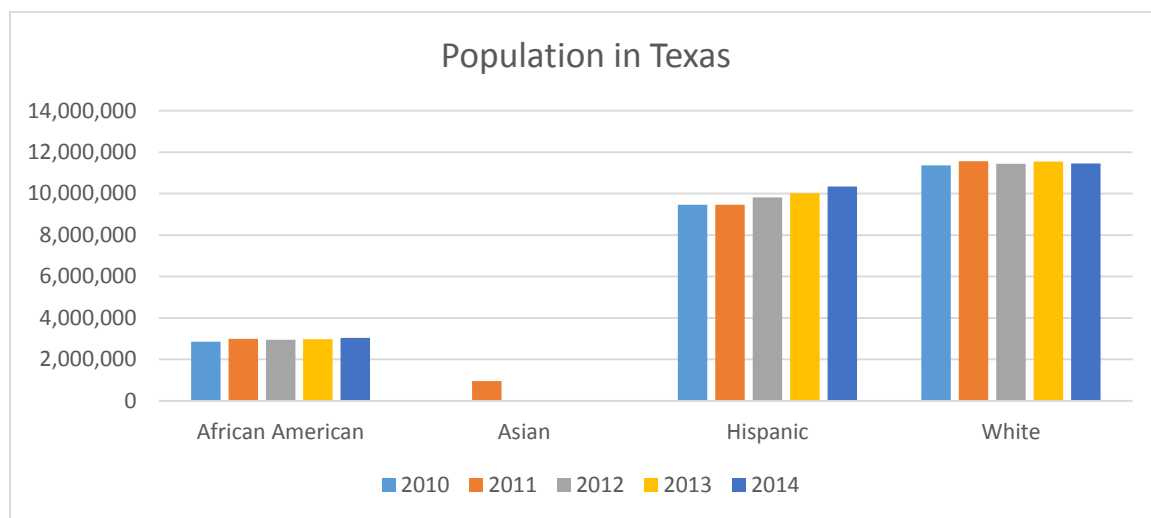


Figure 1. Demographics. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E. Casey Foundation Division of Demographics.

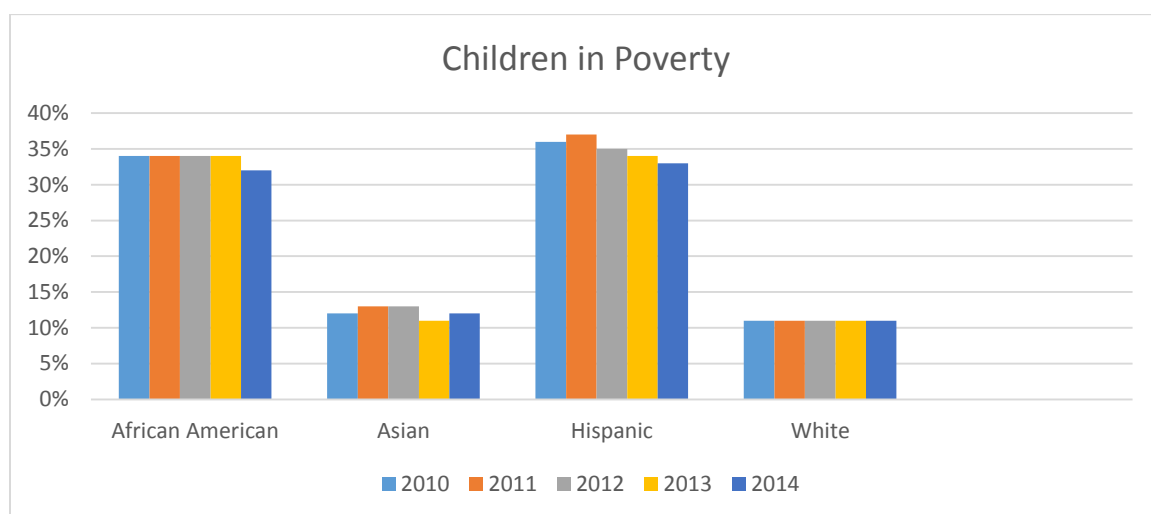


Figure 2. Economic Well-Being. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E Casey Foundation Division of Economic Well-Being.

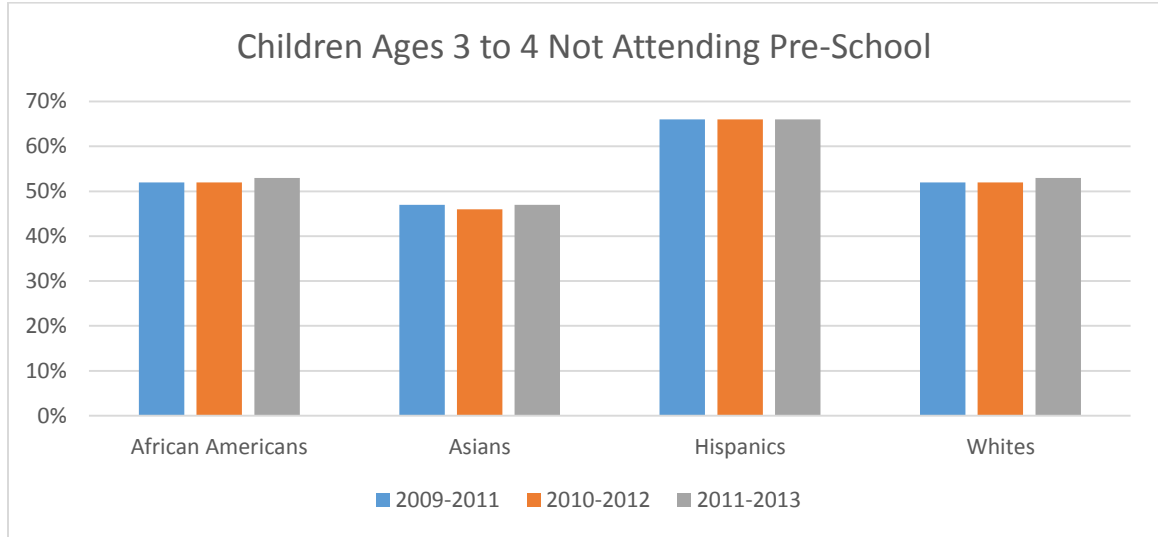


Figure 3. Education. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E Casey Foundation Division of Education.

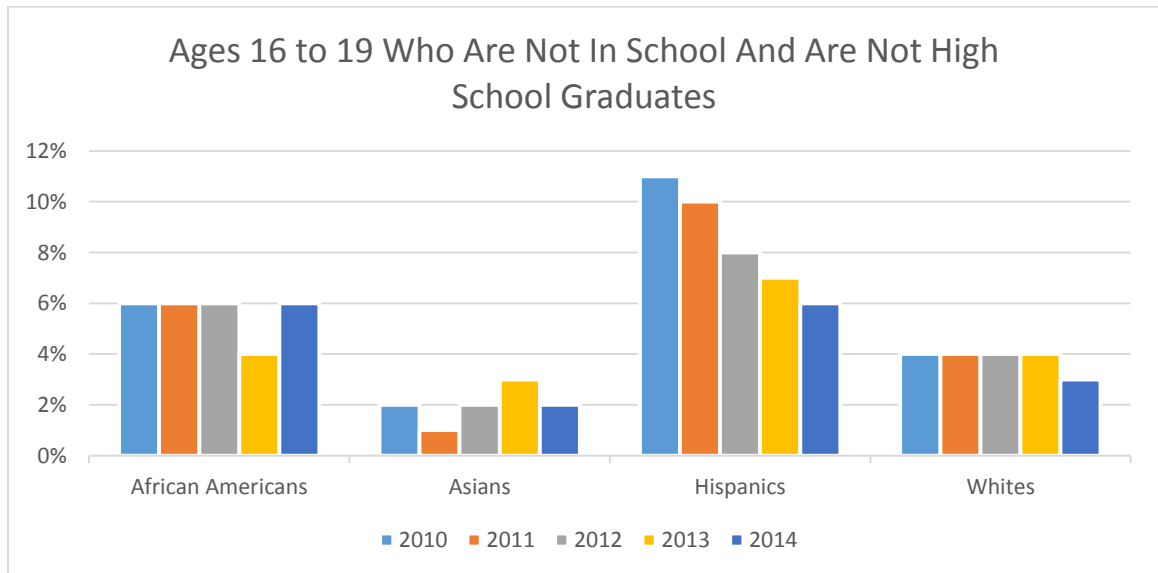


Figure 4. Education. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E Casey Foundation Division of Demographics

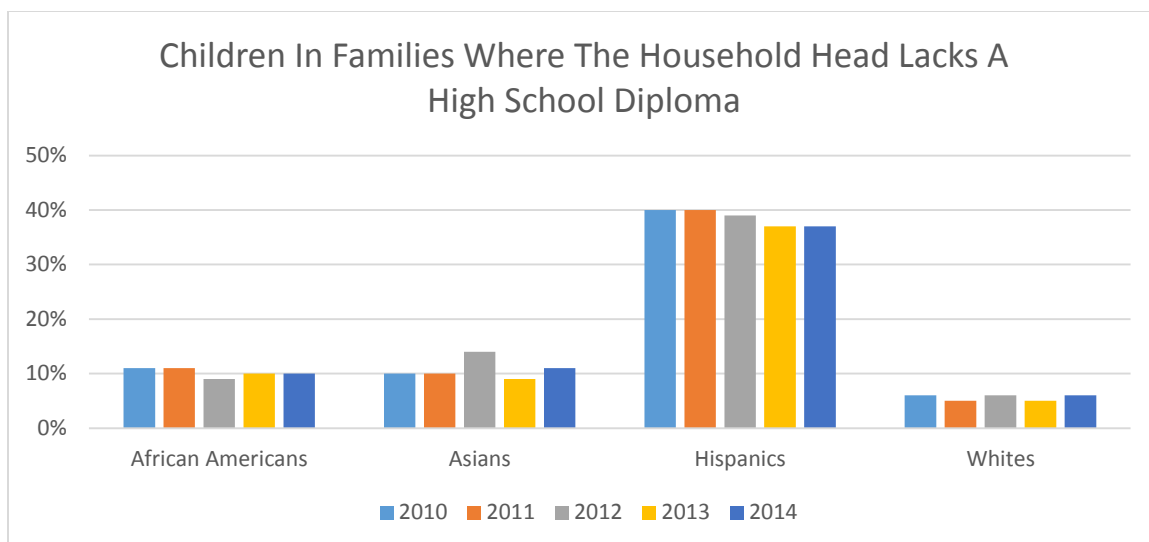


Figure 5. Family and Community. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E Casey Foundation Division of Family and Community.

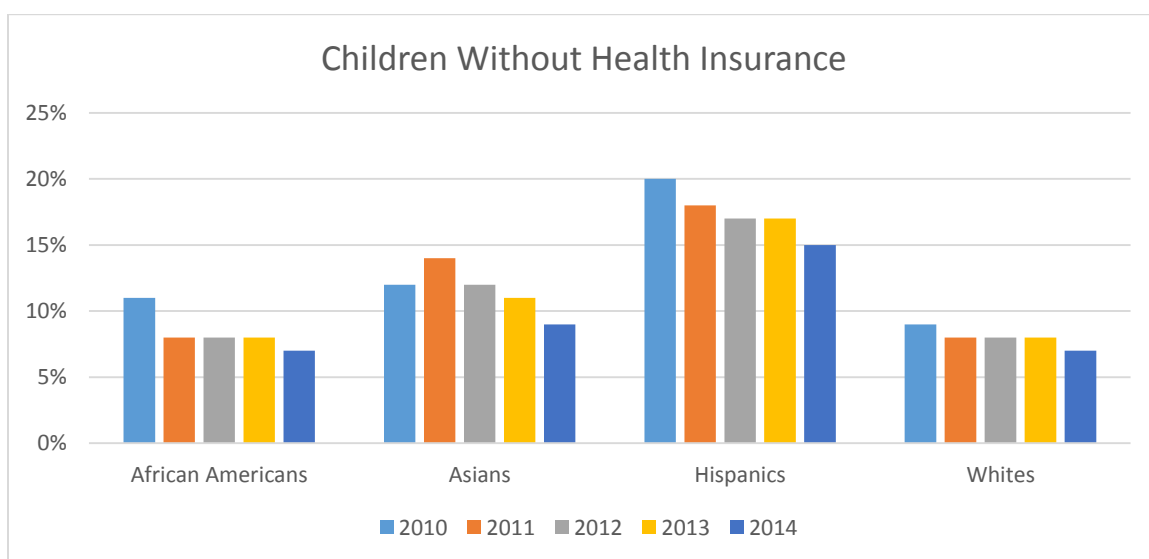


Figure 6. Health. The demographic information in this figure is from the Kids Count: Annie E Casey Foundation Division of Demographics.

With a population of approximately 67,000, Vikings Independent School District falls in the 80th percentile of schools ranked in the United States. However, Vikings Early College High School is ranked 28 in the state of Texas and 155 nationally receiving a gold medal as one of the best high schools in the nation (US News, 2015). The student

body consists of 37 percent males and 63 percent females, and a total minority enrollment of 98 percent (US News, 2015). Although the academic performance at VECHS excels, there is still a gap in academic achievement among student groups.

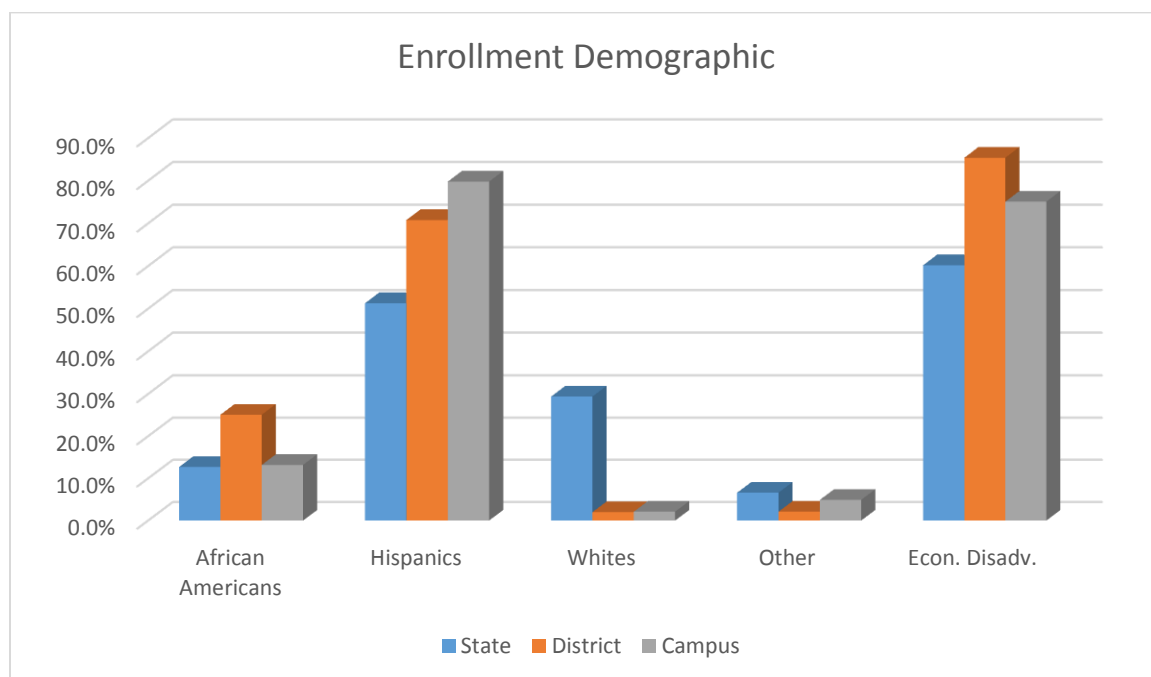


Figure 7. State District Campus Enrollment. The demographic information in this figure is from the campus AEIS Report.

In the classroom, students' learning abilities vary and instruction is designed to meet the needs of all students. However, there is a concern of the achievement gap among different ethnicities. Students achieve at different levels and the differences are prevalent between individuals and groups (Stiff-Williams, 2007). The achievement gap between students of color and whites is present before children begin their educational journey, it is constant throughout their primary and secondary education, and it continues in institutions of higher learning (Stiff-Williams, 2007). According to Reynolds (2002), students of color have major deficiencies in reading to the degree that only one in 100 can

read and comprehend specialized text. This gap in academic achievement has remained consistent over the years and is among the most urgent issues in education and society today (Kober, 2001).

An achievement gap is also found in the results of standardized testing. Students with a scale score of 500 on the SAT and 20 on the ACT ranks in the 50th percentile. Although the scores have increased over the years, students of color continue to score significantly less than their white counterparts on both tests (Kober, 2001). According to Bridgeman and Wendler (2005), low test scores for many African American and Hispanic students limit their access to reputable colleges and universities where research indicates that students of color are more likely to earn a degree. Instead, they gain access to schools where the rate of graduation for students of color is extremely low (Carey, 2005).

Factors Contributing to the Achievement Gap

Understanding racial, ethnic, and immigrant variation in educational attainment has become more important in the U.S. because of an increasingly diverse population (Kao & Thompson, 2003). There are several factors that affect student success, although this literature review will focus on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and parental involvement. Some of the most notable variables that have the greatest impact on student academic achievement are student expectations and self-belief, teacher expectations and their belief in the student's ability, parental involvement, high mobility rate of students and their parents, high poverty, and limited parent educational attainment (Brophy, 1998).

Additional factors contributing to the achievement gap include finding and retaining highly qualified teachers and a lack of resources. According to Curan and Goldrick (2002), it has been proven that teacher quality is the single most isolated factor impacting student achievement. As a result, the U.S. has been challenged with ensuring that every classroom has highly qualified teachers in addition to developing a system that will retain teachers that are certified (Berry, 2004). A key element to delivering quality education is having quality resources for the delivery of content. When materials are not available or the materials are of low quality, it creates a barrier to providing quality education which contributes to the academic achievement gap (Curan & Goldrick, 2002).

Socioeconomic Status. In the United States, socioeconomic status is a key factor used to determine the type of life a child will live: a life of educational opportunities and privileges or struggles and difficulties (Taylor, 2011). However, it does not necessarily mean that every child growing up in a poor family will not be successful in school or that a child growing up in a wealthy family is destined for success (Taylor, 2011).

Socioeconomic status is often measured by a person's education, income, and occupation and it is relevant to all realms of life: especially education (Schwartz, 1997). It has an impact on the lives of many students of color. Low socioeconomic status filters from lower education, poverty, and poor health, which affect society as a whole. According to Schwartz (1997), students of color are three times more likely to live in poverty than Caucasians which increases the chances of them dropping out of school. When students takes this course of action, it typically leads to the exposure of alcohol, tobacco, and drug distribution; resulting in some eventually becoming users.

The state of being poor, despite their efforts to obtain an education, would typically affect the normal development of most students resulting in a lack of academic performance and poor health (Schwartz, 1997). There is a circular relationship between education and socioeconomic status. Children born into poor families usually have an educational disadvantage from birth throughout their education which largely determines their educational outcome, so much so, it determines the socioeconomic status of the next generation (Taylor, 2011).

Parental Involvement. Parental involvement has been identified as a leading factor that contributes to the educational success of students (Doucet, 2011). Research suggests that the level of participation from parents varies among different demographic groups (Rice, 2011). According to Allen (2013), there also is little parental involvement in urban schools, which is one contributor to the problem of failure. Similarly, the Michigan Department of Education reports that when parents are actively engaged in their child's learning, students achieve higher grades and test scores, increase self-esteem and attendance, and decrease the risk of drug and alcohol use and suspensions (Allen & Freitag, 2012).

Positive effects of parental involvement have been displayed at both elementary and secondary levels, with the greatest effect occurring at the elementary level (Stewart, 2007). Transitioning from one school level to the next is a critical milestone for students. Consequently, there is a significant drawback in parental involvement at each transition stage from elementary to middle and from middle to high school (Armento, Scafidi & Henderson, 1999). Parents do not always see the benefit of their involvement in their child's education; however, research shows that the students of parents who are involved

tend to have better academic performance and less behavioral issues (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Parent involvement is crucial to student achievement. When parents are involved, students achieve more regardless of their status or their parents' educational background; they tend to have higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates which results in an increased enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Students keep pace with their academic performance when their parents are active in school events, develop a productive relationship with the teachers and stay abreast of what is happening with their child's school. The use of alcohol, violence and antisocial behavior typically decrease. Henderson & Berla (1994) also noted that children from diverse cultural backgrounds perform better when the parents and teachers work together to bridge the gap between the culture at home and at the institution of learning. Middle school and high school students tend to make a better transition, maintain the quality of their work, and focus on future plans when their parents remain involved in their education. On the other hand, when parents are not involved; the student is at a greater risk of dropping out.

With so much emphasis placed on parental involvement, the focus may need to shift to whether parents have the capacity to do what is needed from or expected of them; for some may not see the impact of their involvement in their child's education. Some parents are willing to be supportive, yet they often do not know which steps to take; they tend to believe they need advice from teachers before they can help their child succeed in school (Weinstein, Wittrock, Underwood & Schulte, 1983).

College Readiness

What type of instruction helps students become ready for college? What is college readiness? Although it is not well defined, Conley (2007), defines college readiness as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed in college without remediation. Preparing students to become intellectually ready for college requires the following: teachers extending beyond the textbook as a primary instructional source, students reading complex text to build strong content knowledge, and students developing skills that will help them to become critical thinkers when evaluating arguments and evidence (Ellis, 2013). College readiness involves a more comprehensive set of student characteristics and personal skills that are necessary for navigating within a college culture (Byrd & McDonald, 2005). The American Institutes for Research (2009) reported that the path to college readiness actually begins before students enter kindergarten and continues beyond high school. Students need support at each critical stage and educators need theoretical-based strategies to support students as they move forward through the education system.

College readiness is a national concern (Menson, Patelis, & Doyle, 2009) and a focus of President Obama's blueprint for educational reform (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). About 67 percent of U.S. students who graduated in 2004 went on to enroll in college (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005), but only 35 percent of students who entered four-year colleges seeking a bachelor's degree earned their degree in four years and only 56 percent had graduated four years later (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Whitmore, 2006). In Texas, more than half of the high school graduates were identified as being unprepared for college level work (Hacker, 2008). According to a researcher, the

major reason students fall by the wayside in college is the gap between their high school experiences and college expectations; there's also disconnect between plans and preparation (Gilroy, 2006).

Colleges and universities throughout the country have turned to remedial courses as a way to help students overcome deficiencies in English and math before moving on to more challenging courses (Hayes, 1995). The National Center for Educational Statistics (2012) reported that forty two percent of first-time undergraduates required at least one remedial course on entering college in 2007. At community colleges, only about 60% of students complete their remedial courses and fewer than 10% of the students referred to remedial coursework will graduate within three years (Bailey & Cho, 2010). In 2006, 13 percent of freshmen students statewide had to take remedial English and 25 percent of the students statewide had to enroll in a remedial math class (Gilroy, 2006). The unduplicated number of students with ACT placement scores indicating a need for remedial courses was around 30 percent of incoming freshmen at public universities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, freshmen students take remedial courses in reading, writing or mathematics at an annual cost of \$1billion to public colleges (Gilroy, 2006) The federal aid program for most Americans awarded 4.6 billion dollars in 2011-2012 to remedial education students (Mitchell, 2014).

Critics of remedial education at the college level charge that huge amounts of money are going to waste by providing instruction to students who have basically demonstrated that they are incapable of handling a college level curriculum, and who perhaps, shouldn't be in college at all (Shively, 1996). Nineteen percent of African American, Hispanic, and Asian American undergraduates and 15 percent of American

Indian students took remedial courses compared with 11 percent of white undergraduates in 1992-93 (Merkowitz, 1996). Twenty years later, it was reported in Education Week, (2012) that an estimated 1.7 million college students each year are placed in remedial classes to help them get caught up and prepare them for regular college coursework which is comprised of the underrepresented students in colleges. Remedial coursework on community college and university campuses continue due to lack of students prepared for post-secondary coursework.

The trend continues as there has been a sharp increase over the past ten years in community colleges which typically serve students of color, low income, and older populations (Mitchell, 2014). A little less than half of the students entering college as a freshman will enroll in at least one remedial class. As a result, students of color, first-generation students are getting stuck in remedial courses (Mitchell, 2014). Strategies highly recommended for students by instructors teaching entry level college courses include students demonstrating an ability to figure out how to solve routine and non-routine problems, students conducting research by engaging in active inquiry and using appropriate references, students demonstrating the capability of developing legitimate arguments to defend their point of view and the willingness to accept or address criticism, and students using precision and accuracy when focusing on a particular subject (Paneque, 2008).

Summer Bridge Program. Summer bridge programs were designed to increase college readiness among high school graduates and help underprepared students build competencies over the course of several weeks prior to entering college, in addition to, providing accelerated and focused learning opportunities that help students develop skills

and knowledge required for college success (Ackerman, 1990). The model included four common features: accelerated instruction in developmental math, reading, and/or writing; academic support; a “college knowledge” component; and the opportunity to earn a \$400.00 stipend.

As a statewide initiative called *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, the state of Texas provided support for the summer bridge programs. In 2007, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) provided funding to 22 colleges in an effort to establish developmental summer bridge programs for eligible students, offering remedial instruction in core areas and an introduction to college. In becoming a popular strategy for increasing college readiness, several two and four year colleges developed their own summer bridge programs that best suit their needs (Kallison & Strader, 2012).

The summer bridge program provides at-risk students an opportunity to advance through developmental education quicker, enabling them to enroll in college level courses in the fall of their freshman year (Edgecombe, 2011). The experience helps them to create personal and professional relationships, clarify their goals and academic commitments and develop college know how (Karp, 2011) in addition to teaching them how to navigate and utilize services that may increase their perseverance (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003). The stipend is used to encourage the students to take on an academic endeavor by participating in the program opposed to working a summer job.

College Initiatives Offered in High School

Prior to inception of the ECHS model, students had the opportunity to earn college hours while attending high school through several college initiatives. The college hours could be earned by taking Advanced Placement (AP) or Dual Credit Courses or

participating in an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program. Unlike the ECHS program, there is a financial cost associated with taking dual credit courses at the traditional high school. Although very popular, none of the initiatives attend specifically to the dual goal of college readiness and closing the achievement gap. This section summarizes these initiatives.

Advanced Placement. Advanced Placement (AP) courses provide students with the opportunity to complete college level classes while they are still in high school. These courses are part of the College Board Advanced Placement Program. There are 38 courses and exams that are offered. The course offerings available in most high schools are: Art History, Biology, Calculus AB/BC, Chemistry, English Language and Composition, English Literature and Composition, Environmental Systems, Government and Politics, Macro/Microeconomics, Music Theory, Physics, Statistics, Studio Art, US History, and World History. It was originally established in 1955 as an opportunity for a few elite groups of students to do college level work, the AP program has expanded to include more than 2,747,371 students and more than 1.6 million exams administered yearly in more than 16,000 schools (College Board, 2014). AP courses are designed to increase the level of rigor for students; however, they have the inadvertent effect of impacting access to prestigious postsecondary universities (Hallett & Venegas, 2011). Grove (2013) listed six reasons why a student should take AP courses: to impress college admission counselors, to develop college-level academic skills, save money, choose a major sooner, take more elective classes in college, and add a minor or second major easily.

AP courses have increased as a desired choice for at least three reasons. First, these courses and exams have been slated as indicators of excellence because students who take the courses and pass the AP exams are amidst some of the most academically advanced students in the nation. Second, it saves money because students who pass the exam may be given transferable college credit for each exam they pass successfully. The cost of the exams is less than \$100; this is a valuable savings when compared to tuition cost. Thirdly, there is the assumption that students who pass an AP exam have the requisite skills and knowledge to be successful at the college level in that subject area (Hallet & Venegas, 2011). The only distractor is students must score a 3 or higher on the AP exam in order to earn college credit regardless of the grade earned in the class.

Dual Credit. Courses offered for dual credit stem from agreements between high schools and universities or community colleges in which a high school junior or senior enrolls in a college course and simultaneously earns college credit and high school credit for the course. The courses include academic and career/technical courses. The students can take the dual credit courses on their high school campus or at the college campus. All instructors must currently be working toward or hold a Master's degree in the core area in which they are teaching. Students must meet the college's prerequisite requirements. In Texas, students must satisfy Texas Success Initiative requirements or they can exempt from testing if they meet the standards for the TAKS, ACT, or SAT tests (Dual Credit Texas, 2014). The student must earn a "C" or better in a dual credit course in order to earn college credit. Tuition and textbook are often free or at greatly reduced rates (Zimmerman, 2012). Three advantages of taking dual credit courses noted by Zimmerman (2012) are taking college-level classes is a useful transition to college life,

earning some college credit during high school will improve a student's chances of completing college, and enrolling in dual-credit courses during high school will reduce a student's tuition burden during college.

A 2005 report by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 70% of public high schools offered courses for dual credit. Griffith (2009) reported that 87% of the students in the U.S. had dual credit courses available to them on their high-school campus. According to Kleiner and Lewis (2005), dual credit enrollment had grown to over 680,000 students throughout the United States. The classes are designed to provide more options and better pathways to higher education (Zimmermann, 2012).

International Baccalaureate (IB). The International Baccalaureate (IB)

Program is a prestigious and rigorous program designed to meet the needs of students internationally. The program's focus is to develop independent and critical thinkers. The curriculum is an in-depth comprehensive study; strong emphasis is also placed on making students aware of local and world affairs. When students successfully complete the program, they earn a diploma that is recognized for university admission throughout the world and for course credit and placement in accelerated courses in leading colleges and universities in the United States (Laurent-Brennan 1998).

The program spans the years from early years to pre-university. Many schools in the United States have developed a pre-IB curriculum to prepare student for the rigors of IB courses to ensure that they have the proper background to be successful in the program (Laurent-Brennan, 1998). The Primary Years Program for students aged 3 to 12 concentrates on the development of the whole child in and outside of the classroom. The Middle Years Program is for students aged 11 to 16 and it provides a framework of

academic challenge and life skills achieved through embracing traditional subjects. The Diploma Program is for students aged 16 to 19. It is a demanding two-year curriculum leading to final examinations and qualification that is welcomed by universities all around the world. The curriculum is made up of the three core elements and six subject groups. The three core elements are: 1) Theory of Knowledge, in which students reflect on the nature of knowledge and how they know what they claim to know; 2) Extended Essay, which is a self-directed 4,000 words research piece that is completed by each student, and 3) Creativity, Activity, Service, in which the students are required to complete a project related to these three concepts. The six subject groups are: 1) studies in language and literature, 2) language acquisition, 3) individual and societies, 4) sciences, 5) mathematics, and 6) the arts.

The newest offering from the IB is the Career-related Certificate (IBCC). It is for students aged 16 to 19. It incorporates the vision and educational principles of the IB Program into a unique offering designed for student who chose to engage in career-related learning (Robelen, 2013). The career related initiative centered on a variety of career pathways was rolled out in the fall of 2013. The career pathways include automotive technology, culinary arts, and engineering (Robelen, 2013). The move comes as mean to attract a more diverse student population as the IB program continues to rapidly expand in public schools in United States (Robelen, 2013).

The Early College Program

Kiser (2006) noted that the idea to incorporate the last four to six years of school and the first two years of college did not originate with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. During the 1930s and 1940s, Leonard Koos, an influential scholar at the

Universities of Minnesota and Chicago, promoted the six-four-four plan of public education (Kiser, 2006). The roots begin in the Compton and Pasadena school districts in California, and expanded to school districts in Kansas, Missouri, Mississippi, and Oklahoma. The six-four-four plan was designed to place grades 7 through 10 in junior high school and grades 11 through 14 in junior college as an economical and effective way of culminating the total advantage of the junior high school and the junior college to the community, creating the Middle College High School concept (Kiser, 2006).

Middle College High School. In 1974, the Middle College High School (MCHS) was established at LaGuardia Community College in New York City to foster alternatives to negative adolescent behavior (Born, 2006). Challenges associated with operating the MCHS were preparing students for college-level work, helping the students adjust to postsecondary education, and supporting them as they face complex personal issues (American Youth Policy Forum, 2004). As Middle College students succeeded and the institution grew, the unexpected occurred. Students were completing their secondary requirements in less than the ordinary four-year framework and were ready to take college courses which was not an outcome that the designer and the principal had previously taken into consideration.

In 1988, Seattle School District decided to be proactive and invite its dropouts to come back to school and experience it as they had never known before; introducing the MCHS model patterned from the example of successful dropout prevention at LaGuardia Middle College in New York City (Houston, Byers, & Danner, 1992). It presented its students, many of whom felt that they were too old to attend regular high school, with a

totally difference environment in which they could mix with older people who are also striving to better their educational opportunities (Houston et al., 1992).

In 1999, over 4,000 Middle College students nationwide enrolled in more than 3,900 college classes with a 97 percent pass rate, scoring high than the regular college freshmen (Lieberman, 2004). In 2000, the Middle College leaders expanded their quest. They requested a grant from the Ford Foundation to pilot a new design: Early College, which would encompass all of the unique features of the original Middle College and add new structural interventions based on student experience (Lieberman, 2004). Although it incorporated some of the features of the Middle College design, the goals were not the same. There was a more intensive collaboration approach between secondary and higher education and an accelerated academic movement.

As the ECHS model was designed and introduced, non-negotiables were established. Some non-negotiables of the program were that a cooperative relationship between the district high school administration and the college president had to be established, and it was required offer a different sequence of courses from the tenth grade and an accelerated program from the ninth grade to the Associate's degree, which can be achieved in five years or less, instead of six (Lieberman, 2004). Additionally, the ECHS model required all resources of the high school on the college campus be combined with the college facilities, making them available to the early college high school students; enhancing the role of high school faculty; and integrating high school and college study in an articulated program recruitment only of students who are underserved by the regular schools. Lastly, the model required active college campus collaboration from the college administrative

structure; faculty interchange, support from the college division of finance, admissions, scheduling, and counseling under a college administrator appointed by the institution.

Early College High School Design. School districts in over 25 states were granted an opportunity to boost their high school graduation rates and give students who normally couldn't afford tuition a head-start on a college education through grants totaling \$29.6 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Dessoiff, 2005). These schools have the potential to increase graduation rates and better prepare students to be more competitive for entry into challenging careers by engaging students in a rigorous curriculum and reducing the number of years to a college degree (Wolk, 2005). As early as the ninth grade, Early Colleges allow high school students to work towards earning a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously on a community college campus with little or no cost to the student (Williams & Southers, 2010). The history of the community college demonstrates a continuous effort of opening doors of opportunity to higher education; females, members of non-dominant groups in society, seasoned learners, learners with disabilities, and now younger students (Bragg, 2006).

Considering the expectations set forth, coherent curriculum, partnerships between high school and the community college, and a strong support system, they are optimistic that majority of these schools will be better options than what currently exist for underrepresented students (Dessoiff, 2005). Too many of our teenage youth are being left behind every day, unprepared to continue their education or secure decent jobs in today's economy (Jobs for the Future, 2005). However, the Early College High School Model has made great gains toward developing an environment where all students graduate from

high school ready for college and work which also result in increased attendance and fewer suspensions (Dessoiff, 2011).

While small schools generally serve all of their students, the Early College High School movement takes the small school initiative a step forward by concentrating on providing opportunities specifically for at-risk students. Early colleges use different criteria to select students including lottery, standardized test scores, or membership in a group that is normally underrepresented in higher education (Hoffman & Webb, 2010). In majority of the cases, the students complete an application and are selected by a lottery for slots that often are limited by the number of applicants and the limited number of slots available at each grade level. In order to keep consistency with the Gates Foundation's smaller schools approach, grade levels are usually limited to about 100 students to ensure individualized support (Dessoiff, 2011; Hoffman & Webb, 2010). During their freshman and sophomore years, early college students experience collaborative support, academically and socially, to help them succeed in a rigorous course of study that may include college courses. As juniors and seniors, students' college course-taking is accelerated (Hoffman & Webb, 2010).

In the Early College High School, instruction is centered around six strategies used in concordance with one another. The strategies are: 1) collaborative group work which allows students of all different skills to be supported and challenged by their peers. Working together helps students learn from each other; 2) writing to learn allows students, including English Language Learners to develop ideas and use critical thinking. They can reflect on what they are learning so they can refine the learning in order to apply it at higher cognitive levels; 3) literacy groups, which are best compared to focused

book clubs that help build comprehension and higher discourse among students across various texts in different disciplines; 4) questioning from students and teachers that fosters purposeful conversations and stimulates intellect; 5) classroom discussion that encourages students to develop thinking, listening and speaking skills; and 6) scaffolding which helps students connect prior knowledge they learned to challenging new concepts (Jobs for the Future, 2011).

Early College High School Initiative. The ECHS Initiative offers an alternative to comprehensive high schools. ECHS couples high school and college in a rigorous, supportive program, with a twist (DiMaria, 2013). It is a bold approach, based on the concept that academic rigor and extended student support, merged with the opportunity to save time and money is a strong motivator for students to persevere and to face serious intellectual challenges head on. It combines high school and college and shrinks the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college (Higher Education, 2012). The schools are designed so that high-poverty youth, students of color, English language learners, first generation students, and other young people underrepresented in higher learning can work towards earning a high school diploma and an associate's degree concurrently (Jobs for the Future, 2013).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was the driving force behind the re-design of high schools combining with local community colleges (Kisker, 2006). In support of this effort by the Gates Foundation, more ECHS campuses are being established across the country. In addition, the early college initiative has garnered the attention of many philanthropists and has received over \$120 million in funding to date from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the

Ford Foundation, and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (Kisker, 2006). The overwhelming efforts of these individuals and sponsoring organizations have been significant in the ECHS development and success.

In 2002, Early College High School Initiative became a reality nationwide for students and educators searching for ways to improve student graduation rates, college attendance, and student achievement (Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010).

Since 2002, the partnerships developed amongst the organizations of the Early College High School Initiative have begun or re-structured over 240 schools serving more than 75,000 students in 28 states and the District of Columbia. From the onset, Early College High School students have accumulated more college credits during their high school years than most suburban students gained in advanced placement credits (Hoffman & Webb, 2010). Lieberman (2004) stated that the success of ECHS's depends on "destroying the hierarchy between secondary and high education and building an equal partnership between the high schools and local colleges" (p.3).

Texas Early College High School Initiative. The Texas Early College High Initiative started in 2004 when the first Early College High Schools opened their doors; funding came from the Texas High School Project (THSP). THSP is a public-private alliance committed to ensuring that all Texas students graduate from high school prepared to be successful in college, in their careers, and in life. Texas Education Agency, Texas Legislature, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, Office of the Governor, Communities Foundation of Texas, Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, National Instruments, and the Wallace Foundation are all included in the THSP Alliance (Texas High School Project, 2013).

In Texas, the ECHS model seeks students for whom the transition into post-secondary education is seemingly problematic. The students engage in a rigorous and supportive academic program of study with the goal that students attending high school and college simultaneously will graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree or at least 60 college hours toward a baccalaureate degree (The Texas High School Project, 2013). Currently there are 49 ECHS in the Lone Star State including nine campuses in the Houston area.

Under the authority of the Texas Education Code and the Texas Administrative Code, the Texas Education Agency developed a designation for Early College High Schools. The designation process guarantees that district and colleges operating ECHS campuses maintain the integrity of the model, which was researched and created to target and serve students who normally would not consider attending college otherwise (Texas Education Agency, 2013). TEA is moving towards an online designation application as a means of strengthening the program as they move forward.

According to the Texas High School Project (2013), ECHS have a set of core principles that must be followed. The schools that receive ECHS Designation are entitled to several benefits. The school receives recognition as an approved early college high School. It becomes eligible for state programs and for exemptions from dual credit restrictions. Upon receiving its designation as an ECHS, it gains membership privileges in the Early College School Network, access to professional development and technical assistance and it is recognized for fidelity to the ECHS model.

Early College, Early Success. In 2013, the American Institute for Research conducted a study exploring the impact of the ECHS Initiative. The findings provided

strong evidence of a positive impact for the program with 86% of its students graduating compared to 81% of students graduating from a traditional high school. There appeared to have been a positive change in the traditional educational attainment gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged Early College students. It also appeared that the ECHS was operating with an end in mind, a purpose; with Early College students earning college degrees and enrolling in a four-year institution (American Institute of Research [AIR], 2013).

Early college students are outperforming students in the traditional high school setting nationwide. According to Webb (2014), early college high schools have succeeded the nation's educational challenge in propelling students from underserved backgrounds to graduate high school with an associate's degree. In 2014, 90% of early college high school students graduated compared to the national rate of 78 % and 71% of the early college graduates enrolled in college immediately after high school, beating the national rate by four percent. The "college for all" culture contributes to the success of the program and it motivates the students to succeed (Webb, 2014). Over the last ten years, the program has produced phenomenal results, exceeding the typical outcomes for the targeted population. With over 60% of the students coming from low-income families, 75% are students of color, and more than half of them are first generation college goers, these students that are doomed to fall through the cracks in the traditional school setting and in the post-secondary education system. However, the record shows that even students who enter high school below grade level succeed, not only in high school, but in college, too (Webb, 2014).

The students that elect to participate in the ECHS programs must complete 26 high school credits in addition to earning up to 60 college hours. The high school courses four credits each of English, mathematics, science, and social studies, two credits of a foreign language, one credit of physical education, one credit of health and speech combined, and six credits of electives. The ECHS students begin taking their college courses at the end of their freshman year. The 60 college hours are comprised of but not limited to Composition English 1 & 2, mathematics, science, social science, and electives. The selection of electives are determined by the students' concentrated area of studies (Early College Design, 2010).

Unlike the traditional high school, students have to apply to the early college high school, which is a multiple step process. The students submit an essay on a topic selected by the school with the application. The applications and essays are reviewed and students are screened by the selection committee. After the initial screening, the student interviews for one of the 100-125 available seats for the upcoming school year. If selected, the student meets with the counselor and a student commitment/agreement letter is signed. The students give up the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities in order to participate in the ECHS program. The reward comes with the opportunity to graduate high school with a diploma and an associate's degree.

Theoretical Perspectives

In the United States, 42 percent of school aged children only reach basic levels of reading comprehension; subsequently, many of these same children also live in poverty and typically perform in the lowest quartile on standardized measures of reading ability (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). On the other hand, some average-ability students do

well in inner city schools despite coming from an environment that is considered at risk (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2002). In order to explain this apparent paradox, research on resilience has been widely conducted to understand why some students from the same economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds are successful while others are not.

There are two theories the researcher draws on to guide this study:

Resiliency and Self-Determination. According to Pietrzak and Southwick (2011), resiliency is defined as adapting well to stress in a school setting or in the workplace. Resiliency has the potential to change over time as a person's interaction with their environment changes (Kim-Cohen & Turkewitz, 2012). Kaplan's (1999) definition ranged from a measure of successfully adapting to situations despite adversity to a psychological attribute of different efficacies. Self-Determination Theory, as described by Deci & Ryan (2006), is a theory of personality and motivation that addresses three common needs: autonomy, competence, and psychological relatedness. It also addresses the issues of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Each perspective will be described in greater detail in the next two sections.

Resiliency. The resiliency theory is a person's belief in his or her ability to overcome adversity when essential protective factors are present in their life (Krovetz, 1999). It is founded on the premise that if one's family members, community, or school exhibit a genuine concern about them, hold them to high expectations, willfully support them, and value what they are accomplishing, the person will remain steadfast and will overcome almost any adversity (Krovetz, 1999). In recent years, resiliency research shifted from concentrating on the areas of psychology, sociology, and anthropology to

focusing on education (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2002). This shift provided researchers a framework that gives insight to why some students are successful in school while other students from the same socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are not successful (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2002). The resiliency approach concentrates on the predictors of academic success as opposed to academic failure. Specifically, it focuses on students' strengths by promoting educational excellence in all students and addressing specific problems that contribute to students falling behind (Bernard, 1997).

Educational resilience is viewed as an alterable process or mechanism that can be developed in an individual (Bernard, 1997). Social competence, problem-solving skills, self-determination, and a sense of purpose are all personal characteristics typically displayed by resilient children. Factors that are related to resiliency are: 1) personal attributes such as self-motivation, aspirations, and goal-setting; 2) effective use of time; 3) family life; and 4) the learning environment at school, particularly in the classroom (McMillan & Reed, 1994).

The resiliency approach is a paradigm shift from problem solving to creativity, growth, and the realization of potential. It is useful to students, teachers, and other stakeholders. According to Henry and Milstein (2000), resiliency has become a powerful path to school improvement for six reasons: 1) It focuses on strengths and potentials; 2) It is an easily understood language that can be communicated and shared by everyone; 3) It is a holistic framework; 4) It promotes widespread involvement; 5) It energizes and motivates participants; and 6) Resiliency does not require schools and communities to discard strongly held beliefs about specific educational philosophies and programs.

Challenges cause people to react differently; some may collapse, others will survive, but a person who exhibits resiliency becomes stronger (Henry & Milstein, 2000).

Self-Determination. Self-Determination Theory is a theory of personality and motivation that addresses three basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2006). The approach begins not with blame and control, but with finding out why people behave irresponsibly when it comes to the things that matter in life such as family, education, and careers (Deci & Flaste, 1995). The self-determination approach takes a person's perspective, concentrates on the motivation underlying his irresponsibility, and identifies the social forces that have an impact on that motivation (Deci & Flaste, 1995).

The critical component of the theory focuses on individuals fulfilling their basic psychological needs; the more these needs are attained, the more self-determined the behavior becomes (Deci & Ryan, 2006). The three common psychological needs are described by Deci & Ryan (2006) are: 1) Autonomy: Feeling ownership and internal causation of one's behavior; having freedom of choice; individuals engage in an activity because they choose to participate; 2) Competence: Feeling effective and efficacious in one's behavior; having a perceived self-belief in one's ability to perform; constructive feedback helps develop an individual's competence; and 3) Psychological relatedness: Feeling close and connected to people of importance; having a sense of shared experience; having a warm, accepting atmosphere can increase an individual's motivation. These basic psychological needs foster the highest forms of motivation and engagement for activities, perseverance, creativity, and enhanced performance.

A student's motivation to learn typically stems from various situations that have impacted their life as a child. Jaschik (2013) conducted a study of motivation and student

success, concluding that students who were motivated by a desire for autonomy and competence seemed to earn higher grades and showed a greater likelihood of perseverance than other students. He found that wealthier students appeared to achieve success based on their interest in a certain subject, whereas low-income students' motivation to enroll in college was related to a desire to improve their financial situation (Jaschik, 2013). Similarly, according to a Gallup report, students who hoped to succeed were more likely than others to succeed because they utilized their ability to set goals and develop plans to achieve their goals (Gallup Report, 2012).

The early college high school program is designed to provide first generation students an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and an associate's degree simultaneously while attending high school. Participation in this program comes with benefits, but it is also accompanied with challenges. The students have to balance and maintain two programs at one time. While many high school students struggle with keeping their grades up to par; the ECHS student has to stay abreast with their work for two programs which is deemed to be stressful. The students manage to adapt to their situation which demonstrate signs of resilience. As with any person that faces adversity, the options are to give up or press on. The ECHS students' self-determination to persevere during their time of adversity is a matter of choice. The two theories in which this study was drawn from will be aligned to and supported in the responses of the participants.

Chapter III

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, this study explored students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and the factors influencing their completion of the program. The study also examined strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree.

This chapter provides a description of the methodology and procedures used to examine the perceptions of the students of an early college high school in an urban school district in Texas. It includes the setting, research questions and design, participants, procedures, data collection and analyses, instrumentation, role of the researcher, and the limitations of the study.

Setting

This qualitative case study was conducted within one large urban school district in Texas. Vikings Independent School District (pseudonym) is a public school district that serves portions of Houston. The Vikings community has been in existence for over 100 years. The area began its growth spurt during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Today, the Vikings area consists of more than 143,578 households with a population estimated at 470, 575. The district is comprised of 80 campuses: Pre-KK(1), EC/PK (8), Elementary (33), Intermediate (12), Middle Schools (11), Ninth Grade Schools (5), High Schools (5), Magnet High School (1), Night School (1), Early College High School (1), and Alternative School (2). A new elementary school opened at the beginning of the school

year. The district currently serves over 67,000 students. The demographics of the school district changed over the years. In the late 1970's, the district was almost 75% Caucasian. As the years passed by, the minority eventually became the majority. In 2002, the enrollment of Caucasians was at 8% and African Americans were at 33%; the Hispanic population became the majority comprising of 58% of the student population.

Vikings Early College High School was chosen for this study. The VECHS student population represents socio-economic levels ranging from lower middle class families to those on or below the poverty level. During the first year of operation, VECHS was housed on another campus and experienced an abrupt change of administration towards the end of the school year. The researcher served as the principal intern during the selection process of the new principal. Vikings Early College High School is unique in that it provides the students an opportunity to earn an associate's degree in addition to earning a high school diploma at the end of their high school journey. This task requires the ECHS students to take high school and college courses simultaneously; some of the courses are offered as dual credit courses. The students must earn 26 high school credits and 60 college hours to successfully complete the ECHS program. The dual credit courses offered at Vikings Early College High School are: Art, Biology, Business Information Systems, Economics, Education, English, Government, Humanities, Physical Education, Psychology, Sociology, and Speech. Unlike the dual credit program in the traditional high school, the ECHS program provides courses and textbooks at no cost to the students.

In 2010, a new campus was built to accommodate the students in the VECHS program along with the students enrolled in the community college. The two programs

combined serves approximately 3,000 students. All interviews were conducted at the VECHS campus in the conference room.

Research Questions

This study sought to examine the perceptions of students that participate in an early college high school program. The following research questions were developed to accomplish this task:

1. What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?
2. What are students' perceptions of factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school?
3. What strategies do students perceive will increase the rate of student success in this program?

Research Design

This is a case study of one Early College High School (ECHS) in Texas. A case study seeks to ensure that the topic of interest is thoroughly explored and the essence of the real life experience is revealed (Yin, 2003). While capturing the students' perspectives, a case study will allow for multiple facets of the students' experiences to be understood through a variety of lenses and not just a single lens (Stake, 1995).

The study used a qualitative research design. Focus groups using semi-structured interviews were conducted on the students participating in the ECHS program. It examined the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while participating in the program and the factors that influenced program completion. This Early College High School (ECHS) program has been in existence for nine years;

graduating almost 400 students with 78% of them earning an associate's degree at the end of their high school career.

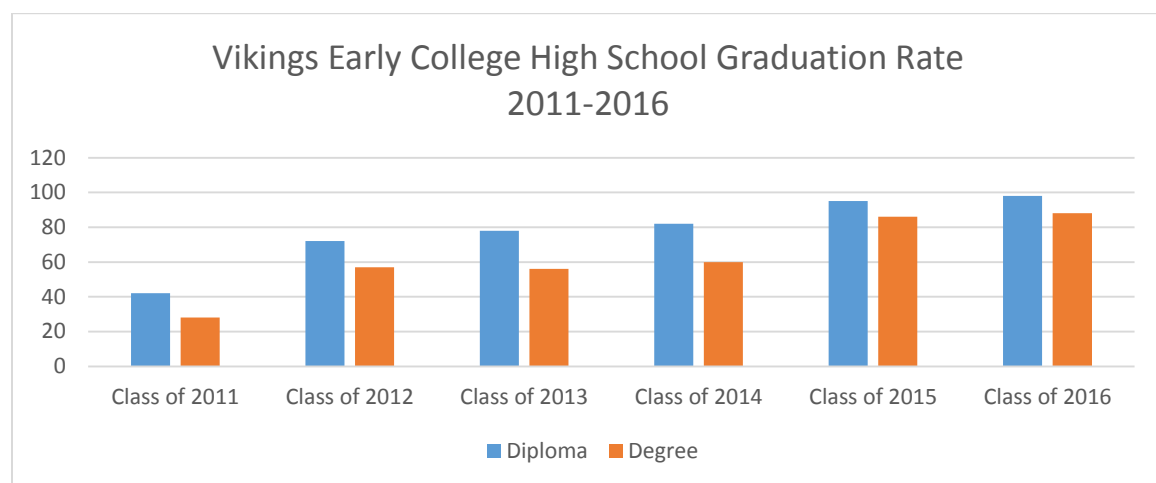


Figure 8. Graduation Rate. The academic information in this figure was calculated using the SMS data base.

The purpose of a research interview is to examine the perceptions of the experiences of individuals on specific matters providing a deeper understanding of their phenomena (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The flexibility of interviews provides an opportunity for researchers to collect the stories from participants in a variety of ways in order to address the needs of the individuals involved (Conle, 2000). The interview consisted of open-ended questions providing the participants the opportunity to openly express their perceptions of the ECHS program as it relates to the benefits and challenges of participating in the program. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to get the participants to speak from their own lived experiences of an ECHS program.

Participants

Viking Early College High School currently has 430 students and graduated its first class of seniors in 2011. As of date, VECHS has graduated a total of 467 students, 375 of whom earned an associate's degree at the end of their high school career. The

study's participants were students from Vikings Early College High School. There were 28 students that participated in the study of which 18 were females and 10 were males. The pool of participants consisted of nine African Americans, two Asians, and seventeen Hispanics. All students must have completed at least one year of the ECHS program to be eligible to participate in this study.

Table 1

Demographics of Student Participants

Grade Level	Ethnicity			Sex	
10 th Grade	A-0	AA-3	H-5	M-4	F-4
11 th Grade	A-2	AA-3	H-7	M-3	F-9
12 th Grade	A-0	AA-3	H-5	M-3	F-5

Note: A=Asians, AA-African Americans, H=Hispanics M=Male, F= Female.

Students were selected utilizing their grade point average (GPA). At the end of the spring semester, each student received his/her class rank and grade point average. The class rank is determined by the student's academic record. The semester grade in each course was assigned grade points according to the level of the course taught; for instance, Gifted and Talented (GT) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are weighted more than the regular courses. The dual credit courses are weighted the same as the honors courses which also is weighted more than the regular courses, but less than the GT and AP courses. The total number grade points are added and divided by the total number of semester courses attempted. This determines the student's grade point average. All of the students are then listed by grade level in numeric order based on their grade point average to determine their rank.

A random sampling of subjects was used for the purpose of this study.

Specifically, the class ranking was divided into four quartiles. There were 2-3 students randomly selected from each quartile by grade level. Randomly selecting students from each quartile provided representation of various levels of academic performance, ability, and success. Each grade level student focus group consisted of 8-12 students. Since the ninth graders have not completed a full year of studies and could not be ranked; this study was limited only to 10th-12th grade students. The 10th, 11th, and 12th grade focus groups consisted of 8, 12, and 8 students respectively.

Table 2

Vikings Early College High School Class Rank (2015-2016)

Grade Level	1 st Quartile	2 nd Quartile	3 rd Quartile	4 th Quartile	Total Students/Grade Level
10th	1-32	33-65	66-97	98-129	129
11th	1-33	34-67	68-100	101-133	133
12th	1-27	28-53	54-80	81-96	106
Total Students					368

Note. The student's current class rank per quartile by grade level.

The information, including the date, time, and location of the focus group interviews, was distributed to the students when they returned their consent/assent forms. The student focus groups were conducted during school hours during study group. The goal was to examine the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the early college program and identify factors that impact the successful completion of the program.

Procedures

Upon receiving approval from the University of Houston Committee of the Protection of Human Subjects (see Appendix A), the researcher contacted the school to schedule a meeting with the principal. A schedule was developed for the researcher to meet with the students. At each informational meeting, the researcher met with all students by grade levels. The participants were provided detailed information about the research including background information on the researcher, purpose of the study, a description of the methods that will be used to collect the data, and the participant's rights (see appendix B), and a participant's agreement form that includes permission for the use of audio/video taping of the groups (see Appendix C). The researcher emphasized that participation in the study is strictly voluntary and that no one participating in the study will receive any type of compensation. Participants were assured that participation in the study does not pose any risk. The researcher answered all questions from the potential participants. At the closing of each meeting, an invitation was extended to participate in the research study.

The researcher met with the students by grade levels. Each student was distributed a consent form. The returned agreements were grouped in clusters by grade levels and then by rank. The selected students received a copy of the invitation letter, the Assent to Participate Form and the Parental Permission Form if the student was a minor under the age of 18. The adult student received the Consent to Participate Form (see Appendices D-G). Of the students who agreed to participate, 28 were randomly selected to participate in the interviews. All participants completed a Student Demographic Survey (see Appendix H) prior to beginning the interview. Students that were not selected received a

thank you notice for their interest and willingness to participate in the study (see Appendix I). These students were on reserve as an alternate if other students decided not to participate. The alternates would also be selected randomly based on their class rank.

This study included three student focus groups consisting of 8-12 participants in each group. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed. The data was collected and analyzed to develop common themes and categories that capture the experiences of the participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected using focus groups. A focus group is a form of qualitative research in which a group of people are questioned about their attitude, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions of a particular idea, concept, or service (Morgan, 2013). The researcher established trust and rapport, making it comfortable for the participants to provide information about his or her experiences. The focus group interviews were guided by a protocol of open-ended questions that allowed the researcher to probe a little deeper and the participants to elaborate on their responses. The protocol of questions (see Appendix J) explored the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the ECHS program, what they considered to be their greatest benefit and challenge, and how the benefits and challenges would have differed had they chosen to attend a traditional high school. The protocol also included questions pertaining to the students' perceptions of successful completion of the program and factors that influence their completion of the program. The interviews were concluded with the students' responses to what strategies they perceived that would increase the number of students completing the program.

This study included three focus groups consisting of 8-12 participants in each group. Each session was audio recorded and transcribed. In each 60-minute session, the three focus groups consisted of 8-12 students, grade levels 10th-12th. The student focus groups were conducted during the school day during grade level study hall or club. All of the interviews were conducted on the campus of Vikings Early College High School in the conference room.

Instrumentation

The researcher created the focus group instrument for this research study of students' perceptions of an early college high school. The focus group questions were open-ended to allow the participants to answer freely and the researcher to probe if necessary.

To answer question one, What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?, the researcher asked the students five questions to allow them to speak freely about their perceptions of an early college high school. The participants were asked:

1. As a student in an Early College High School (ECHS) program, what are your perceptions of the benefits associated with participating in an early college high school?
2. If you were to rank the benefits of participating in an ECHS program, what would you consider to be the greatest benefit?
3. As a student in an ECHS program, what are the challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?

4. If you were to rank the challenges of participating in an ECHS program, what would you consider to be the greatest challenge?
5. How do you think the benefits/challenges would have differed if you would have attended a traditional high school?

To answer question two, What are students' perceptions of the factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school?, the researcher asked four questions to allow them to express their perceptions of factors that influence the completion of an early college high school. The participants were asked:

1. What is your perception of successful completion of the ECHS program?
2. What is your perception of factors that influence successful completion of an early college high school?
3. What are some factors you encounter? How much influence do the factors you encounter have on your successful completion?
4. How do you overcome factors that may have an impact on your successful completion of the program?

To answer question three, What strategies do students perceive will increase the rate of student success in this program, the researcher asked two questions to allow them to share their perceptions of strategies that will increase student success in the early college high school program. The participants were asked:

1. What strategies do you perceive will increase the number of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree?

2. As you progress through the program, the curriculum becomes more challenging.

What strategies do you find to be most effective in helping you to persevere and overcome your challenges?

To create trustworthiness in the instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot on eight students from another campus with a similar program utilizing the focus group semi-structure instrument. The purpose of using the semi-structure interview questions with a pilot group was to validate if the questions were interpreted as intended. The pilot group responses were very similar to the responses of the participants of the study.

Data Analyses

Data from the interviews were coded inductively revealing a thematic content analysis about the students' overall perceptions of an early college high school. In analyzing the data, the researcher used the three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective, as described by Strauss & Corbin (1990). Coding is a systematic procedure to organize the results of an interview into categories (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). In the open coding phase, the researcher examined the transcripts, searching for important words or phrases in the transcribed data in order to categorize discrete elements in the data. Key words and phrases that are shared among the students were used to identify similarities and differences in the data. During the axial coding phase, the concepts were developed into categories searching for common themes by comparing each participant's transcript to seek out emerging themes and trends. Using the cutting-and-sorting method, relevant statements related to emerging themes were grouped. The researcher combined the related themes.

The emerging themes were: 1) building relationships among students and teachers, 2) college preparation, 3) adaptation to a rigorous workload, 4) economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program, 5) the ability to be self-driven, 6) head start experience of college, 7) a change of lifestyle, 8) more free time, 9) self-determination, 10) family support, 11) seeking help, and 12) building relationships among students and teachers.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative research study, the researcher can serve in one of two roles—an emic role, having full participation or an etic roll as an outsider with an objective view (Simon, 2013). According to Punch (1998), a researcher can start in an emic role and end in an etic role or vice versa. The researcher of this study was afforded the opportunity to work with the staff and students of VECHS during its first year of existence for about a month as the principal intern. The brief experience did not qualify the researcher to serve in an emic role as an insider; therefore, the etic role is more appropriate for this qualitative study.

As an African American female and first generation college student, I would have fit the criteria for participating in an early college high school program. During my senior year of high school, I was offered the opportunity to take a college class after school. The professor provided instruction to the students on the high school campus. I entered college with six credit hours in Composition English I. While attending college, I came home every weekend to work so that I could contribute to cost of my tuition. If this program had been in existence when I was in high school, I would have pursued the

opportunity to earn an associate's degree while simultaneously earning a high school diploma without incurring an expense to myself or my parents.

Limitations

This is a single study consisting of the perceptions of students of an ECHS program in an urban school district in Texas; therefore, the perceptions may not be akin to the experiences of other students in a different district (urban or suburban), region, or state. The study was based on the perceptions of individuals, which relied on their self-report. The sample size for this study was small. It only included 10th-12th grade students; 9th grade students were excluded due to lack of data regarding their progress in the program. For this reason, results from the study will not be generalizable to other Early College High School programs.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

This study was designed to examine high school students' perceptions regarding their experience at an early college high school. Specifically, it explored students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and the factors that influenced their completion of the program. Strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree were also examined. The guiding research questions were:

1. What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?
2. What are students' perceptions of the factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school?
3. What strategies do students perceive will increase the rate of student success in this program?

The researcher collected and analyzed responses from three semi-structured, open-ended focus group interviews consisting of a total of 28 students. A demographic survey also was distributed and completed by each student prior to the interviews. The demographic survey included information regarding the students' and their parents' educational background. It also yielded information about the students' household status and future plans after graduating from the Early College High School Program. The researcher met with students from each grade level separately.

The first focus group consisted of 10th graders, the second focus group was 11th graders, and the third focus group was comprised of 12th graders. All of the students gathered in the conference room and protocol was established for responding to the questions. Upon submitting their demographic survey, the participants received a respondent number. The researcher began the interviews.

The responses from the interviews were coded inductively revealing emerging themes related to the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school program, their perception of the factors influencing the successful completion of an early college high school, and their thoughts on strategies students perceive to increase the rate of student success in the program. This chapter will include the themes that were emerged and direct quotes from the students.

Research Question # 1

Benefits and Challenges

























The opportunity to participate in an early college high school program comes with many benefits. Alongside those benefits are challenges that students encounter. To earn an associate's degree at the end of the four year program would appear to be the greatest benefit of the program; however, the students revealed additional benefits that were meaningful to them. They also expressed the challenges associated with participating in the program. The 10th graders list of benefits included: earning an associate's degree, college preparation, building relationships, participation in a rigorous program, college experience, development of time management and study skills, and earning college hours. The benefits expressed by the 11th graders were: support from teachers, no cost to participate in the program, college preparation and experience, building relationships,


development of time management skills, becoming self-driven, earning an associate's degree, and a better quality of education. The benefits discussed among the 12th graders were: the head start experience which is inclusive of the students' college experience and preparation, no cost, earning an associate's degree, more challenging program, development of time management skills and self, and developing a sense of responsibility.

Building a relationship with their teachers and peers was a benefit common among the 10th and 11th graders. College preparation was expressed by all three grade levels as a benefit associated with participating in an ECHS program.

Table 3

Common Themes Derived from the Students' Responses of Benefits and Challenges

	Building Relationships	College Preparation
10 th Graders	   	   
11 th Graders	    	    
12 th Graders		     

Note.  denotes the number of students that responded to each theme.

10th Graders Responses. When asked about their perceptions of the benefits associated with the program, aside from earning an associate's degree, many of their responses concentrated on college preparation and building relationships with their teachers and other students. They were all in agreement that earning college hours and

graduating with an associate's degrees was the ultimate benefit of participating in the program. Additional benefits included time management skills developed and the opportunity to participate in a rigorous program. One students noted:

“One of the benefits for me is that this is a rigorous program and because of it being rigor, I get challenged daily.”

Another student stated:

“You are going to have a hard time being able to adapt to this environment if you don't know how to manage your time. I had to learn time management skills quick because I am easily distracted.”

Of the eight participants in this group, seven of them shared that building relationships with the teachers and students was a benefit associated with participating in the ECHS program.

Theme 1: Building relationships among students and teachers.

The students discussed the relationships that were built among themselves and with the faculty. The students' relationships started with them interacting with each other. Those interactions lead to seeking help and advice from each other and their teachers; from there, relationships were formed. Within their grade level, they were very competitive, but they were also very supportive of each other. Along with learning, they expressed that encouraging one another when someone fell off with their grades was also part of their responsibilities. The students would form study groups so that could study together and help each other. Responses of the 10th graders were:

“I believe the best benefit that you can receive from being in this type of environment, is the relationship you get with people. I really enjoy that. If I had

gone to a normal high school, I wouldn't have a close relationship with my teachers."

"I was going to say the relationship I built here. I have become close with some of my friends and I have made new friends. We share the same goals, you want friends that have the same mind set as you."

"I would say the interacting with people is the best part because you learn how to communicate with people that assist you with other resources and that can help you throughout your education."

The students also discussed the importance of building a relationship with their teachers. They noted that it is a different relationship with the teacher and the professor. The students felt that both were very supportive, but the interaction with the professor was more formal than the interaction with their teacher. They also indicated that both the high school teacher and the college professor demonstrated a sense of caring and high expectations. One student expressed,

"One of the benefits for me is that it's such a rigorous program, so you get challenged every day. Also, the teachers are there for you if you need help on anything. We have a close relationship with them. They actually seem to care."

"I believe the best benefit that you can receive from being in this type of environment, is the relationship you get with people. I really enjoy that. If I had gone to a normal high school, I wouldn't have a close relationship with my teachers."

"When you're interacting with a professor, it is way different than when you're interacting with a high school teacher. The conversation seems to be a little more

formal with our professors. But I still like the fact that I have a relationship with them that I feel comfortable in talking to any of them.”

Theme 2: College preparation.

A second theme that emerged was college preparation. There were four of the participants that discussed how participation in this program prepares the students for college. They expressed how rigorous the program is and the impact it has on preparing them for college. In addition to preparing them for college, the experience has developed their time management skills which contribute to their success in their high school and college courses. One student stated,

“Basically you achieve skills like time management and study skills that not only help you in high school, but also in college and later in life. I’ll be prepared when I go off to a four-year university.”

Other students’ responses were:

“I really wanted to be in this program because you can get college experience while you are younger. It basically prepares you for college and I really enjoy that.”

“I guess one of the benefits is getting your associate’s degree because you take dual credit courses, but it also helps prepare you for college as well as interacting with people.”

Next, the students were asked what are the challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, and what did they consider to be the greatest challenge? The students expressed the overall experience was extremely challenging due to the nature of the program. Participating in the program is a choice that is accompanied

with dedication and commitment from all participants. Many of their responses to the challenges associated with participating in the program focused on adapting to the rigorous workload. Another challenge mentioned during the discussion was competition.

The students' comments were:

“Everybody’s goal is to be number one or to at least be in the top ten percent of your graduating class¹. That’s a really big challenge here because our class size decreases each year.”

“My biggest challenge is to be able to compete with the other students to be number one. If you know you’re not number one, you must work harder to make sure your rank doesn’t drop too low. This gives you a type of anxiety.”

“It's a competition. Everyone here wants to be number one.”

There were four of the eight participants that expressed that a challenge associated with participating in the ECHS was adapting to the rigorous workload. The emerging theme drawn from their responses was adaptation to a rigorous workload.

Theme 3: Adaptation to a rigorous workload.

The workload of the ECHS program is rigorous for the students because they are completing two programs in one. Their effort requires time management and perseverance. Unknowingly, as the students reflected on the challenges of the program and all that it entails, they identified their own strengths. One student expressed,

“The greatest challenge is basically the workload. It’s just something to adapt to, but once you make friends and you begin working together, you help each other out. That’s what we do.”

¹ Students that graduate in the top ten percent of their class are automatically eligible for admission to most state colleges. The top ten percent students also graduate magna cum laude or cum laude

Another student stated,

“I get really stressed out easily. The majority of things that causes me to stress is that I can’t really cope with the workload. We have to be able to adapt to the workload in order to be successful in this program.”

“If I want to be basic, it’s the workload, it's hard. You have to sacrifice some things and that's the biggest challenge... yeah, that's what it is.”

A review of the current grade summary of the sophomore class indicates that the students are successful in the program despite the rigorous workload.

11th Graders Responses. The eleventh graders’ perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school were similar to, yet slightly different from the 10th graders’ perception. They concentrated more on the economic aspect of the program. The benefits aligned with the 10th graders responses were building relationships and college preparation. One student, in particular, described his benefit as a safe place to learn. Other students’ responses to the benefits of participating in the ECHS program were:

“The benefit that I see from participating in this program is college preparation. It is preparing me for the college environment. Another benefit is the close teacher and student relationships that are developed. The teachers really care.”

“One of the many benefits we make new friends, and those friends become our best friends and because of that, that brings family and unity together. That is one of the most important value we have as students.”

“I think one of the main benefits from my perspective is that the environment is really family oriented. It also prepares you for when you do go to a four year

university. The students here that are now juniors, know that this is not an easy school to be in. It does get really stressful at times.”

When asked their perceptions of the benefits associated with the program and what they perceived to be their greatest benefit, student acknowledged the privilege of attending college at no cost. The emerging theme derived from this group was the economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program.

Theme 1: Economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program.

Attending college can be very costly. Many students depend on financial aid to cover the cost of their tuition. The students do not incur any expenses while participating in the ECHS program and yet they are afforded the opportunity to graduate with an associate's degree.

As the students began their discussion on the economic benefits; they acknowledged the privilege of earning college hours at no cost to themselves or their parents. Some of the students shared that if they had not participated in the ECHS program, then their chances of going to college would be limited due to the high cost of tuition. As supported by one student's statement,

“The biggest benefit I see in entering early college, and I think some might agree, is the economical aspect it offers. That's two free years of college, two free years that my parents probably couldn't afford. I consider it a scholarship that pays for my education.”

Other students commented,

“Some of us don’t have the financial accessibility to pay for college, that’s one of the main things that is always going around in my mind. Yes, we desire to go to college, but how are we going to pay for it? Economic support is one of the greatest benefits the early college high school offers.

“I feel like a benefit from the school is the economical aspect. My parents probably would have never had the money to pay for college. I took the chance to come here, and I feel like they really help us with our future. I never really knew much about college or anything like that.”

“The biggest benefit I see in participating in the program, and I think some might agree, is the economic benefit it has. That’s two free years of college, two free years that my parents probably couldn’t afford.”

As the students transitioned from their sophomore to their junior year, the classes became more rigorous, the workload increased, and the students begin taking a full load of college courses consisting of 9-12 hours per semester in addition to their high school classes. According to the students, their junior year is the year of survival. It is at this point that students begin to leave the program for various reasons such as lack of resilience, the desire to participate in extra-curricular activities, and mobility.

The juniors were asked what are the challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, and what do you consider to be your greatest challenge? When the students began discussing their challenges, they eluded to how different their experiences would have been if they would have attended a traditional high school. The students stated that the challenges they encountered by participating in an ECHS program

were time management, self-drive, and prioritization. As the researcher examined all of the responses, the major theme that emerged from the challenges associated with participating in the program was the ability to be self-driven.

Theme 2: The ability to be self-driven.

The students shared that their desire and drive comes from within oneself and it is motivated and cultivated by the support of family, friends, and teachers. Although they are faced with many distractions, they have to remain focused on their courses. Some of the students' responses were:

“Whenever you start getting your harder college classes and more rigorous teachers, I think one quality you need to have is you have to be driven to be able to persevere.”

“I think self-drive is one thing you have to have because sophomore year is when you see people drop out or transfer because they couldn't handle it.” The ability to be self-driven is encompassed with late night studies, very little sleep, and a strenuous workload.

“In your sophomore year, the level of rigor increases. That's when your self-drive kicks in. You have to ask yourself, do I want to keep trying or do I give up.”

“The biggest challenge I see is, you have to want to participate, which means that you have to give up some things. You have to study and do homework instead of hanging out with friends. That's when you are challenged with being self-driven.”

12th Graders Responses. The 12th graders' focus group consisted of eight students. After three successful years of participating in the program, the twelfth graders' goal was graduation, which involved two ceremonies for most of them. The students that

earned 60 college hours participated in the college graduation in addition to their high school graduation. The account of their perceptions of the ECHS program was unique to their own situations. It was also a combination of the underclassmen experiences. Their shared perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the ECHS were: college preparation, building relationships, cost, and earning an associate's degree. Their responses were:

"I believe this program has helped us save money, both me and my parents."

"You're not only able to save on tuition, but you're also able to graduate with an associate's degree earlier and then go from there to receive a bachelor's and master's in less time."

"I think the relationships I have established is my greatest benefit. I have bonded with different students because we are in this struggle together. We can call on each other for help at any time. The teachers know us by our names. I feel comfortable in talking to my teachers about my school work or about personal things. The teachers also encourage you when you are not doing your best."

"I think participating in this program has really prepared me for college. I now study, study, study... and I prioritize my schedule so that I won't fall behind.

Prior to coming here, I didn't study at all."

As the discussion continued, several of the students' comments were related to their head start experience to college life. The head start experience prepared them for real world situations and developed them in becoming responsible students. The emerging theme derived from their discussion was their head start experience gained from participating in the ECHS program.

Theme 1: Head start experience.

The seniors felt that they received a wealth of knowledge by participating in an early college high school program. As they entered the program as a freshman, they were faced with the reality of no longer being pampered by their teachers; they were treated as adults. The experience taught them a sense of responsibility which prepared them for real world situations. One student expressed,

“I think a benefit of the early college high school program is building a sense of responsibility because here, you don’t have teachers babying you, so you work a lot on your time management, ability, and motivation to get what you need to get things done.”

Other students stated,

“The benefit of this program I think would be the realization that comes with being a college student and you get a reality check when your professor doesn’t remind you that you’re missing work and you need to turn it in.”

“I wouldn’t know how to rank my benefits because I feel like all of them are so valuable, but for the most part, all of our benefits don’t just involve the scholarship we get for the two free years of college, there is also the personal benefit of developing ourselves into responsible students.”

“I think a benefit of the early college high school program is building that sense of responsibility because here, you don’t have teachers babying you so you work a lot on your time management, ability, and motivation to get what you need to get things done.”

“One of the benefits that I would say we get in addition to gaining knowledge, is the head start experience of dealing with college professors and the personal experience of failing a college course and having to go back and take it over.”

“My head start experience is allowing time for me to study abroad. Since I will be entering college with an associate’s degree that will free me up some time to study abroad.”

The seniors were asked what are the challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, and what do you consider to be your greatest challenge? As with most students entering high school, the transition into a different environment can be frightening, but the idea of entering high school to take college courses increased their anxiety level. The challenge the seniors faced contributed to them having a change of lifestyle. The changes included learning how to balance their course workload, a job for some, and their responsibilities at home. Many of them had to give up having a social life. The change of lifestyle taught them how to prioritize and develop time management skills. The emerging theme from this group was a change of lifestyle.

Theme 2: A change of lifestyle.

As most teenagers enjoy going out to the movies, sporting events, or just hanging out with friends, the students in the ECHS program did not have that freedom. They were taunted about spending their free-time studying, and although it was their greatest challenge, it also contributed to their success. Their change of lifestyle involved them learning how to have a balanced life by prioritizing and using their time effectively. The following comments were shared by the students:

“I believe the biggest challenge was deciding, “Should I go with my friends, should I stay in sports, or should I focus on my future? While I’m stuck at home doing homework and essays and not getting enough sleep, my friends are enjoying their weekend.”

“My greatest challenge was adapting to a balanced lifestyle. I work a lot of hours. My manager loves to give me the midnight shift and I never complete my homework on time. There are a lot of nights that I don’t even sleep because I have to do a paper that’s due the next day. I’ve worked on balancing my life now. I know how to prioritize a little more now since it’s almost the end of the year.”

“My greatest challenge was prioritizing and it’s still a challenge on a daily basis.”

“I think the big one for me is sleep. I don’t sleep anymore. I come here and then I go to work; a lot of times, I don’t get home until ten o’clock. I’m just like, oh my god, I’m tired so I take a nap and sometimes I don’t wake up from my nap which means that I didn’t do my homework, but if I wake up from my nap, it means I only get like two hours of sleep total for the day.”

“It’s time consuming. Most of our time is spent doing homework. We used to focus on core classes and activities such as band or sports; now we have to concentrate on our college classes.”

10th-12th Graders Responses. After reflecting and elaborating on the benefits and challenges of the program, during each focus group interview, the students were asked, “How do you think the benefits and challenges would have differed if you attended a traditional high school?” The students were eager to respond to this question. The responses of each grade level were unique in that each student had their own opinion

about the traditional high school setting. Some of the perceptions of the benefits and challenges as it relates to the traditional high school were the workload was not as rigorous, different learning environment, and there was less competition academically.

Their responses were:

“The workload obviously is less and the class sizes are bigger. Here, our class of 2018 is really small; there are fewer students on our campus. At a traditional high school, there wouldn’t be as much interaction between the student and the teacher. The benefit of participating at the early college is the ability to develop college preparation skills.”

“Basically, if I would have attended a traditional high school, I would have not developed the skills I have because the learning environment would have been totally different compared to here.”

“One of the benefits, I think, of attending a traditional high school is you would have a higher in rank and less work. Here, we have to work hard towards earning our grades. If our grades fall, we work harder to bring them back up again.”

“I have seen some of their (traditional high school) curriculum. I probably would have 10 times better grades and 10 times a higher class rank.”

Most of the students were in consensus about the free time the traditional high school students have to socialize or participate in extra-curricular activities. Although sacrificing some things become part of the process of participating in the ECHS program, the students expressed that they were comfortable in their decision to participate in the program. The emerging theme from the students’ responses was more free time.

Theme 1: More free time.

“If I would have attended a traditional high school, I wouldn’t have had to study as much; therefore, I would have more free time; which is not a good thing because I would have probably ended up doing something dumb instead of using my time wisely.”

“The students in the traditional high school have a lot of extra time. While we’re going home and doing homework, the majority of them are at home doing their own thing and some of them are even able to have jobs. I also want to go back to relationships; they don’t develop the relationships with their teachers. You know how we’re close, and if we’re having a problem, we can go talk to our teachers.”

“I think attending a traditional high school gives the students more free time.

While I am studying at home, my friends at the traditional high school are either attending or participating in sporting events, hanging out with friends, or working.”

“I don’t think I would have been as challenged at a traditional high school as I am here. The workload is a lot less and it is not as hard.”

“I feel like it would have been a walk in the park. I wouldn’t have those days that you almost break because you have so many things due at the same time and the teachers thinking that you only have their work to complete. My workload would be cut in half”




























Research Question # 2


Factors Influencing Successful Completion

There are many factors that can influence the students' successful completion of the program. The factors could be positive or negative or they could be presented as internal or external. For the early college high school students, the factors that influenced their success were both positive and negative and the encounters occurred internally and externally. The common factors identified by students of all grade levels that influenced the successful completion of the program were self-determination and family support from family.

Table 4

Common Themes Derived from Students' Responses of Factors Influencing Completion

	Self-Determination	Family Support
10 th Graders	     	   
11 th Graders	    	    
12 th Graders	  	   

Note.  denotes the number of students that responded to each theme.

10th Graders Response. The tenth graders were asked the question, “what is your perception of successful completion of the ECHS program?” Their initial responses were not aligned to the question; therefore, they had to be redirected to gain an understanding

of their perception. After a further explanation of the question, the students begin expressing their thoughts. It was a consensus that completing the program with an associate's degree defined successful completion; however, for one student, successful completion was to avoid being placed on academic probation throughout the four years of the program.

The researcher then asked them of their perceptions of factors that influence successful completion of an early college high school?" The students began talking among themselves while reflecting on situations that occur at home or school which has an impact on their success in the program. The factors that the students expressed which contributes to their successful completion of the program are higher teacher expectations, a desire for a better lifestyle, and self-determination. The students' comments were:

"So I guess it's my willpower to be someone in life, but it could also be other things, such as the teachers pushing me on to do a lot better, and my parents telling me you should do a lot better than me."

"I guess one big factor that motivates me is my teachers not holding my hand; they have high expectations for their students. I have to motivate myself."

"My biggest factor is self-determination. Without it, I would just give up because it really gets hard sometimes."

When asked about the factors they encounter and how much influence those factors have on their successful completion, the students were eager to respond. The factors they encountered having influence on their completion of the program were difficult situations at home, stress, and peer pressure. As the students were expressing their thoughts, they were also sharing their coping mechanisms. The responses were:

“If there’s something going on in your house, or something going on within yourself, you shouldn’t let that get in the way; for instance, when my father lost his job. I thought I was going to have to begin working to help support my family. My parents wouldn’t allow me to work because they didn’t want it interfere with my studies. Fortunately, I was able to find me a weekend job working at a car wash. In order to remain employed, I had to maintain my grades. This experience encouraged me to work harder in school.”

“The workload can become very stressful; especially, when assignments are due at the same time in all of my classes. When my stress level gets too high, I take a break. I take a bath or go outside and walk the dog. I just try to relax my mind, then, I come back to whatever I was working on.”

“I guess peer pressure is one factor that has an influence on me completing this program. I listen to the negative comments of my friends that attend a traditional high school, and it becomes a distractor; especially when I have so much work to complete. I have to remind myself that this will soon be over and I will have an associate’s degree when I graduate.”

The sophomores concluded question two by expressing their thoughts on how to overcome factors that may have an impact on their successful completion of the program? As a preface to their response to this question, the participants reflected on their purpose of participating in the program and what they were attempting to accomplish. Two of them perceive factors that may arise, as a part of life, and just like with anything else, they don’t let it become a distraction to them. The others overcome

factors that may impact their success by taking a break to recuperate. The sophomores responded to this question in the following manner:

“If there’s something going on in my house or within myself, I shouldn’t let it get in the way. I am doing all of this for my own success; so I don’t let my personal factors interrupt my success in school.”

“Sometimes there are really, really tough situations at home that just can’t be handled along with schoolwork. I just calm down and think about what’s going on in my personal life before I start doing anything related to school. When I’m not focused, it is hard for me to concentrate and that can have an impact my success.”

“Just take a break, that’s what I do. Stressed, I take a break. I take a bath, go outside, or walk the dog. I try to relax my mind so when I return back to what I am working on, I can be focused.”

“I always remember my main goal when I am most stressed; it helps me overcome factors and inspires me to work harder. Stress comes with participating in this program. If you are not stressed at some point, you are not serious about completing this program.”

11th Graders Response. The juniors were asked about their perception of successful completion of the ECHS program. With three years of studies almost completed, this group was more elaborate in their responses based on their experiences. As stated before, all of them agreed that successful completion of the program was represented by earning enough college hours to earn an associate’s degree by the end of the program; however, success for some of them was defined on a wider spectrum. As an example, one student’s expression was,

“I think if you’re able to come out with a degree, that’s great, but I look at it in a broader sense. At the end of the day, that’s what we are all striving for, but for me, the experience made me a better student overall.”

Another student shared that the experience and the idea of graduating from an early college high school defined successful completion for her. Additional responses to this question included:

“I think a successful completion of the program is graduating from high school with an associate’s degree. I know students are supposed to mature overtime, but in my situation, I can honestly say, I’m a different person and a better student.”

“I think being able to write on my college application that I have earned college hours whether I complete enough hours to earn an associate’s degree or not, I have accomplished something I never imagine. This is what defines my successful completion.”

“Given the opportunity to come here and show my family what I am capable of accomplishing my goal of attending college; that the opportunity given to me was not a lost, is my example of successful completion of the program.”

The researcher asked the juniors, “What is your perception of factors that influence successful completion of an early college high school? The responses included internal and external factors. The students acknowledged that developing relationships with the teachers has a major impact on the success of the program. Strangely so, failure was also mentioned as a factor that influenced success. The external factor was identified as lack of family members support and understanding. The students’ expressions were:

“Teachers are a very important factor to being successful, but some teachers don’t like to teach. When you find the ones that do, you build a good relationship with them. Those teachers will typically go out of their way to help you.”

“Another important factor that helps us achieve success is the failure we gain through our experiences. I, for one, have learned a lot from failed experiences, from not passing test, because at times, I have that feeling of not studying when I know I should. At the end of the day, I know that if I want to be successful, I have to study and I have to put my mind into it.”

“Yeah, the failures that we go through at Vikings, we see them as strengths. It redirects our focus to come back, put ourselves together, and move forward for what we want to accomplish and achieve in the future.”

“When my ability is questioned, that becomes a factor for me. For instance, someone told me I couldn’t do this; it pushed me even more to be like, “You know what? You say I can’t do it. I’m going to do it.” When I replay this in my head, it drives me to work harder and it increases my determination.”

When asked, what are some of the factors you encountered and how much influence those factors have on your successful completion of the early college high school program, the juniors responded accordingly:

“I am very sports-driven. My friends would say, “You are giving up sports for some education? You know playing sports get you scholarships. You should stay here.”

Their comments influenced me because I perceived that they thought that I was better at sports rather than education. I guess I did become self-driven on my studies after that.”

“I think a factor for me was my cousins telling me that I was cheating myself out of a real high school experience. I felt that I had to prove to them that my high school experience offered me a greater advantage. So far, I am maintaining good grades.”

“My parents don’t offer me the emotional support that I need and it’s not in a bad way. They push me to strive for better and they always tell me, “Education is what is going to help you to be successful.” The conflict I am feeling is that they haven’t been through what I am going through. When they tell me, “Oh, it’ll be fine,” when I’m up at three o’clock in the morning, “just get your some sleep.” They don’t understand that my stress level is at a ten at that point. It’s not their fault. The fact that they don’t understand and the fact that I want to show them, is what drives me to be more successful.”

The researcher concluded question two by asking the juniors, how do you overcome factors that may have an impact on your successful completion of the program? The students responded:

“Oh, to overcome them, sometimes you just have to ignore them. Sometimes you have to prioritize and know which ones you need to overcome, and then to overcome them, you have to have a plan and act on your plan. That’s how I overcome situations.”

“I overcome factors doing an evaluation. I evaluate each factor and determine how it is affecting me. Anything that is holding me back, I eliminate it. For instance, negative friends. I remove myself from their company or conversation. This program is hard enough. I don’t allow no one or nothing bring me down.”

12th Graders Responses. As the seniors were approaching the end of their journey, their responses were images of their overall experience of participating in an early college high school. The researcher asked the group what was their perception of successful completion of an early college high school program. The replies were getting an associate's degree and surviving. More specifically the students' responses were:

“Walking across the stage with an associate's degree will define my success.”

“Surviving, staying all the way to the end; not necessarily competing with your associates, but pushing yourself. Surviving and knowing that you just didn't give up by throwing in the towel and going to your homeschool because it appears to be easier. You decide to stay and push through and withstand the challenges without running from them. This shows growth. This shows perseverance.”

When asked, what is your perception of factors that influence successful completion of an early college high school, their responses mirrored factors they actually encountered. Self-determination and having the support of teachers, parents, and friends were factors that influenced successful completion of the program. Collectively, their responses were:

“Friends, the group you hang around can either bring you up or down. I have certain friends that I go around to hang out and talk, but when it comes to the business of doing my school work, I have surrounded myself with my friends who are working hard at completing their college coursework and graduating. I also learned early on that having friends that are upperclassmen help out because they can give you guidance.”

“A big factor would be your mindset and your motivation. You have to have the right mindset to be in this program because the teachers are all about business. Motivation and self- determination is what drives you. If you lack the two, it is like being anchored. You have no room for growth.”

“The teachers remind us that they are here for us. One of the things they keep repeating is, “we’re here for you guys; we’re not here to fail you.” Our teachers get to know us personally and they genuinely care about our success. They are there to offer us their support.”

The researcher asked the seniors about some of the factors they encountered and how much influence those factors have on their successful completion of the program. The replies included motivation and encouragement from family members and other college students that were not afforded the same opportunity to go to college while in high school. The fact that the students take classes on a college campus with adult college students has contributed to student success in the program. One student’s encounter has inspired him based on mere conservation. He shared:

“When the people downstairs (referring to the adult college students), have conversations about us, it be like, “you know those kids upstairs, they go to college and high school and they’re getting their associate’s degree.” They also share with us how great of an opportunity we have. When you hear that, you don’t want to let this opportunity go to waste. It motivates me hearing other people talk about my situation.”

Another student expressed,

“Family also. Growing up, being a first-generation college student, everybody’s proud of you. They don’t realize that I am barely surviving over here. They are always telling me that I am going to do something with my life. That motivates me. My parents are constantly on me; they don’t know what I am going through either; however, they are always pushing and encouraging me. After a good talk with them, I find the motivation to push just a little harder.”

In completing question two, the seniors were asked, how do you overcome factors that may have an impact on successful completion of the program. The responses were evolved around family, religion, and friends. The seniors’ comments included:

“I am the first in my family to go to college. My family is constantly on me about getting stuff done. Sometimes it’s a good thing and sometimes it’s not because the pressure gets to me and I feel like I am about to break. I get through my situation with laughter with my friends because we all kind of have that one similarity we share.”

“Religion helps me. You could say I’m a religious person. I’m Catholic and I believe nothing is too great for God. He is almighty and there’s no problem greater than He. I have a lot of trust in Him. There are times and there are struggles when, for example, you failed a test and your grade drops really low and lot of stuff is in jeopardy. You’re faced with the challenge of not only bringing your grade up, but you put yourself at risk of not being eligible of taking the classes you need to take the following semester. I have learned to pray about my

situation and let God handle it. I feel religion really helps me out. I also put in more time in studying so I won't keep putting myself back in the same situation."

"I believe that the workload sometimes become overwhelming. When this happens, I have to keep an optimistic view on things; so I go out with my friends, take a day off to have fun and forget about things. Upon my return, I tell myself, "I can do this now.""

As it relates to defining successful completion of the early college high school program, having a self-determination to earn an associate's degree was the consensus of each focus group. Success was also defined as avoiding being placed on academic probation, becoming a better student, survival and determination, and graduating with college hours even if an associate's degree is not obtained.

Factors, whether positive or negative can be influential on success. The participants' perceptions of the factors that influenced the successful completion of the early college high school included motivation and self-determination, support of family and friends, and building relationships with the teachers. As it became personal to the students, family support and motivation remained as factors that influenced their success. The responses on how to overcome factors that impact their success included laughter, religion, family, planning, and prioritizing. The emerging themes derived from the students' perceptions responses of factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school were self-determination which encompassed the students earning their associate's degree and family support.

Theme 1: Self-determination.

Entering the early college high school program, the students were aware that their journey was going to be complicated. At the beginning of year, a new group of students comprised of approximately 100 freshmen formed a cohort. As the years went by, the numbers dwindled and the class sizes decreased. Students withdrew for various reasons such as mobility, poor grades, and sports. Those that remained also experienced some of these reasons; however, they remained to weather the storm. Their drive was built on their self-determination to be successful in this program. The students discussed factors that could have prevented them from completing the program such as a strenuous workload, lack of sleep, time management, and the lack of a social life, but it was their self-determination that allowed them to prevail. The students' responses were:

“One of my biggest factors that motivate me to be successful is being determined to actually achieve what I want; because if I’m not determined, I would just give up on my main goal which is to graduate with my associate’s degree.”

“The factors that contribute to me being successful in this program is my determination to be someone in life.”

“I have the determination to stay focused so I could achieve what I want. My goal is to graduate with my associate’s degree when I finish high school.”

Theme 2: Family support.

The students in this program are first-generation college goers. Some of them come from a household in which their parents' highest level of education does not extend beyond high school and in some cases, grade school. The students expressed that the support of their family influenced their successful completion of the program. The support was demonstrated verbally through words of encouragement and sometimes

words of guilt and defeat. Students were either challenged to strive towards gaining greater measures or they were criticized in their efforts which motivated them to persevere. In either situation, the students prevailed in accomplishing their goal.

Their responses were:

“A factor for me being successful would be my parents and my family because they motivate me every single day.”

“My family, they know that I am in school, but they don’t know the magnitude of what I’m going through to get through this program; therefore, they don’t always understand why I choose not to do family things with them.”

“Growing up, being a first generation college student, my family shares how proud they are of me even though I am barely surviving over here. They tell me that I am going to do something with my life. That motivates me. I feel like I can do this thing and I can do it for them.”

Research Question # 3
























Strategies that Increase Student Success


What strategies do students perceive will increase the rate of student success in this program?

It has been established that the ECHS program is rigorous. The students concluded their interview discussing strategies that would increase the rate of student success. The students utilized strategies that were aligned to their individual needs. Inclusive of the suggested strategies were setting goals, taking breaks, and time management. The strategies that were common among all three grade levels were seeking help and building relationships among the students and teachers.

Table 5

Common Themes Derived from Students' Responses of Strategies that Increase Success

	Seeking Help/Advice	Building Relationships
10 th Graders	   	   
11 th Graders	   	     
12 th Graders	  	 

Note.  denotes the number of students that responded to each theme.

10th Graders Responses. The researcher asked the sophomore participants to share the strategies they perceive will increase the number of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. The strategies encompassed seeking help, being involved in study groups, and building relationships. The varied responses were:

"A strategy I think that would help would be to ask for help. If you don't understand, ask your classmates; if they don't know, then ask your teacher. That strategy helps me."

"I've said it before, what I like to do is have study groups. I like to study with other people because it helps me; we are learning together. You have that person telling you if you are right or wrong and what you need to do. That helps me; I guess I like the feedback."

“Having friends with the same goal will elevate you; especially if you are helping each other. Having a friend here is having a friend for life. We can keep up with each other even when we go off to college.”

The researcher concluded this focus group interview with the following question: As you progress through the program, the curriculum becomes more challenging. What strategies do you find to be most effective in helping you persevere and overcome your challenges? The participants’ responses were similar to their responses in the previous question with the exception of self-evaluation and goal-setting. Their responses were:

“I guess one strategy is staying after school for tutorials of a study session with friends. We all have the same assignments and the same teachers; so we can all contribute our part to help each other out. For example, if I am horrible in geometry and my friend is really good at it, but his weakness is English and English is my strength, then we could help each other.”

“A strategy that I like to do is a self-evaluation after receiving my grades each grading period. When I see that my grade is low, I try to work hard in that subject. To bring up my grade, I study more and stay after school to get the help I need from my teacher.”

“Knowing my weakness helps. Therefore, I know what to ask and who to ask for help.”

“What I personally do, I just keep setting goals, small goals. Let’s look at chemistry. I know I have quizzes in that class daily; so I set my goal to get at least an 80 on the quiz. That way, each time, I see an improvement I can set a new

goal. If I start getting 100's on the quizzes, I will shoot for making 100's on the test."

11th Graders Responses. The researcher asked the 11th graders about strategies they perceived will increase the number of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Their responses were totally different from the responses of the sophomores. Their responses were more aligned with the changes in the selection process instead of the experience of it all. The juniors' responses were:

"In term of the school, what they can do to increase the number of students that graduate per year, is to continue what they are doing now, which is, the way they hand selected us. They interviewed us and we had to write an essay. I heard that they're doing a lottery to select the incoming students. I feel that this process is going to lose out on students that are really willing to work hard."

"In order to be successful here, you have to have to be self-motivated. Selecting students from a lottery doesn't necessarily mean that the student has the drive to be successful in this program. What does the school know about the student and his academic ability? You have to have a self-drive within you to persevere."

"One important thing that I always keep in mind is that sometimes, we all take this opportunity for granted. Yes, we were selected to be here and it is a big opportunity. Every year, there is a selective number of students that are accepted in this program. The fact that we are included in the selection is the reason why I work hard to do my best in my classes. So my strategy would be not to take this opportunity for granted."

In concluding the 11th grade focus group interview, the researcher asked the students: As you progress through the program, the curriculum becomes more challenging. What strategies do you find to be most effective in helping you persevere and overcome your challenges? The strategies that they considered to be effective in overcoming challenges were seeking advice about teachers and classes, taking a break, and asking for help. The juniors' replies were:

"I ask my peers that are a grade level ahead of me for advice on which classes to take, which teachers to take for particular classes, and what are the expectations."

"Personally, for me, I guess, whenever, you get overwhelmed with learning certain things, I suggest taking a break. Sometimes you have to take projects and assignments step by step."

"A strategy that works for me is to acknowledge when I don't understand something and ask for help. No one wants to look stupid, but what is stupid is to not ask questions when you don't know something. Students have to realize that we are all in this together and the students and teachers don't mind helping."

12th Graders Responses. The seniors were asked to share the strategies they perceived would increase the number of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree. Visualizing the rewards of their efforts and perseverance, they freely shared the strategies that contributed to their success in completing the program. The suggested strategies were time management, seek help when needed, and to establish relationships. The senior's responded:

"Don't procrastinate, don't procrastinate, and don't procrastinate! That's what the teachers told us. I would also suggest to them to work very hard during your freshman

year. Don't settle for a "B" because as you progress and reflect, you will realize that you really could have earned an "A". Once you get your first rank at the end of your freshman year, it encourages you to do better."

"I would say time management. I also co-sign what he just said about working hard at the beginning. I wouldn't want them to be like me and let time pass me up. They will see the impact of their hard work when they walk across the stage with an associate's degree."

"Getting to know your teachers; establishing a relationship with them is extremely important. They are here to help you, but they can only do so much. If you are putting in the work, and they see that, they are sometimes willing to go out of their way to help you. Establishing relationships with teachers will even help you beyond the classroom. Sometimes they offer life lessons that could help you along the way."

"If you are struggling in a certain subject and you have a classmate that has mastered the subject, don't be afraid to ask for help. We are here to help each other."

In bringing this focus group interview to an end, the researcher asked the seniors: As you progress through the program, the curriculum becomes more challenging. What strategies do you find to be most effective in helping you persevere and overcome your challenges? The strategies they found to be most effective persevering and overcoming challenges were time management, self-determination, and having an escape plan. The participants concluded with the following responses:

"The strategy that worked for me was time management. It required effort, and after four years, I still haven't mastered it, but I have gotten better. I think I will have more of a handle of it when I enter college this year."

“I am not sure if you would consider this to be a strategy, but self-determination is a must. Having a determined mind got me through all of the late nights, missed activities, and lack of sleep.”

“I feel like something that is very important is that you need to have an escape plan; something else that can give you a balance like listening to music, playing your favorite sport. You can’t just be focused on school all the time. Take a little time to distress and recharge your battery.”

The strategies perceived that would increase the rate of student success in the early college high school program were: student involvement in a study group, building relationships, asking for help, self-motivation, and time management. The perceived strategies that contributed to student persevering and overcoming challenges were: self-evaluation, setting goals, seeking advice, taking a break, asking for help, establishing relationships, and self-determination. The emerging themes drawn the students’ recommended strategies for increasing the rate of student success in the ECHS program were seeking help and building relationships.

Theme 1: Seeking help. The students stressed the importance of asking for help when needed. They sought help from their peers, their high school teachers, and their college professors. They considered this as a means of supporting each other throughout the process. The help sometimes came from participating in a study group, visiting their college professor during office hours, or staying after school for tutorials. . Studying together provided an opportunity for them to learn from each other and provide feedback. Some of their responses were:

“You have to know when and how to ask for help. Don’t be afraid to say that you don’t understand. For all you know, your peers may have the same question as you.”

“I used to be one of those people who wouldn’t ask for help because I didn’t want to be seen as stupid. That’s what our teachers are here for, to give us help when we need it. You can also ask a friend for help, but just don’t sit there and do nothing.”

“I’ve said this before, what I like to do is have study groups. I like to study with people because that helps me to gain a better understanding. I can ask for help and feel comfortable in asking because we all know each other.”

Theme 2: Building relationships among students and teachers. The students strongly emphasized building a relationship with the teachers and students was a major contribution to student success in the ECHS program. As students would become overwhelmed with balancing everything in their lives involving school, home, and sometimes work, it was the bonds that were formed through relationships that brought them through their rough times.

“Getting to know your teachers, that is important; establish a relationship with them. They are there to help you, but they can only do so much.”

“Surround yourself with good friends. Know who you can go to for help.”

“Building relationship has helped me. If I need help with something, I know what teachers and friends I can depend on.”

In summary, results from this study of students’ perceptions of an early college high school, grade levels 10-12, indicated that there were benefits in participating in the

ECHS program, despite the challenges that the students encountered. The benefits and challenges faced were specific to each student's situation. Factors emphasized by the participants that influenced the successful completion of the ECHS program were self-determination, and family support. Recommended strategies for increasing the rate of student success in the program were to seek help when needed and build relationships. This study was guided by three research questions in which 12 themes were emerged based on the students' responses. The themes were: 1) building relationships among students and teachers, 2) college preparation, 3) adaptation to a rigorous workload, 4) economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program, 5) the ability to be self-driven, 6) head start experience of college, 7) a change of lifestyle, 8) more free time, 9) self-determination, 10) family support, 11) seeking help, and 12) building relationships among students and teachers. Two of the themes, the ability to be self-driven and self-determination, were cross-referenced as the students' perceptions of the program were examined. The themes that were consistent of the perceptions of the ECHS students from all grade levels were building relationships, college preparation, and self-determination. The most important aspect drawn from the students' responses was building relationships with their teachers and their peers.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine high school students' perceptions regarding their experience at an early college high school. Specifically, it explored students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and the factors that influenced their completion of the program. Strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree were also examined. This chapter includes the following sections: Summary of Findings, Implications for School Leadership, Implications for Further Research, and the Conclusion.

Summary of Findings

The researcher analyzed the data from the interviews to find distinct concepts and categories. The findings from the research were organized into themes using three research questions. There were a total of 12 themes that emerged from the responses of the participants of this study. The themes and summarizations are presented by each question.

Research Question # 1

Benefits and Challenges

The first research question asked the students what were their perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school? There was a total of eight themes that emerged from the responses of the participants from first question. The themes were 1) Building relationships among the student and

teachers, 2) College preparation, 3) Adaptation to a rigorous workload, 4) Economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program, 5) The ability to be self-driven, 6) Head start experience, 7) A change of lifestyle, and 8) More free time. The findings were:

10th Graders

Theme 1: Building relationships among the students and teachers. The students discussed the relationships that were built among themselves and with their teachers and professors. They expressed that each relationship was different in the sense that the relationship with their college professor seemed to be more formal; implying that the relationships with their peers and their high school teachers were more informal. It was expressed that sharing common goals was significant in developing their relationships; as a result, they became a support system for each other. Along with learning, they expressed that encouraging one another when someone fell off became part of their responsibilities.

Theme 2: College preparation. The students discussed how rigorous the program is and how it is preparing them for college. The experience of participating in the program has developed their time management and study skills which contributes to their success in the college courses. It has taught them how to prioritize their schedules and activities. The students expressed that they felt confident in advancing to their next phase of college life when they transition to a university. Taking dual credit courses also prepared them for college.

Theme 3: Adaptation to a rigorous workload. In order to graduate with a high school diploma, the student have to earn 26 credits; to earn their associate's degree, they

must complete 60 college hours. The 26 high school credits and the 60 college hours are to be completed in the course of the four years that the students are in high school. The workload of the ECHS program is rigorous for the students because they are completing two programs (high school and college) simultaneously. Their effort requires time management and perseverance. Many times they are faced with having several assignments due at the same time. They shared how they had to adapt to having a rigorous workload which sometimes meant sacrificing some things.

11th Graders

Theme 1: Economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program. The rising cost of attending college has left many students in debt or it has prevented students from attending school. The ECHS program provides the students an opportunity to attend college at no cost; tuition and textbooks are free. The eleventh graders acknowledged that their greatest benefit was the ability to attend college without incurring a cost. Many of them expressed that if it wasn't for the ECHS program, then their chances of going to college would have been limited due to the high cost of tuition. The students recognize that this is a privilege and they are eagerly taking advantage of it. Some of them viewed this benefit as a scholarship that has provided them with two free years of college.

Theme 2: The ability to be self-driven. The students shared that their desire and drive comes from within and it is motivated and cultivated by the support of family, friends, and teachers. As they progress through the program, it becomes more rigorous. They are faced with many distractions from their friends and family, but they have to remain focused. There are times when they have to decide if they are going to push

through or give up. That is when their desire to keep striving and self-drive intervenes to give them that extra push they need to persevere. Having a self-drive causes the students to make sacrifices, but they see the reward in the end.

12th Graders

Theme 1: Head start experience. The head start experience provided students an opportunity to experience colleges at an early age. They benefit by earning college hours and an associate's degree. Although it is challenging, the students benefit from the experience.

The seniors felt that they received a wealth of knowledge by participating in an early college high school program; it also provided them a head start experience of college life. Along with his experience, their time management and study skills were developed which are both crucial to being successful in college. They also became responsible students. The experience taught a sense of responsibility which prepared them for real world situations. It was expressed that this head start experience gives students a reality check of the expectations of college professors.

Theme 2: A change of lifestyle. As most teenagers enjoy going out to the movies, sporting events, or just hanging out with friends, the students in the ECHS program do not have that freedom. They were taunted about spending their free-time studying, and although it was their greatest challenge, it was also a great benefit. Their change of lifestyle involved them learning how to have a balanced life by prioritizing and using their time effectively.

The lifestyle change involved the students having to make decisions on if they were going to study or go to the movies with their friends. It also required some of them

to balance school, work, and their responsibilities at home. There are times where the students experienced sleep deprivation due to late night assignments or study sessions. Completing two programs of studies simultaneously became time consuming. The students acknowledged this change in their lifestyle was necessary for them to complete the program successfully.

10th-12th Graders

The students' responses to their perceptions of how the benefits and challenges would have differed if they would have attended a traditional high school were unique in that each student had their own opinion about the traditional high school setting. However, most of them expressed that attending a traditional high school would have provided them more free time to do things such as participating or attending sporting events, going to the movies, or hanging out with family and friends.

Theme 1: More free time. The students that participate in the ECHS program opt out of participating in extra-curricular activities. Due to the rigorous workload, the students' free time is spent studying or working on their assignments. As a student of an ECHS program they become distracted by the temptation of hanging out with their friends instead of studying. They are sometimes discouraged in knowing that their friends or siblings are at home chilling or out having fun while they are somewhere studying. To endure, they focus on the outcome ahead which is earning their associate's degree.

Research Question #2

Factors Influencing Successful Completion

The second research question examined the students' perceptions of the factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college

high school? The researcher noted two major themes from the students' responses. The themes derived from the factors influencing successful completion were family support and self-determination. The findings were:

Theme 1: Family support. The students in this program are first-generation college goers. Some of them come from a household in which their parents' highest level of education does not extend beyond high school and in some cases, grade school. The students expressed that the support of their family influenced their successful completion of the program. The support was demonstrated verbally through words of encouragement and sometimes words of guilt and defeat. Students were either challenged to strive towards gaining greater measures or they were criticized in their efforts which motivated them to persevere. In either situation, the students prevailed in accomplishing their goal.

Theme 2: Self-Determination. Entering the early college high school program, the students were aware that their journey was going to be complicated. At the beginning of each school year, a new cohort is comprised of approximately 100 freshmen. The student begin taking their college courses during their second year of the program. As the years passed by, the numbers dwindled and the class sizes decreased. Students withdrew for various reasons such as mobility, poor grades, and sports. Those that remained also experienced some of these reasons mentioned; however, they remained to weather the storm. Their drive was built on their self-determination to be successful in the ECHS program. The students discussed factors that could have prevented them from completing the program such as a strenuous workload, lack of sleep, time management, and the lack of a social life, but it was their self-determination that allowed them to prevail. Their determination was driven by their own personal goals, for instance, one student shared

that his determination was motivated by his desire to earn an associate's degree. Another student's determination stemmed from her wanting to be someone in life. Giving up was an option for some of the students, but for those that remained, it was their self-determination that prompted them to remain steadfast in accomplishing their goals.

Research Question # 3

Strategies that Increase Student Success

The third research question explored what strategies the students perceive to increase the rate of success in the program. There were two themes that emerged from the students' responses on the strategies that increase success in the program. The themes were seeking help and building relationships among students and teachers. Additional strategies expressed by the students were goal setting, self-evaluation, time management, and taking a break. The findings were:

Theme 1: Seeking Help. The students stressed the importance of asking for help as needed. They sought help from their peers, their high school teachers, and their college professors. They considered this as a means of supporting each other throughout the process. The help sometimes came from participating in a study group, visiting their college professor during office hours, or staying after school for tutorials. Studying together provided an opportunity for them to learn from each other and provide feedback. The students expressed that rapport that they have with each other and their teachers contributes to comfort level in seeking help when they need it.

Theme 2: Building relationships among students and teachers. The students strongly emphasized building a relationship with the teachers and students was a major contribution to student success in the ECHS program. As students would become

overwhelmed with balancing everything in their lives involving school, home, and sometimes work, it was the bonds that were formed through relationships that brought them through their rough times. The students emphasized that getting to know their teachers was important to them because they are there to help them. The relationships with their friends were just as significant as their relationship with their teacher because both offered support to them.

Findings from this study indicate that there are benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school. The benefits and challenges include building relationships among the student and teachers, college preparation, adaptation to a rigorous workload, economic benefits of not having a cost associated with participating in the program, the ability to be self-driven, head start experience, a change of lifestyle, and more free time. In addition to the benefits and challenges, the students also identified factors that influenced their successful completion of the program, such as family support and self-determination. The strategies that were suggested to increase the rate of student success in the program were seeking help when needed and building relationships with their teachers and the students.

More specifically, the findings in the study indicate that college preparation was a shared benefit associated with participating in an ECHS program among all three grade levels. The students expressed their confidence in taking the college level courses while in high school and having the ability to be successful in completing their courses as they anticipate transitioning to a four year university. Building relationships with their teachers and peers was a shared benefit among the 10th and 11th graders; however it was a

common strategy that the students from all three grade levels considered to increase student success in the program.

The students discussed the significance of developing a relationship with their teachers. They recognized the value of their teachers' support and the comfort level in being able to ask questions and have discussions about personal and school matters. They also expressed an appreciation of the smaller setting in which the teachers could provide one-on-one or small group assistance. The student's relationship with their peers was just as essential as their relationship with their teachers. They expressed that having friends that shared the same goals was meaningful because they could understand the adversity of participating in an ECHS program. The students considered the teachers and their peers as their support system.

The discussion of how the benefits and challenges would have differed if they had chosen to attend a traditional high school was quite relevant. Their perceptions of the traditional high school lead them to believe that it was less strenuous providing students more free time to participate in or attend extra-curricular activities; less interaction with teachers due to large class sizes, and less competition for the top ten percent class rank position because of a larger student enrollment at each grade level. During one of the focus groups, one of their peers reminded the group that participation in the ECHS program was an option. The fact that students chose to attend the traditional high school opposed to the early college high school did not make them less competitive academically than their peers that were not in the program.

The students never lost sight of their purpose for participating in the program, which was to earn an associate's degree. During the process, they remained steadfast and

they redefined success as surviving four years of the ECHS program by earning college hours and a high school diploma. Their resilience and self-determination prevailed, while providing them an opportunity of a lifetime.

Implications for School Leadership

Since 2002, school districts across the nation have implemented the early college high school program. It was initiated in the state of Texas in 2006. The early college high school program is designed to serve minority students that are at-risk or first-generation college goers. Successful completion of the program is earning a high school diploma and an associate's degree. The students redefined successful completion as the ability to remain in the program for four years, graduating with a high school diploma, and earning college hours while in high school; the opportunity to earn an associate's degree was a bonus. The data indicates that most students are successful in completing the program. The findings of this study cannot be generalized because the sample size was small, the students were selected randomly, they all attended the same school, and it was based on their perceptions of which relied on their self-report.

School leadership is a key factor for success within a school. The results indicate that the benefits of participating in the program and the strategies recommended for increasing student success were relationships built among the students and the teachers. Available evidence strongly indicates that building a relationship among students and teachers is relevant to the students' successful completion of the program. A consideration for school leaders is what could be implemented to enhance relationship-building at all levels.

As the students made a comparison of the early college high school to the traditional high school, it was noted that the environment at the traditional high school was different, there was less interaction with the teachers, and a decreased workload. It was also indicated that the traditional high school offered fewer advantages in terms of college preparation and opportunities. Creating a culture that enhances relationship building is a consideration for leaders as it was expressed the students as a benefit and a strategy for successful completion of school.

Lastly, the students expressed the importance of family support during their participation in the ECHS program. The support was motivated by their parents' own personal experiences and the desire for their child to have a better life. A suggestion to consider would be what would a leader do to help parents understand how they can support their child in school and the impact their support have on their child's success in school.

Implications for Research

The early college high school produces a very rigorous program. The students acknowledged how difficult it was to balance participating in two demanding programs simultaneously. As indicated in the findings, the students experienced a lifestyle change that had an impact on them adapting to a new level of rigor. The results also indicated that having self-determination was a strategy recommended for increasing student success. Many of the students referenced that it was their self-determination that prevented them from giving up.

Self-Determination Theory is a theory of personality and motivation that addresses three basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2006). The three common

psychological needs as described by Deci & Ryan (2006) are: 1) Autonomy: Feeling ownership and internal causation of one's behavior; having freedom of choice; individuals engage in an activity because they choose to participate; 2) Competence: Feeling effective and efficacious in one's behavior; having a perceived self-belief in one's ability to perform; constructive feedback helps develop an individual's competence; and 3) Psychological relatedness: Feeling close and connected to people of importance; having a sense of shared experience; having a warm, accepting atmosphere can increase an individual's motivation. These basic psychological needs foster the highest forms of motivation and engagement for activities, perseverance, creativity, and enhanced performance. In reflecting on the students' responses, the psychological needs were fulfilled.

The results of this study also indicated that family support was a factor that influenced successful completion. The resiliency theory is a person's belief in his or her ability to overcome adversity when essential protective factors are present in their life (Krovetz, 1999). It is founded on the premise that if one's family members, community, or school exhibit a genuine concern about them, hold them to high expectations, willfully support them, and value what they are accomplishing, the person will remain steadfast and will overcome almost any adversity (Krovetz, 1999).

Although the findings indicate that the students are successfully completing the program, the concerns about students that withdraw from the program still exist. Further research on who decides to leave the ECHS program and the factors that contribute to their decision to discontinue their participation in the program is recommended.

The ECHS students are graduating with a bachelor's degree two years earlier than the norm, those students have the option to either enter the workforce or to continue their education to pursue their master's degree. Another line of future research is to investigate the success of the students in either setting.

Lastly, this study concentrated only on the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the ECHS program, the factors that influence success, and the strategies to increase student success. A similar study should be conducted to determine the teachers' and administrators' perceptions associated with participating in the ECHS program.

Conclusion

This study provided an understanding of the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, factors that influenced successful completion, and strategies that increased the rate of success in the program. Although their perceptions were unique to their own situations; many of their thoughts and feelings about their experiences were similar.

After listening to the students and reviewing the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher recognized similarities in the participants' experiences and her own as a student in a doctoral program, working full time, and managing a family. There were adversities that arise tempting her to give up, but it was her self-determination and resiliency that inspired her to complete her journey. Other common experiences shared between the participants and the researcher were lack of time management, procrastination, prioritizing, and graduation.

The researcher would like to express gratitude to the students that participated in the study. The students were very comfortable in sharing their perceptions; allowing the researcher to gain a global understanding of the early college high school program. The students demonstrated resilience by adjusting to the demands of participating in an ECHS program.

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Appendix A

Approval from the University of Houston Human Subject Research Committee

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

DIVISION OF RESEARCH

April 13, 2016
 Yolanda Calhoun
 c/o Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel,
 Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Dear Yolanda Calhoun,

The University of Houston's Institutional Review Board, Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL, FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION, AND CHALLENGES THEY FACE" on February 5, 2016, according to federal regulations and institutional policies and procedures.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately fulfill the requested contingencies, and your project is now

APPROVED.

- **Approval Date: April 13, 2016**
- **Expiration Date: April 12, 2017**

As required by federal regulations governing research in human subjects, research procedures (including recruitment, informed consent, intervention, data collection or data analysis) may not be conducted after the expiration date.

To ensure that no lapse in approval or ongoing research occurs, please ensure that your protocol is resubmitted in RAMP for renewal by the **deadline for the March, 2017** CPHS meeting. Deadlines for submission are located on the CPHS website.

During the course of the research, the following must also be submitted to the CPHS:

- Any proposed changes to the approved protocol, prior to initiation; AND
- Any unanticipated events (including adverse events, injuries, or outcomes) involving possible risk to subjects or others, within 10 working days.

If you have any questions, please contact Samoya Copeland at (713) 743-9534.

Sincerely yours,



Dr. Lorraine Reitzel, Chair
 Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document, if one is approved for use. All research data, including signed consent documents, must be retained according to the University of Houston Data Retention Policy ([found on the CPHS website](#)) as well as requirements of the FDA and external sponsor(s), if applicable. Faculty sponsors are responsible for retaining data for student projects on the UH campus for the required period of record retention

Protocol Number: 16271-01 Full Review: ____ Expedited Review: X

316 E. Cullen Building Houston, TX 77204-2015 (713) 743-9204 Fax: (713) 743-9577 COMMITTEES FOR THE
 PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS.

Appendix B

Script to Invite Participants

Script to Invite Participants

My name is Yolanda Calhoun. I am a student working on my doctoral studies in Educational Leadership from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D Program at the University of Houston. As the Principal Investigator, I am conducting a qualitative research of an early college high school program in Texas. This research is part of a dissertation that is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel. My research topic is:

A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

The results from this study will provide the district leaders and stakeholders a global perception of the early college high school experience as it relates to the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the program. It may also serve as a gateway for the approval and implementation of another early college high school program in the near future.

I am inviting you as a student in the ECHS program to participate in a focus group. The focus group will allow you to respond freely to questions based on your experiences. The focus group will consist of open and closed-ended questions and it will be approximately 60 minutes. I will also invite you to participate in a process called member check. At this meeting, you will review the transcript of the focus group interview to ensure that your experience was captured accurately. This meeting will be approximately 60 minutes. Identifiable information of each participant will be kept

confidential. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary and no one participating in the study will receive compensation.

At the end of this meeting, I will give you a Participant Agreement Form to complete indicating if you are willing or not willing to participate in this study. Upon collecting the completed forms, the names of the students who are willing to participate will be grouped into four quartiles according to your class rank. I will randomly select students from each quartile to form a group of 8-12 participants by grade level. The students selected to participate will receive an invitation letter, a Parental Permission Form and an Assent Form; students who are 18 years old or older, will receive an Informed Consent Form. A basket labeled "Research Study" will be provided in the front office of the early college high school for you to return the completed, signed forms the following day of receiving your invitation letter. The willing participants that are not randomly selected will receive a thank you notice for their interest and willingness to participate in the study. The students who are randomly selected will complete a demographic survey prior to the focus group. In closing, I want to thank you for allowing me to meet with you today. If you have any questions, you may contact me at (281) 935-3359 or via email at ymcalhoun@uh.edu. You may also contact Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel at (713) 743-0343 or via email at vrangel4@cental.uh.edu. Are there any questions?

Appendix C

Participant's Agreement Form

Participant Agreement Form

A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE
ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS
INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

Participant's Name: _____

Email Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Grade (Students Circle One) 10th 11th 12th

_____ Yes, I am willing to participate in this study.

_____ No, I am not willing to participate in this study.

_____ I am in agreement for the use of audio/video taping of the session.

“This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the
Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.

Appendix D

Invitation Letter for Participation in a Research Study

**Invitation Letter for Participation in a Research Study
(Student Ages 15-17)**

Dear _____,

Thanks you for your willingness to participate in the research study on an early college high school program. To accept this invitation for participation, I have included a Parental Permission Form and an Assent Form. You will need to return the signed Parental Permission and Assent Forms on _____ (Date) _____ to the front office of the early college high school and place it in the basket on the counter labeled “Research Study”. A research demographic instrument for you to answer questions regarding your name, grade, gender, and ethnicity will be distributed for you to complete before you begin the focus group interview. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also be invited to participate in a process called member check. At this meeting, you will review the transcript of the focus group interview to ensure that your experience was captured accurately. This meeting will be approximately 60 minutes.

To ensure safe and proper research procedures, auditors of the University of Houston Institution Research Board and regulatory authority (ies) will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants. In addition to this, the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) phone number is (713) 743-4965.

If there are any questions regarding this study, you may contact me. I can be reached by phone at (281) 935-3359 or via email at ymcalhoun@uh.edu. If you have any concerns about this research, my advisor’s contact information is Dr. Virginia Rangel, PhD vrangel4@central.uh.edu or (713) 743-0343.

You and your parent's signatures will serve as an acknowledgement that you are willing to participate and that the both of you have reviewed the Parental Permission Form and the Assent Form. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,

Yolanda M. Calhoun

"This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204."

**Invitation Letter for Participation in a Research Study
(Student--18 or Older)**

Dear _____,

Thanks you for your willingness to participate in the research study on an early college high school program. To accept this invitation for participation, I have included an Informed Consent Form. You will need to return the signed Informed Consent Form on _____ (Date)_____ to the front office of the early college high school and place it in the basket on the counter labeled “Research Study”. A research demographic instrument for you to answer questions regarding your name, grade, gender, and ethnicity will be distributed for you to complete before you begin the focus group interview. The focus group will last approximately 60 minutes. You will also be invited to participate in a process called member check. At this meeting, you will review the transcript of the focus group interview to ensure that your experience was captured accurately. This meeting will be approximately 60 minutes.

To ensure safe and proper research procedures, auditors of the University of Houston Institution Research Board and regulatory authority (ies) will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants. In addition to this, the University of Houston Institutional Review Board (IRB) phone number is (713) 743-4965.

If there are any questions regarding this study, you may contact me. I can be reached by phone at (281) 935-3359 or via email at ymcalhoun@uh.edu. If you have any concerns about this research, my advisor’s contact information is Dr. Virginia Rangel, PhD vrangel4@central.uh.edu or (713) 743-0343.

Your signature will serve as an acknowledgement that you are willing to participate and that you have reviewed the Informed Consent Form. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and participation.

Sincerely,

Yolanda M. Calhoun

"This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204."

Appendix E

University of Houston Assent to Participate in a Research Study

Student Permission Form (Students Under 18)

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

PROJECT TITLE: A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Yolanda M. Calhoun from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Houston. This research is part of a dissertation that is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel.

You can say no if you do not want to participate in this study. Adults cannot make you participate in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to participate in the study now, but change your mind about it later, you can stop being in the study, and no one will be mad at you.

WHAT IS RESEARCH?

Research is a way to learn information about something. Researchers study different subjects the way you study English or math as a subject in school.

There are many reasons people choose to be in a research study. Sometimes people want to help researchers learn about ways to help people or make programs better.

You should understand why you would say yes to being a research participant. Take the time you need to decide if you want to be in this study. You may ask questions at any time.

WHY ARE WE DOING THIS RESEARCH?

In our research, we want to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, we will explore the students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school and factors influencing program completion. We will also examine strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree. The duration of the study is approximately five months; your participation will last one month.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THE STUDY

You will be one of approximately 36 students invited to participate in this project. The process will include three student focus groups. The interviews are approximately 60 minutes. Before the interviews begin, each student will complete a demographic survey. The interviews will take place during the period of one week on the early college high school campus. You will be asked questions regarding your perception of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, factors influencing successful completion, and strategies that increase student success in the program. In each 60 minute session, the three focus groups will consist of 8-12 students,

grade levels 10th-12th. The student focus groups will be conducted during the intervention period or after school. All of the interviews will be conducted on the early college high school campus in the conference room. Each session will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. You will also be invited to a meeting to review the transcript of the interview to ensure that your perception was captured accurately. The meeting will be approximately 60 minutes.

COULD GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO ME FROM BEING IN THIS STUDY?

This research provide you an opportunity to reflect on the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school program which could lead to the development and utilization of strategies that enhance your successful completion of the program.

COULD BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO ME FROM BEING IN THIS STUDY?

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences during this study. However, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to.

DO I HAVE OTHER CHOICES?

You can choose not to participate in this study, and you can decide you no longer want to be in the study at any time. You may also choose not to answer any question that you are not comfortable with. If you choose not to participate at any time, you will not be penalized.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have questions or worries about the research, you can ask Yolanda Calhoun at (281) 935-3359 before, during, or after your completion of the survey. If you wish to talk to someone else or have questions about your rights as a participant, call the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects at (713) 743-9204.

DOCUMENTATION OF PARTICIPANT'S ASSENT

I agree to participate this study called: A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION.

Signature of minor participant: _____

Date: _____

ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713) 743-9204. ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

Appendix F

University of Houston Consent to Participate in Research

Parental Permission Form

**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
PARENTAL PERMISSION**

PROJECT TITLE: A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

Your child is being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Yolanda M. Calhoun from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Houston. This research is part of a dissertation that is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your child's participation is voluntary and you or your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. Your child may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, this study will explore students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and factors influencing program completion. The researcher will also examine strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree.

The results from this study will provide the district leaders and stakeholders a global perception of the early college high school experience as it relates to the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the program. It may also serve as a gateway for the approval and implementation of another early college high school program in the near future. The duration of the study is approximately five months; your child's participation will last one month.

PROCEDURES

Your child will be one of approximately 36 students invited to participate in this project. The process will include three student focus groups. The interviews are approximately 60 minutes. Before the interviews begin, each student will complete a demographic survey. The interviews will take place during the period of one week on the early college high school campus. Your child will be asked questions regarding his/her perception of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, factors influencing successful completion, and strategies that increase student success in the program. In each 60 minute session, the three focus groups will consist of 8-12 students, grade levels 10th-12th. The student focus groups will be conducted during the

intervention period or after school. All of the focus group interviews will be conducted on the early college high school campus in the conference room. Each session will be audio/video recorded and transcribed. Your child will also be invited to a meeting to review the transcript of the interview to ensure that his/her perception was captured accurately. The meeting will be approximately 60 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your child's participation in this study. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences during this study.

BENEFITS

While your child will not directly benefit from participation, his/her participation may help investigators gain insight of the participants' perceptions of an early college high school program. It may also provide the students an opportunity to reflect on the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school program which could lead to the development and utilization of strategies that enhance successful completion of the program.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to your child's participation in this study, please indicate whether you agree to allow your child to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio/video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- ☐ I agree for my child to be audio/video taped during the interview.
 - ☐ I agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
 - ☐ I do not agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree for my child to be audio/video taped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that parental consent is required of all persons under the age of 18 participating in this project. I understand that my child will also be asked to agree to participate.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and I have been provided an opportunity to ask any questions I might have regarding my child's participation.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Yolanda Calhoun at (281) 935-3359. I may also contact Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel, faculty sponsor, at (713) 743-0343.
6. I have been told that my child or I may refuse to participate or to stop his/her participation in this project at any time before or during the project. My child may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY CHILD'S RIGHT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713) 743-9204.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with my child will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with my child may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying my child's name.

NAME OF CHILD: _____

I agree to allow my child to participate in this research project:

YES _____ NO _____

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Appendix G

University of Houston Consent to Participate in Research

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: A CASE STUDY OF AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ATTENDING AN EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL AND FACTORS INFLUENCING PROGRAM COMPLETION

You are being invited to take part in a research project conducted by Yolanda M. Calhoun from the Department of Education Executive Ed.D. Program at the University of Houston. This research is part of a dissertation that is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine high school students' perceptions regarding an early college high school. Specifically, this study will explore students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges experienced while attending an early college high school, and factors influencing program completion. The researcher will also examine strategies that are perceived to contribute to students' success in remaining in the program and graduating with an associate's degree.

The results from this study will provide the district leaders and stakeholders a global perception of the early college high school experience as it relates to the benefits and challenges associated with participating in the program. It may also serve as a gateway for the approval and implementation of another early college high school program in the near future. The duration of the study is approximately five months; your participation will last one month.

PROCEDURES

You will be one of approximately 36 students invited to participate in this project. The process will include three student focus groups. The interviews are approximately 60 minutes. Before the interviews begin, each student will complete a demographic survey. The interviews will take place during the period of one week on the early college high school campus. You will be asked questions regarding your perception of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school, factors influencing successful completion, and strategies that increase student success in the program. In each 60 minute session, the three focus groups will consist of 8-12 students, grade levels 10th-12th. The student focus groups will be conducted during the intervention period or after school. All of the interviews will be conducted on the early college high school campus in the conference room. Each session will be audio/video

recorded and transcribed. You will also be invited to a meeting to review the transcript of the interview to ensure that your perception was captured accurately. The meeting will be approximately 60 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this study. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code number will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences during this study.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators gain insight of the participants' perceptions of an early college high school program. It may also provide the participants an opportunity to reflect on the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school program which could lead to the development and utilization of strategies that enhance successful completion of the program.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations; however, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES

If you consent to take part in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio/video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- ☐ I agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.
 - ☐ I agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
 - ☐ I do not agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
- ☐ I do not agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me, as have any potential benefits
4. I understand the protections in place to safeguard any personally identifiable information related to my participation.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Yolanda Calhoun at (281) 935-3359. I may also contact Dr. Virginia Snodgrass Rangel, faculty sponsor, at (713) 743-0343.
6. **Any questions regarding my rights as a research subject may be addressed to the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.** All research projects that are carried out by Investigators at the University of Houston are governed by requirements of the University and the federal government.

SIGNATURES

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form and have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions to my satisfaction. I give my consent to participate in this study, and have been provided with a copy of this form for my records and in case I have questions as the research progresses.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. An explanation of the research was provided and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgment, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H

Student Demographic Survey

Student Demographic Survey

Student's Name: _____

Grade: _____

Gender (Circle One) Male Female

Class Rank (Circle One): 1st Quartile 2nd Quartile 3rd Quartile 4th Quartile

Ethnicity (Circle One): African American Asian Hispanic
 Native American or American Indian White Other

First Generation College Student (Circle One): Yes No

Attended Pre-School At The Age Of 3 or 4: Yes No

Family Health Insurance Yes No

Highest Level of Parent's Education:

(Father) High School Diploma Bachelor's Master's Doctorate
 Unknown

(Mother) High School Diploma Bachelor's Master's Doctorate
 Unknown

Lives In The Home With: One Parent: Father / Mother Both Parents
 Other

Plans After Graduating from an Early College High School Program (Check One):

____ Attend a four year university.

____ Go into the workforce.

____ Go to the military.

____ Undecided.

Appendix I

Letter for Participants Not Selected

Letter for Participants Not Selected

Dear _____,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the research study of the Early College High School program. Unfortunately, your name was not selected in the random drawing to participate in this study. Continue to strive to do your very best.

“This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713)743-9204.”

Appendix J
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. What are students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?

- As a student in an Early College High School (ECHS) program, what are your perceptions of the benefits associated with participating in an early college high school?
- If you were to rank the benefits of participating in an ECHS program, what would you consider to be the greatest benefit?
- As a student in an ECHS program, what are the challenges associated with participating in an early college high school?
- If you were to rank the challenges of participating in an ECHS program, what would you consider to be the greatest challenge?
- How do you think the benefits/challenges would have differed if you would have attended a traditional high school?

2. What are students', teachers', and administrators' perceptions of factors influencing the successful completion (with an associate's degree) of an early college high school?

- What is your perception of successful completion of the ECHS program?
- What is your perception of factors that influence successful completion of an early college high school?

- What are some factors you encounter? How much influence do the factors you encounter have on your successful completion?
- How do you overcome factors that may have an impact on your successful completion of the program?

3. What strategies do students perceive will increase the number of students completing and early college high school program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree?

- What strategies do you perceive will increase the number of students completing the program with a high school diploma and an associate's degree?
- As you progress through the program, the curriculum becomes more challenging. What strategies do you find to be most effective in helping you to persevere and overcome your challenges?