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Readiness for College: A Case Study of Three Hispanic Immigrant Students Who Overcame the Odds

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READINESS FOR COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY OF THREE
HISPANIC IMMIGRANT STUDENTS WHO
OVERCAME THE ODDS

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Educational Leadership and Foundations

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By

Holly Kay Fields

2012

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for their constant love, support and encouragement. To Mike, my husband, who without your unwavering support, this project would have never been completed. You provided me with the financial means to pursue this endeavor without hesitation. Your kind words, uninterrupted time, and your great sense of humor kept me going when I needed it most. I am forever grateful for your love and support. To you I dedicate this study. To Zach, my oldest son, who constantly encouraged me and provided me with advice and scholarly knowledge, I am grateful for your wisdom. I loved being a college student with you. To you I dedicate this study. To William, my youngest son, who never questioned why his mother continued to enroll in college classes instead of spending time with family, I am truly grateful for your support and understanding. To you I dedicate this study. To my parents, Kit and Judy Sanders, who raised me to always strive to be the best at everything in life, to love God and family, and to cherish the gifts I have been given, I am so proud to be your daughter. To you I dedicate this study. To my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Sue and Jodie Fields, whose empathy, unwavering love, and patience with one another have made me a better person. To you I dedicate this study. I dedicate this dissertation to my siblings and their spouses, Kari and Wayne, Brad and Paige, Wendy and Richard, and Linda and Nick. Your love and support over the years has helped me to accomplish so much in my life. Finally, to the immigrant students who I have encountered, taught, counseled and supervised over the years as an educator, I am grateful for your persistence and motivation in finding your place in this world. To you I dedicate this study.

READINESS FOR COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY OF THREE
HISPANIC IMMIGRANT STUDENTS WHO
OVERCAME THE ODDS

by

HOLLY KAY FIELDS, B. S., M. Ed.

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study is about Hispanic, immigrant, low-income students who have graduated from high school “college ready” and the contexts from which they achieved such success. Few studies exist relative to immigrant, Hispanic student college readiness. This research hopes to provide insight into how institutional, peer and family culture helped to produce the success of the three students in this study.

The purpose of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which immigrant, low-income, Hispanic students and the modern contexts of schools interact to produce distinct lived experiences for the participating graduates. This study aims to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. The theoretical framework applied in this study is based on Resiliency Theory (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999).

The literature review includes a thorough definition of college readiness, those factors that have contributed to a lack of college readiness among today’s high school graduates, and the historical inequalities and subtractive schooling practices related to the demographics of such students. Additionally, the literature review details those institutional factors, most notably, lawsuits and legislation that were related to the inequalities of minority and low-income students. Students living in poverty are discussed as a home factor. This home factor combined with the institutional factors helps to form a convergence that is seasoned for new research. This convergence then lends to a review of resiliency and resiliency theory from the perspective of student development and of family and organizational environment.

This ethnographic research allowed the researcher to participate in the field with the recent graduates in order that a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) and an insider account can be obtained from the experiences of the participants. Finally, domain structures or critical themes (Spradley, 1979) were constructed based on the categorization of the data collected through participant interviews, teacher, counselor or administrator interviews, parent interviews, and artifact collections.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

College readiness is at the forefront of today's educational policy. In an era when high school graduation rates are at an all-time high and with the demands of the changing global economy, more education is required if graduates are to realize the American Dream¹. According to the report, Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009 (Ryan & Siebens, 2012), 85% of the population aged 25 or older has at least a high school diploma. However, about 89% of the native-born population has at least a high school diploma compared to only 68% of the foreign-born population. Even more distressing, foreign-born Hispanics have the lowest educational attainment of any other group at 48% of the population (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). Then again, some foreign-born Hispanic students persist and demonstrate success in spite of their many challenges.

Consider the following scenario. Edgar² is a recent graduate from a large comprehensive high school in an urban border community. His family chose to immigrate to the United States when Edgar was only twelve years old. As a low socioeconomic, Hispanic, immigrant student in his new school, many might speculate that Edgar's future is not as promising when compared to his classmates. Yet to Edgar, his future holds much promise. He persists in learning a new language and challenges the educational system as he navigates his way through middle and high school. He made the decision to enroll in a much more rigorous course path without truly understanding the demands he would endure. Yet he persists. Despite the fact that Edgar's parents choose to remain unseen at most school events,

¹ The American Dream is a national ethos of the United States in which freedom includes the opportunity for prosperity and success.

² All names and places are pseudonyms.

he becomes involved in extra-curricular activities that allow him to network with peers who have high ambitions for their own futures. While most of Edgar's classmates go on to graduate, the majority will not be considered college ready. But for Edgar, his networking and persistence pays off. He not only graduates, he graduates ready for college and is offered admissions and scholarships to attend Cornell and Dartmouth as well as several state public universities. His accomplishments, amidst the many challenges, are a phenomenon and are the basis for this proposed study.

Today's era of increased high school graduation rates does not lend itself to much celebration due to the ubiquity of a larger concern. In order for students to be prepared for life beyond high school and to successfully compete in the ever present global economy most students will require some type of post-secondary education. While enrollment in post-secondary education is accelerating statewide, college persistence and graduation rates in the Upper Rio Grande region remain lower than most other parts of the state (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010a). When students are not prepared for the demands of college credit-bearing coursework, they are labeled not college ready and must enroll in developmental or remedial coursework and/or participate in college ready preparation programs that may leave students feeling as if a college education is out of their reach.

College readiness in the State of Texas can be defined as "the attainment of the core knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in the first year of education after high school without the need for remedial/developmental education" (Commission for a College Ready Texas, 2007, p. 2). College readiness among high school graduates in the border community is a challenge to both secondary and higher education stakeholders. Despite this growing

concern, some students attain college readiness in the face of their personal challenges – low-income status, race or ethnicity, and/or immigrant status.

Immigrant students encounter more obstacles than native-born students when first enrolling in public school in the United States. Some of these barriers include having to learn the English language, adjusting to a new culture and navigating a new educational system and working through residency issues. Many Hispanic immigrant students do not complete high school because of the challenges they encounter. In 2009 dropout rates for Hispanic students continued to be the highest among all ethnic and racial groups at 18% with the overall dropout rate at just over 8%; however, of the total population of dropouts, 23% of dropouts reported in 2009 were of Hispanic immigrant status (United States Department of Education, 2011).

Immigration is a highly debated political issue at the state and federal level. The DREAM Act hopes to provide relief to certain illegal immigrants. The DREAM Act is an acronym for Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors. It is a legislative proposal first introduced in the United States Senate on August 1, 2001 and more recently reintroduced on May 11, 2011. This bill would provide conditional permanent residency to certain undocumented immigrants of good moral character who graduate from U. S. high schools, arrived in the United States as minors, and lived in the US continuously for at least five years prior to the bill's enactment (Senate Bill 952, 2011). Recently an executive order was given that prevents the deportation of young undocumented immigrants who meet certain elements described in the DREAM Act (Bruno, 2012). In the overall context of this ongoing controversy concerning the status of immigrants, it was the intent of this research to explore the relationship among immigrant students and college readiness. This ethnographic research

centered on the phenomena of three Hispanic, immigrant and low-income students to detail the factors that may have contributed to their success in becoming prepared for college.

Statement of Problem

Border students, in general, face numerous challenges in pursuit of attaining a college degree. Even for the most equipped learners, the transition, persistence, and attainment of educational goals and/or a college degree seem difficult. In the report *Diplomas and Dropouts* (Hess, Schneider, Carey & Kelly, 2009), graduation rates for over 1,300 colleges and universities are reported based on the attainment of a degree from a four-year institution within six years. While the State of Texas reports an average college graduation rate of 45.8%, Southwest Border University situated along the United States-Mexico border reports a 29% graduation rate (Hess et al., 2009). This gap alone is a basis for further research and leads to additional questions. Is it possible that the low graduation rate among border students is primarily due to a lack of college readiness among students in this region? What correlation(s) exists, if any, between college readiness rates among area high school graduates from this major city located on the border of Texas and Mexico and the percentage of college graduates from Southwest Border University?

College readiness is a demographic problem among minority and low-income students statewide and for most students in the border region. College readiness rates in the urban border region are far lower than that of the state as a whole. Only 41% of high school graduates for the class of 2010 in the urban border region were classified as college ready in both English language arts and mathematics according to the criteria set forth by the Texas Education Agency (2012a). While this percentage is already low, it is slightly lower for Hispanic students (40%) and low-income students (36%). The overall percentages for the

state is much higher, yet still a challenge at only 52%. The statewide percentage for Hispanic students is at 42% and 38% for low-income students (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

Institutions of High Hispanic Enrollment (IHHE), such as Southwest Border University, often cater to minority students and are arguably more responsive to the needs and challenges of these students. For example, Southwest Border University states on their webpage that it “seeks to extend the greatest possible educational access to a region which has been geographically isolated with limited economic and educational opportunities for many of its people” (Southwest Border University, 2012). Yet, graduation rates often lag behind national averages (Hess et al., 2009). Is it possible that the need for developmental coursework hinders the chances for Hispanic and/or low-income students to complete a college degree?

Developmental or remedial course enrollment in an urban border community region reflects the same concern as that of a large population of recent high school graduates not prepared for college credit bearing coursework. With only 41% of area 2010 high school graduates deemed ready for college, course enrollment in developmental courses continues to plague institutions of higher learning in this urban border region. For instance, in the fall of 2009 a total of 7,996 students were enrolled in a developmental mathematics course and a total of 1,812 students were enrolled in a developmental English course at either Southwest Border Community College or the Southwest Border University. In mathematics alone this accounted for approximately 25% of the total population at Southwest Border Community College and 6.5% of the total undergraduate population at Southwest Border University (Southwest Border Community College, 2009; Southwest Border University, 2009).

Currently both Southwest Border University and Southwest Border Community College rely on a variety of measures to determine a student's readiness for college. These measures include the Exit Level Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAKS) performance, the SAT, the ACT, or the Accuplacer exam. Most of these measures account for the Texas Success Initiative (TSI) as outlined in Chapter 4, Subchapter C of the Texas Administration Code (2004). Students not meeting the minimum requirements on one or more sections of any of these assessments are required to enroll in developmental education.

Students that are required to take developmental coursework have much lower persistence rates than students not requiring remediation (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010b). For example, students who required developmental coursework in mathematics had a one-year persistence rate of 59.5% and 74.6% at Southwest Border Community College and Southwest Border University, respectively. For students not requiring developmental coursework, the one-year persistence rate increased by as much as 14%. For instance, the one-year persistence rate for students not requiring developmental coursework at Southwest Border Community College increased to 73.5% and it increased at the Southwest Border University to 86% (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010b).

Immigrant student college persistence and completion is lower than that of native-born students. For example, the population of native-born students with a college degree in 2009 was at approximately 18%; however, this rate drops to 16% for foreign-born students and, more importantly, it dropped to only 6.6% for Hispanic foreign-born students (Ryan & Siebens, 2012).

For the purposes of this study, the participants selected were Hispanic students who immigrated to the United States from Mexico and enrolled in Texas public schools during their primary or middle school years. Having said that, there is continuous debate about what Hispanics should be called. The terms *Latino* (for males) and *Latina* (for females), for example, refer to men and women whose origin is from Latin America. In many communities, Latino is preferred because it has no connection with Spaniards (Comas-Diaz, 2001). *Hispanic* is the familiar category used to identify individuals of Latin-American descent. This term was created in the 1970s by the United States Census Bureau to classify individuals who spoke Spanish (Comas-Diaz, 2001). Individuals who identify more with their European (i.e., Spaniard) background are typically referred to as Hispanic. However, it is also widely used by federal and state governmental entities and more widely recognized as the common term in the southwest border community. Lastly, *Spanish people* are an additional category used very deliberately in this country to describe Hispanics. Comas-Diaz (2001) provides more discussion on how this term is utilized to portray individuals who are Spanish-speaking. The use of different terms highlights not only the debate about the choice of words to name Hispanics. This debate also recognizes the diversity of Hispanics around the world and within the United States as well as the diverse accounts faced by all members of this group.

Significance of the Research

Research of the phenomena of those that acquire college readiness in spite of the demographic challenges is relevant to the work of this researcher in policy development for programs to assist recent immigrant, minority and low-income students. Findings of this study would also be beneficial in informing policymakers in similarly situated areas of the

state and nation. Furthermore, immigration in general is a concern among policy makers, educators, economists and many employers. Immigrants from Mexico represent the largest region of all immigrants according to 2010 census data. According to a Pew Hispanic Center report (Patten, 2010), 29.4% of all immigrants were born in Mexico with the next highest region being that of South and East Asia at 24.9%. Texas census data for 2010 indicates that 16.4% of the population is comprised of foreign-born persons. College enrollment rates for immigrants from Mexico is the lowest among all regions at 12.3% compared to immigrants from South and East Asia which represents a college enrollment rate of 64.2%. While this represents a large gap between two foreign-born regions, a large gap exists between foreign-born students from Mexico and students born in the United States with a college enrollment rate of 43.9% (Patten, 2010).

The significance of the research is associated with foreign-born students living in poverty. Poverty is problematic for foreign-born students ages 18 and under which represents a rate of 30.8% overall based on 2010 census data; yet, for foreign-born students from Mexico the poverty rate increases to 46.1%. This represents a significant gap of native-born students ages 18 and under living in poverty at 20.8% (Patten, 2010). Finally, the significance of this research is based on a lack of extant literature in this area.

Murdock's (2012) research accentuates the importance of the Hispanic population in the State of Texas and the United States. The projected Hispanic population in the United States in the year 2040 is estimated to be 58.1% of the total population. A dramatic shift has already occurred in Texas. In the 2010-2011 academic school year, Hispanic students became the majority in public schools across the state at 53%. At the same time, Hispanics made up 67% of economically disadvantaged students. Finally, Murdock (2012) has revealed that

greater than 20% of the total population in the urban border region that was part of this research is an immigrant.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the ways in which immigrant low-income, Hispanic students and the modern context of schools interacted to produce distinct life experiences for the participating students. College readiness, in general, is a problem for most students in the border community; however, it is a more significant problem for low-income, immigrant, Hispanic students. Many of these students have migrated to this country with families that are in search of better job opportunities for themselves and for their children. Yet, the hope of a high school diploma and even more, that of a college degree, often seems unattainable for such students. Therefore, when a student with these challenges, like Edgar, does succeed and graduates from high school ready for college, it truly is a phenomenon. Therefore, this study was conducted to inform the reader about this phenomenon in hopes that more students with these challenges are able to attain equal success.

Research Questions

Prior to the development of the methodologies employed in this study, attention was focused on identifying the specific research questions to be examined during the course of this study. The following research questions were examined: What is the nature of the phenomena of the selected Hispanic immigrant students' ability to attain college readiness while so many other borderland students are not able to do the same? How did culture help to shape the students' decisions and actions regarding post-secondary education? What are the attitudes and opinions of the selected students in regards to high school graduation and the

pursuit of higher education? What factors have contributed to the development of the students' attitudes and opinions?

Theoretical Framework

Resiliency theory was the foundation for the framework of this research. Resiliency is defined as one's ability to rise above hardship and be successful despite exposure to high-risk circumstances (Fraser, Richman, & Galinsky, 1999). Resiliency theory goes further as it is based on the premise that individuals attain certain protective skills that lend to positive outcomes when faced with significant challenges in life (Richardson, 2002). Resiliency theory as it relates to student development, family environment, social capital, and the educational environment was central when examining the participants' perceptions. Student development and resiliency theory are examined in the following chapter through several distinct and notable studies. Classroom environments and school culture are central to resiliency among students as are teacher practices within the classroom. Such practices were considered as they may also help students to develop protective skills when faced with difficult challenges.

A theoretical framework was developed with resiliency theory at the core to assist in understanding the progression of each research participant's high school successes and transition to college. Through the use of this theoretical framework, the researcher first examined the perceptions of the three students in the study to determine if patterns or relationships existed relative to the students' perceptions of high school and transition to college. As a component of the phenomenological research, theoretical assumptions were made from the practitioner perspective. These assumptions asserted that institutional and

organizational factors played a significant role in determining the success of college readiness among high school graduates.

Each participant's childhood, high school environment, course of study, involvement in extra-curricular programs, and individual assessment data was analyzed to further understand how each of these have contributed to each student's success. The context of each participant's high school experiences helped to understand institutional and organizational structures that played a significant role in determining college readiness for each student in this study as well as other students within the organizations.

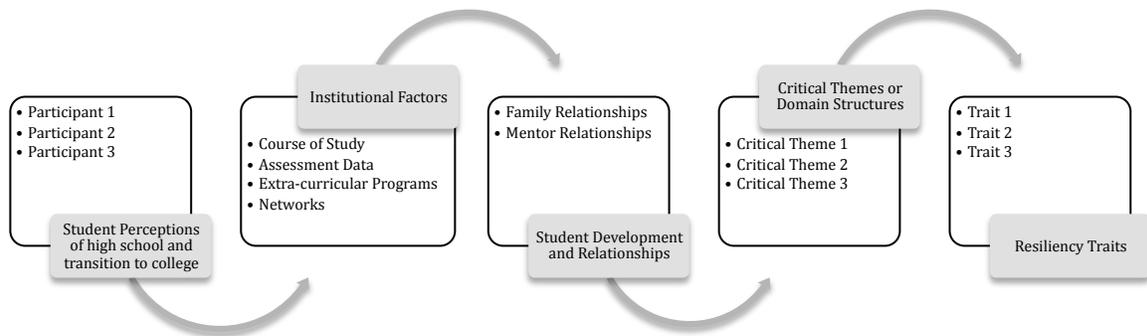
Upon the conclusion of institutional and organizational factors, student relationships with teachers or mentors and family members were examined. Next, critical themes or domain structures (Spradley, 1979) emerged and provide a path to understanding the resiliency traits each participant embraced on their journey to college. From the analysis of the data, the critical themes are portrayed as a path to the resiliency traits among the three participants.

Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the theoretical framework of the research study. By highlighting students' perceptions, examining the institutional and organizational factors, and investigating teacher/mentor, and family relationships between the students, it was expected that this research approach would facilitate the identification of resiliency traits that were expected to correlate with those identified in the literature review. The analysis of data and the identification of resiliency traits helped to distinguish and provide an understanding of the critical themes or domain structures for other practitioners. It is important to note that the themes to be presented were based on the documented and analyzed

work of the role of the researcher as a participant observer/interviewer and such themes have been constructed with careful consideration in view of subjectivity.

The critical themes or domain structures that are revealed were fundamental to the research and are considered in the findings of this empirical study. It was anticipated that such critical themes or domain structures would be useful to inform others. Practitioners and policy makers could and should contemplate policy and practice improvements that will support an increase in college preparedness not only for low socioeconomic, immigrant, Hispanic students, but for all students in their school systems. Public education agencies and institutions of higher education must take heed to the growing representation of the Hispanic population in this country. Because the Hispanic population is the fastest growing population in the United States, understanding the domain structures of culture and schooling relative to the participants in this study makes this research necessary.

Figure 1



Theoretical Framework of College Readiness Success for Low-income, Hispanic, Immigrant Students

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitations of this study may suggest additional research in at least four areas. First, the complexity of the students' pre-college characteristics and their unique and diverse experiences as they interact within their family, school and peer structure may be a limitation. Each relationship structure may be worth further study in and of itself as a separate research project.

Secondly, because the truthfulness of the responses provided from the sample participants cannot be controlled, their responses will be considered as a limitation. Subsequently, a limitation exists relative to resiliency theory in that students with the same backgrounds and circumstances often yields varying outcomes, some who develop resiliency and others that do not. Finally, while deficit thinking on the part of key stakeholders, including policy makers and public educators, is addressed as part of subtractive schooling practices in the literature review, it was not a focus for this research study and may be an area worth further investigation as a consideration of the continued plight for the civil rights of minority students. Educational inequalities are explored in the literature; however such inequalities may be cause for more attention but will not be considered as part of this research.

The delimitations of this study can be attributed to the unique characteristics of the participants. The student subjects of this study were limited to reflect the experiences of three border Hispanic immigrant high school graduates who are now enrolled in higher education and are representative of the demographics of this community. Thus, a highly successful range of other immigrant students to include Hispanic immigrants in non-border communities, were not included. The critical themes or domain structures of other ethnic and racial

minority immigrant students were not examined. Additionally, because this research delved deeply into the lives of the participants, their families and their educational mentors, only three participants were included in this study. Finally, successful Hispanic immigrant students who chose not to enroll in higher education were not considered in this research.

Generalizability of the Study

It was the aim of this study to inform and enhance the reader's understandings of the nature of the phenomena of attained college readiness of the three Hispanic, low-income, immigrant participants. In this case study, the findings may well be of benefit to members of the education community, particularly those educators that work with a high population of low-income, minority, and immigrant student enrollment. Additionally, this study may help to inform higher education officials in regards to the student development programs available for student populations that represent some or all of the characteristics of the participants. Finally, private and governmental grant programs that support and expand college enrollment opportunities for under-represented populations in higher education may benefit from the findings as a means to target funds to institutions of higher education as well as K-12 public education agencies with a high representation of Hispanic, low-income students.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One of this study provided an introduction along with background information. In addition, this chapter included the statement of the problem, the research questions, the relevancy of the issue at hand, the theoretical framework, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and the generalizability of the findings. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature that encompasses a broad review of college readiness. Additionally, the historical point of view of college admissions and higher education and the historical

inequalities within public education are examined. Factors contributing to a lack of preparation for college with an emphasis on poverty are explored as a prelude to resiliency theory as a basis for the theoretical framework. This chapter concludes with an understanding of high stakes accountability and the implications related policies have placed on Hispanic, low-income, immigrant students. Chapter Three provides a description of the research methodologies, namely a description of the qualitative approach, the research design, the research procedures, the selection of the participants, the data collection strategies, and the data analysis. Chapter Four presents the stories of the participants as told by themselves, by their families and by that of a significant mentor identified by each subject. Chapter Five provides the analysis of the information gathered from the participants as presented through domain structures or critical themes. This chapter also examines the resiliency traits of each participant relative to the theoretical framework established in the introduction of this research. Finally, this chapter provides implications for practitioners, implications for curriculum and instruction, implications for policymakers and provides recommendations for future research.

Summary

The story of Edgar was the basis for this research study. His ability to graduate college ready in spite of what the data reflects regarding students who are born and raised in the southwest urban border community was an inspiration and a motivation for this researcher and for many other educational professionals.

It was important to consider the current status regarding high school graduates in this community, as well as the state. College readiness data to include readiness rates, persistence rates, and completion rates helped to provide a basis of what many immigrant students face as

new comers to public education in this country. Additionally, research relative to the future demographics of our public education systems and the population as a whole serve as a wake-up call as a need for more targeted support for the already majority minority Hispanic population in the State of Texas.

It is the researcher's current belief that there is a lack of extant literature relative to the college readiness of recent immigrant students. Therefore, data relative to Hispanic and low-income, as well as border community data, are drawn upon as the basis for shaping an understanding of the challenge of many Hispanic, immigrant students.

By approaching this research based on the work of many noted qualitative researchers, this study intended to tell a story about three recent high school graduates. It was the aim that their stories would provide readers with a thick description of the lives lived of each participant in the study. Through the incorporation of a developed theoretical framework, it was anticipated that the identification of domain structures or critical themes would emerge. These domain structures or critical themes may help to shape an understanding of college readiness attainment by Hispanic, low-socioeconomic, immigrant students.

Uniquely attained successes of immigrant, Hispanic, low-income students, in spite of the many challenging issues they encounter, make this community an ideal place for complex and added research. Understanding the experiences of the extraordinary students that reside in this community makes it necessary for further research. Sharing an appreciation of the research may allow for improved opportunities. The research may provide enhanced policy opportunities for local school boards to consider relative to, not just Hispanic, low-income, immigrant students in attaining college readiness skills, but all students in general. Such research may also foster improved state and national policy opportunities.

Replication and further research may provide better grant opportunities to improve the success of college prepared high school graduates in this community. Additionally, significant institutional and organizational programs and initiatives and teacher practices provide for more opportunities to demonstrate successful examples and models of exemplary public high schools in this community, in the state and across the nation. Most importantly, the success of immigrant, Hispanic, low-income students can be increased through research in this realm, which opens the doors of opportunity for generations to come. If a very small percentage of Hispanic, immigrant, low-income students can find success in terms of college readiness, so then can many more!

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this research considers the phenomena of how some recent immigrant; Hispanic low-income students attain college readiness while most of the same demographic as well as students in a southwest border community in general, do not. In this study the research intended to explore how three recent Hispanic high school graduates, who immigrated during their middle years or high school years to the United States, successfully attained a high school diploma and graduated ready for college credit bearing coursework. As a result, it was important to consider the body of research relative to the meaning of college readiness and how it differs between minority students and all students in general.

College admissions and enrollment have drastically changed in the last seventy years. For instance, in 1940 only 5% of the population aged 25 and older held at least a bachelor's degree or higher. By 2009, this percentage had increased to 30% for the same age group; this represents a 500% increase over the seventy-year span (Ryan & Siebens, 2012). These quick and drastic shifts in admissions and enrollment may not have allowed for public education as well as higher education to adapt policies and practices to meet the needs of the changing demographics of college students. Therefore, research regarding the historical point of view of college admissions and higher education was considered. Literature about college admissions and enrollment helps to provide an understanding of the problem among many public education institutions that are comprised of a large population of minority and low-income students. In addition, the historical inequalities within public education helped to deepen an understanding of the practices that have too often closed the door for many minority students.

Because this study was interested in identifying characteristics that may be attributed to the participants' academic success, resiliency theory was explored. Resiliency theory as a component of student development and the school environment was a central idea from the literature in this study due to the wide-ranging available research relative to resiliency theory as well as the applicability to the intended research. While the literature is not as abundant for this group, resiliency theory as viewed through Hispanic, immigrant, and low-income students was explored. Perceptions of first generation Hispanic college students and the role of parents help to broaden an understanding of the college readiness issue at hand. Literature that focused on first generation perceptions of Hispanic students was explored as well as literature that explores parental roles of Hispanic college students.

Poverty plays an important role in this research in that all of the participants are from low-income families. In addition, poverty more often attaches to race and ethnicity (Popham, 2001; Rothstein, 2004). Therefore, it was important to view the literature in the context of social class outside that of race and ethnicity. In addition, the perception or belief system of the importance of a college education may not have shifted among cultures and communities with higher poverty rates as quickly as in middle class and upper class communities. Finally, high stakes accountability was explored as an important component to this study. Because accountability is shifting, to ensure college readiness is not neglected and is regarded as a primary focus; past, current and even future accountability policies were examined.

College Readiness

While there are many different definitions of college readiness, one definition stands out among most researchers and legislators. The common definition is the level of preparation a student must attain in high school English language arts and mathematics

courses to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in an entry-level general higher education course for credit (Cline, Bissell, Hatner, & Katz, 2007; Conley, 2010; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010a; Wagner, 2008). Conley (2010) takes this definition one step further by presenting a four-dimensional model that can be used to determine how prepared high school graduates are for college. This four dimensional model is comprised of “key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors and contextual and awareness skills,” each of which interact extensively with one another (Conley, 2010, p. 31). Conley believes that this four-dimensional model is necessary because college readiness is a multifaceted concept in of itself requiring both internal and external variables of the school environment.

Key cognitive strategies are defined as “patterns of thinking that lead to the development of a variety of specific ways to approach and attack challenging learning situations” (Conley, 2010, p. 33). Further, the key cognitive strategies are described as the need for students to master problem formation, conduct research, make instructive interpretations, and effectively communicate with precision and accuracy. Key content knowledge is then presented as “processing information so that its structure becomes more apparent and then probing, consolidating, and applying that information by means of the key cognitive strategies” (p. 35). The key content knowledge that will enable students to be college ready includes overarching academic skills such as reading and writing and then core academic subjects, knowledge and skills. These include English, math, science, social science, world languages and the arts.

Academic behaviors or self-management skills encompass a wide range of behaviors that include self-awareness, self-monitoring and self-control. Another necessary skill within

this dimension is one's ability to master the necessary study skills needed to work independently outside of class to comprehend material and master academic tasks (Conley, 2010). Finally, contextual skills and awareness is comprised in the fourth dimension. This broad category encompasses the information needed to "understand how college operates as a system and as a culture" (p. 40). This is an area of great importance to minority, low-income and/or first generation college students as students who are more affluent and not from first generation college-going families are more likely to readily possess college knowledge.

Similar to Conley's (2010) four-dimensional model, Wagner (2008) identified seven survival skills necessary for high school students to be competitive in the twenty-first century. These skills include "critical thinking and problem-solving skills, collaboration across networks and leading by influence, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication skills, assessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination," (Wagner, 2008, pp. 14-38). Wagner stresses the need for complete reform of the comprehensive high school in order for teaching and learning to effectively impact the attainment of these seven survival skills.

In a study of first generation non-traditional college student perspectives, participants indicated the importance of non-academic skills. More important than academic skills, the participants specified the need to have effective time management skills, the ability to apply one-self and focus on a goal, and the importance of self-advocacy skills as a learner (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005). Additionally, participants expressed background factors that contributed to their success in attaining college readiness. These included family experiences and expectations about college, work experiences or career motivations, financial motivations and previous high school experiences. The participants expressed how they were motivated to do

better than their parents had done as a result of the struggles they witnessed their parents endure. In addition, many of the participants expressed how they felt high school did not adequately prepare them for college and in particular, reading college level content was the most challenging academic skill. However, these nontraditional college age students did stress that work experience and age were of benefit to them. This was due to the fact that they often could actively and positively participate in honest and open dialogue in class discussions based on their own lives.

Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) lay out similar skills to that of Conley and Wagner as necessary components of college readiness. Content knowledge and basic academic skills are foundational to understanding specific academic disciplines. However, core academic skills are those skills that are transferred across academic disciplines, such as writing, reading and analytical thinking. These core academic skills are often cited as the weakest areas of preparation for today's high school students by college faculty.

Aside from the basic and core academic skills, non-cognitive skills such as a series of behaviors that facilitate greater self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control are essential for college readiness. Study skills, work habits, time management, help-seeking behavior, and social problem-solving skills are all important non-cognitive behavior skills (Roderick et al., p. 190).

It is important to consider how a lack of readiness for college impacts college persistence and graduation rates. The literature pertinent to why students leave higher education prior to obtaining an undergraduate degree presents varying research perspectives (Braxton, 2000; Tinto, 1994). Braxton (2000) refers to this dilemma as “the student departure puzzle” suggesting the complexity of the problem. One of the many suggestions is a lack of

appropriate preparation for high school students before entering higher education. Tinto's (1994) research considers a multitude of reasons as to why students leave college early. A lack of preparation for the academic coursework is but just one of these many reasons. In a report released from the College Board, *The Educational Crisis Facing Young Men of Color* (College Board, 2010) identifies the need for policy action. The report specifically addresses the need for further study of the concerning factors that contribute to minority male academic achievement. Students who reside in the border community and especially those of Hispanic, low-income and recent immigrant status provide for a wealth of necessary research.

For instance, Hispanic student high school graduation rates for a large urban border community school district revealed that 54.8% of Hispanics were classified as graduates compared to 83.1% statewide for Hispanic students (Swanson, 2006). More interestingly, college readiness rates are much lower for graduates from low-income families. Students from families earning \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year had a mean score of 475 on the SAT mathematics test compared to a mean score of 553 for students from families earning more than \$100,000 per year (College Board, 2009). According to Long and Riley (2007), college readiness is considered the second most compelling reason that limits access to college enrollment and persistence for all students. This is just behind the most compelling reason of educational cost. Their research indicates that only 32% of graduates are prepared for college while this proportion is more drastic for Hispanic students at only 16% ready for college (Long and Riley, 2007).

Factors Contributing to a Lack of Preparation for College

In the report entitled, *State, Schools and Colleges* (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009), a historical perspective is provided that sheds light on factors

that have contributed to the dilemma of such a large number of students graduating from high school, yet not fully prepared for college. One area of blame can be attributed to that of a disjointed curriculum for grades 10 to 14. After World War II, the emergence of aptitude testing became the focus rather than shared standards across the curriculum to determine college admissions. In addition, high schools placed more emphasis on elective courses in nonacademic areas, which further diluted the earlier relied upon standards for admissions (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009).

Teacher colleges in the early part of the twentieth century evolved into full universities and thus, allowed for even further disjointedness between higher education and public education. Many teacher preparation programs were first designed as two year programs to establish the standards of teaching and were even termed normal schools because of such norms. However, these teacher preparation programs began to evolve in part to better accommodate secondary teachers as well as the first intentions for elementary teachers through the normal schools. As demands increased and the workforce began to expand, teacher preparation programs became more commonplace. Most evolved into full multipurpose universities, many for prestige, which led to a lack of communication altogether with public education and the necessary standards for teaching (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009).

Even further, the detachment of community colleges from high schools can be considered as contributors to the problem. During the Baby Boom³ generation, high school and college student enrollment dramatically increased. In addition to this increase, a different population began to seek higher education. Housewives, immigrants, unemployed industrial

³ The Baby Boom generation is the well-known expression used to identify the demographic population boom that occurred shortly after World War II from 1946 to 1964.

workers, and older adults began to seek opportunities through community colleges. This was in part due to the vocational program training so many community colleges began to include. As this enrollment shift occurred at community colleges, so too did a shift in interaction with high schools; so much so that community colleges no longer provided high schools with indications of necessary academic preparation (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009).

Finally, the divided governance and finance of public education and higher education by state legislators are to blame. Many states began to create higher education coordinating boards to solely oversee the governance of higher education separate and apart from public education. Also, many states continued to fund public education with property taxes while primarily funding higher education with tuition costs and appropriations from state general funds (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2009).

The misalignment of public and higher education continues to be a challenge among policy makers, practitioners and business and industry leaders. Many states and local governments are now realizing the need to have alignment and partnerships between public and higher education. Today, consortiums and councils comprised of stakeholders from public and higher education are working together to address the needs specific to ensuring students attain college readiness as they transition from high school to post-secondary education.

Demographic Factors, Historical Inequalities, and Subtractive Schooling

The less educated a community, the less earning power of the work force of the community will be attained. According to the journal article *Educational Inequities and Latina/o Undergraduate Students in the United States* (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera,

2005), five major racial/ethnic groups in the United States are described along an educational pipeline from elementary school to the doctorate. The data clearly reveals that Hispanics do the least well at each point in the educational pipeline. Of 100 Hispanics who begin elementary school, 52 will graduate from high school and only about 10 will complete a college degree (Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). This data is particularly important because Hispanics represent the largest ethnic/racial group in the United States but have the poorest educational transition rates among all groups. As previously mentioned in the introduction, the projected Hispanic population in the United States in the year 2040 is estimated to be 58.1% of the total population (Murdock, 2012). As dismal as the data is in terms of educational transition rates, an opportunity is ever present to examine potential factors prevalent among border students that may attribute to such statistics.

Equal access and equal opportunity. Equal access and equal opportunity are compelling ideals that may not be deemed as significant a challenge for today's school leaders and educators as they once were; however, as long as an educational gap in student performance exists among different ethnic and income brackets, there is still much work to be accomplished. Further, all public school educators should have a thorough understanding of the historical beliefs that contributed to horrific injustices of Hispanic students in the time period following the civil rights movement. Barriers to equal opportunities of Mexican American school children in public education were portrayed in the report *Ethnic Isolation of Mexican Americans in the Public Schools of the Southwest* (1971), the first report of six from the United States Commission on Civil Rights' (CCR) Mexican American Education Study. The study revealed curriculum practices that were discriminatory against Mexican American students as these historical practices were based on an English-only white middle class

methodology to teaching and learning. Today, educators very well know that such practices are an extreme violation of students' equal rights (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Educators are required to ensure that equal access to learning exists for all students. Further, *Castañeda v. Pickard* (1981) requires schools to provide both English instruction and the academic content appropriate for the grade level to all English Language Learners, again with emphasis for equal access to the appropriate academic content. On the surface, most educators would hold the belief that equal access exists; however, a closer examination of school practices may reveal alarming evidence that equal access continues to be a problem in our schools. Yet, improvement is evidenced in practices that promote respect for cultural differences and practices that allow students to embrace their cultural history.

In the Southwest region at present, educators have made significant progress to ensure that cultural sensitivity and even the celebration of Mexican heritage are integrated in the overall school environment (Stafford-Levy, 2007; Svedman, 2007). Demonstrating empathy and understanding of each other's differences and celebrating these differences can contribute to border Hispanic students' interest in learning (Svedman, 2007). On the other hand, the Texas social studies curriculum standards were recently adopted by the State Board of Education, and the argument can be made that the culture of the minority majority Hispanic student population of Texas has again not been given equal representation in the standards (Stern and Stern, 2011).

Another lesson to be learned by educators in relation to their behaviors towards minority students is to have an understanding of the family structure of Mexican immigrants. In the article *From Me to You: Lessons from Teaching in Segundo Barrio* (Svedman, 2007), the importance of what goes on outside of the classroom between the teacher and newly

arrived immigrant students is stressed as equally, and sometimes, more important than the content taught in the classroom itself. Understanding the family structure and issues faced by immigrant students plays a significant role in the success of immigrant Hispanic students.

Subtractive schooling. Subtractive schooling practices were documented in Valenzuela's (1999) examination of an urban high school in Texas. This study revealed that the practices within the school subtracted resources from Mexican American youth by expecting the students to care about school when the school devalued their linguistic and cultural heritage and showed no care to them. Valdés' (1996) *Con Respeto* further conveys subtractive schooling by exposing the misunderstandings between teachers and parents regarding new immigrant students and the affected educational programs and outcomes of these students. How different the outcomes might be for immigrant students if all educators had an understanding and compassion of the uniqueness of the Mexican immigrant family structure, parental responsibilities and family interaction (Valdés, 1996, p. 120-123). Without this understanding, teachers label such students as "slow" and wonder why they cannot "snap out of it" (Valdés, p. 146). The mixed messages of strong family structure and an understanding of the unwillingness among immigrant children to engage in pretend play may permanently impact academic behaviors that later contribute to lacking academic success.

In *Latino High School Graduation* (Romo & Falbo, 1996), several recommendations for change are proposed for high schools to improve graduation rates for Hispanic students. The recommendations correlate to the teacher strategies suggested as part of the research under institutional and organizational climate. One such recommendation is to make participation in schoolwork rewarding. Romo and Falbo (1996) suggest that one way to accomplish this is to ensure that all school personnel behave in a respectful and nurturing

manner toward students so that students maintain a positive attitude toward school, thus contradict subtractive schooling practices. In addition, the study recommended that students be assembled in smaller heterogeneous groups and that teachers follow their group, often called looping, throughout their years in high school (Romo & Falbo, 1996). As a final measure to make participation in schoolwork rewarding for Hispanic students, Romo and Falbo (1996) suggest that teachers make the work relevant to the lives of the students they are teaching by incorporating active and engaging exercises relevant to the interests of the broad range of students in their classroom. This behavior is easily associated to the work of Valdés (1996) and findings from the CCR study previously mentioned. In addition, this thought correlates to research on performance-based assessments (Castner, Castello, & Hess, 1993). The goal of effective performance assessment is “to develop important tasks that are worthwhile and engaging for students, requiring the application of skills and knowledge learned prior to the assessment” (Castner, Costella, & Hess, 1993, p.46). Acknowledgement and empathy for students and their cultural heritage can make the difference between a newly arrived immigrant student’s ability to trust his or her teachers or to rebel against his or her teachers.

Public school finance can be considered a factor that has contributed to the historical inequalities of students from low-income and minority families. Public school finance has been litigated in several states over the last forty years. Some states such as Texas have had multiple school finance court cases. The Texas timeline involving major school funding arguments includes *Rodriguez v. San Antonio*, *Edgewood v. Kirby* and *West Orange-Cove Consolidated I.S.D. v. Neeley et al.* (Coalition to Invest in Texas Schools, 2004) to name a just a few. All, but the last case, are classified as equity lawsuits. *West Orange-Cove*

Consolidated I.S.D. v. Neely et al. was the first school finance court case in Texas that applied the adequacy argument.

Institutional Factors: Lawsuits and Legislation Related to Inequalities in Education

School finance lawsuits are nothing new in the face of the changing demographics in public education as well as the financial burden often placed on property poor school districts in a number of states in this country. In Texas the crusade continues with a combined legal battle recently entering the courts that represents over two thirds of the school districts in the state. The argument hinges on the legislation passed in 2005 that reduced the amount local school districts could tax property owners with an emphasis on meaningful discretion as to how the levied funds could be used by each local school district. In addition, the argument is attached to the recently revamped standards for academic performance while a \$5.4 billion cut in state funding occurred in 2011. The plaintiffs argue that the “state has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide an adequate and efficient public education” (Smith, 2012, para. 4). This argument also adds the growing concern of the increasing concentration of low-income and English language-learning students in Texas schools (Smith, 2012). Equity, efficiency and adequacy are the arguments of this case as well as a number of legal disputes from the past.

Equity lawsuits have primarily argued that school finance has been in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. Equity lawsuits (Kauffman, 2004) are based on the belief that “every school district should have the same resources to offer its students as every other district in the state” (p. 1). The argument against equity is based on the belief that there is a loss of local control. Some see the equity issue as a means to force districts to tax at a certain rate in order to produce an equitable distribution of funds or

redistribution of wealth from high-wealth districts to low-wealth districts. Opponents to the equity concept have more recently viewed this as a state property tax rate, which is currently unconstitutional in Texas.

In *Rodriguez, et al. v. San Antonio ISD* (1971), the plaintiffs argued in United States District Court on behalf of the school children residing in the Edgewood Independent School District, as well as other Texas school children who lived in school districts with low property valuations. Their argument was based on the practices in which local property taxes were generated and how such practices did not allow for equal protection under the law and thus, violated the fourteenth amendment of the United States. The United States District Court sided with the plaintiffs. However, on appeal to the United States Supreme Court, the decision was overturned by a five to four decision (*San Antonio, et al. v. Rodriguez et al.*, 1973) based on the argument that public education was not a fundamental right protected by the United States Constitution but rather a decision of local governments.

In *Edgewood v. Kirby* (1989) efficiency was the argument made that ultimately led the State Supreme Court of Texas to conclude that the manner in which public schools were funded did violate the state constitution. This ruling led to an overhaul by Texas legislators in the manner in which school districts received funding based on property values. The nickname *Robin Hood*⁴ has been used to identify the school funding established as a result of the *Edgewood v. Kirby* case because it required the state to capture funds from property wealthy school districts and redistribute these funds to property poor school districts as a means of equalizing the school funding system.

Adequacy advocates argue that the state should provide a guaranteed amount to all school children regardless of local property wealth and tax effort. The adequacy argument is

viewed by both wealthy and even some poor school districts as a more acceptable means to school funding because it keeps the focus on the state rather than “pitting school districts against one another” (Lefkowitz, 2004, p. 3).

The adequacy argument is not without flaws. For one, the changing philosophy on what is considered an adequate education makes it difficult for policy makers to set a standard that can be considered adequate for all. Often, the adequacy measure is set too low to prevent states from having to allocate significantly higher amounts of funding. This is exactly what happened in *West Orange-Cove v. Neely et al.* (2004). In addition, the adequacy notion tinkers beyond the equity concept by examining the quality of the educational system and its effects on students (Kauffman, 2004).

Home Factors: Inequity at the Starting Line of the Race

Socioeconomic status plays a significant role when determining a student’s readiness for learning and, ultimately, his or her readiness for college. Parental income shapes more than just opportunity for learning; it is part of the culture in which a child is raised (Rothstein, 2004). According to Rothstein (2004), children from households whose parents hold college degrees and have professional careers are more likely to arrive at school “with more inquisitive attitudes” for learning than those of children from homes of parents who are in low-skilled jobs (p. 2). There are social and economic manifestations of social class that also contribute to a child’s readiness for learning. Lower-class children have poorer vision either from a lack of adequate prenatal care or how their eyes are trained as infants. Additionally, they have on average poorer oral hygiene, more asthma, poorer nutrition, more exposure to smoke, less adequate pediatric care and more lead poisoning. Finally, due to the lack of available affordable housing for lower-income families, often children from such families are

more likely to be mobile which is another cause of lower academic achievement (Rothstein, 2004, p. 3).

To believe that all children arrive at the doorsteps of the schoolhouse with the same enthusiasm and intuitiveness about learning is a fallacy. President Lyndon B. Johnson expressed this best in his commencement address at Howard University in 1965, “You do not take a person who for years has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘You are free to compete with the others,’ and still justly believe you have been completely fair” (p. 2). Yet, high stakes standardized testing often ignores the class and race differences among students but demands that the gaps be narrowed. Popham (2001) stated, “The probability that an individual student will answer the items correctly on a standardized achievement test will be meaningfully influenced by such factors as parental education levels and family income” (pp. 55-56). Goodlad (1997) offered, “So far, with achievement test scores, the conventional output criteria for excellence, the only correlation in which we can have confidence is that of the high association of test scores and the socioeconomic level of the school’s clients” (p.111). Readiness for college, which is now measured by a host of standardized tests and aptitude tests, depends on the opportunities provided to students from lower-income families prior to their arrival to school.

The Perfect Storm: Converging Cold Fronts of the Institution and Home

There are too many students who lack the necessary resources in their homes who are at a disadvantage from day one of school. Combine this fact with the reality that the schools they often attend are inferior to schools in more affluent regions of the country. It would be easy to give up and say that schools cannot overcome influences of social class characteristics, but this would be contrary to the very foundations of public education in this

country. More importantly, it would mean giving up on society as a whole. This thinking is related to the Coleman Report (as cited in Kiviat, 2000), which “found that academic achievement was less related to the quality of a student's school, and more related to the social composition of the school, the student's sense of control of his environment ...and the student's family background” (para. 6).

It has been established that both institutional inequity and social class characteristics contribute to the problem of a lack of educational achievement among immigrant students when compared to their more affluent counterparts, thus causing a “perfect storm” for these students. What hope is there for children in such conditions? One school of thought that offers hope for this population is resiliency theory.

Resiliency and Resiliency Theory

Resiliency, both individual and environmental, is intriguing when considering the attainment of college readiness among students that are exposed to risk factors. These risk factors are linked to the students selected for this study; specifically their low-income status, limited English proficiency status and immigrant status. Therefore, an exploration of resiliency theory lends an alternative view.

Resiliency theory is based on the premise that individuals attain certain protective skills that lend to positive outcomes when faced with significant challenges in life (Richardson, 2002). There is abundant literature relative to resiliency and resiliency theory; however, for the purposes of this research, resiliency was explored in the context of student development and the educational environment. Resiliency theory can be described as the “motivational forces within an individual that drives one to seek wisdom, self-actualization, and altruism and to be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength” (Richardson, 2002, p.

309). Resiliency can also be defined as one's ability to rise above hardship and be successful despite exposure to high-risk circumstances (Fraser et al., 1999).

Parental support. Parental support is key to the development of a child. Several studies offer evidence of the role that parents play in development of successful resilient children. One study that continues to provide insight to student development was that of Werner (1982) and Smith (Werner & Smith, 1992). In a thirty-year longitudinal study, she examined a multiracial population of children deemed high risk due to four environmental factors – “perinatal stress, poverty, daily instability and parental mental health problems,” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 4). She found that of 200-high-risk children, 72 managed to live positive and productive lives despite the adversity they encountered from birth to adulthood. Werner was able to categorize resiliency traits among these 72 children. The traits identified included being “socially responsible, robust, tolerant, adaptable, achievement oriented and having a good self-esteem” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 74). The care-giving environment within the family was central in aiding these young adults to thrive in the face of adversity. However, external factors were identified as well.

Another study, which focused on resiliency as a component of student development based on parental support, was that of Garnezy (1991) and colleagues (Garnezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). In this study, children of schizophrenic parents were examined over the course of eleven years. He found that most children did not become maladaptive young adults. Rather, he identified high expectancies, positive outlook, positive self-esteem, good problem-solving skills, humor, critical thinking skills, effectiveness at work, play and love and internal locus of control as qualities among these warm and competent participants. His findings helped to establish Garnezy's triad of resiliency – personality disposition, a

supportive family environment and an external support system (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). These qualities were researched among the three participants in this study to determine if there a commonality among them regarding resiliency as a component of individual student development.

Parent and family support is key to the success of raising emotionally healthy children. However, it is not the only support that can be connected to resiliency among children living in at-risk situations. Building a trusting relationship with key members outside of the family also plays a significant role in the development of a child.

External support. The literature suggests that environments and caring adults outside of the family can help to develop resiliency in students by providing caring relationships, setting high expectations and allowing students opportunities to actively participate and contribute to the environment (Bernard, 1991). Classroom environments are central to these ideas and teacher practices within the classroom may also help to develop protective skills in students when faced with difficult challenges. Such practices include providing differentiated instruction tailored to individual student needs, emphasizing choice and autonomy among students and experiential approaches to learning (Alfassi, 2004). Waxman, Pardon, and Arnold (2001) suggest that learner-centered instruction lends to developing a sense of purpose among students. Further, educators that communicate and maintain high expectations for all students are critical for the development of a positive academic self-concept (Waxman et al., 2001). Finally, developing a caring and supportive relationship with each student that results in positive student-teacher engagement is crucial to student development of protective skills such as self-actualization, self-efficacy, and self-esteem (Waxman et al., 2001). Developing a positive classroom climate can help students to develop social skills such as respect for

differences and understanding of individual differences and the importance of teamwork to solve complex problems (Blum, McNeely, & Nonnemaker, 2002).

Resiliency theory in the context of student development and the school environment was central in the identification of domain structures among the participants in this study. The participants' understanding of their own student development and the identification of the challenges and adversities from their youth helped to determine if such domain structures existed among the participants. Additionally, school environment lends to the research by considering the factors upon which the participants were provided that may have contributed to their development of protective skills.

Resiliency among Hispanic students. To gain a broader prospective of resiliency and resiliency theory, literature that encompasses college readiness and college ambitions of students that have the characteristics of the participants in this study were explored. Research that includes all of the characteristics of the students in this study, namely Hispanic, low-income, and immigrants, appears to be limited. In fact, this limitation may serve as a critique of resiliency theory. This premise is based on the available literature for resiliency theory that by and large represents the average middle class white student (Howard, Dryden & Johnson, 1999). Thus, most of the literature does not adequately represent the demographics of the participants included in this study. Yet, even with this limitation three studies were identified that help to collectively provide context of the intended participant demographics.

In one such study resiliency theory was applied to demonstrate Chicana students' perspectives of the role of parents in the development of college goals and ambitions (Ceja, 2004). The study examined how first-generation college-going Chicana students recognized and comprehended the method by which their parents influenced and shaped their educational

goals and aspirations. Twenty Chicana seniors were selected from three separate college bound lists: University of California bound, California State University bound, and community college bound. An initial limitation of this study is that it did not consider the perceptions of non-college bound Chicana students and their alternate post-secondary plans. All 20 students mentioned the parent role as important in developing academic success and educational goals. However, it was not always through direct communication but rather, what the students perceived to be as important, often noting the consequences of the conditions and struggles that their parents endured.

While many of the parents of the students in this study did not have a formal education and lacked English language proficiency, it was apparent that these parents understood the importance of attaining a good education if their children were to achieve greater economic and occupational opportunities. Story telling helped to shape a broader understanding of the importance of education. Many of the parents shared stories of their childhood struggles as well as the mistakes they made as a way to offer support for the educational attainment of their children. Ultimately, the sense of resiliency of the students in this study was fueled by the parents' ongoing support that was demonstrated through the parents' economic, social and occupational struggles (Ceja, 2004).

Another study considered the world of school and how school environment could impact students' motivation for college (Calaff, 2008). In addition to school environment, this study hoped to contrast the portrayal of other studies that focused on subtractive schooling (Valdés, 1996, and Valenzuela, 1999). Nine Hispanic immigrant students in grades 9 through 12 were selected through contacts from a college preparation program offered at a

large northeastern high school. The urban high school selected was noted as being exemplary in preparing minority and low-income students for college.

The findings of this ethnography indicated that the school set high expectations for all students, provided access to a rigorous academic curriculum and the latest technologies, embraced cultural and linguistic diversity, and demonstrated care and support from teachers, counselors and administrators. High expectations began with the goal of helping all students to meet high standards set by the principal. Clear attendance and disciplinary policies established classroom-learning environments that encouraged students to ask questions and seek assistance. All students were obligated to enroll in college preparatory coursework despite their English language proficiency or academic level. These established practices helped to shape high expectations of the school as a whole (Calaff, 2008, p. 99).

Access to academic rigor was provided through complex safety nets that helped English language learners gain the necessary language skills as well as continue to enroll in a college preparatory program of study. Alternate course paths enabled students to build foundational knowledge while acquiring knowledge in specialized courses at the same time. Additionally, technology access was a common theme throughout all classrooms. All students were provided internet access before, during and after school hours. Science laboratories were furnished with the most modern equipment available and several departments had computer labs accessible within their particular wing, such as the mathematics department, business education department and science department. The availability of technology outside of school hours was found to be an extremely important resource for the immigrant students in this study as many of their homes were not equipped with such resources (Calaff, 2008).

Valuing students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds was a central theme among the faculty as well. In fact, the school was often featured in local and national newspaper and magazine articles because of its model multicultural relations among the student population. Cultural and ethnic celebrations were commonplace and many extra-curricular clubs and activities that enhanced a student's heritage were available and encouraged. Students were proud to display their heritage by wearing distinctive apparel and openly speaking their native language. Much pride was in place to further foster this positive multicultural environment (Calaff, 2008).

The world of school or the school environment in this study was found to foster immigrant students' motivation towards higher education. Each element from setting high expectations to providing a caring and supportive staff ensured that the students in this study were resilient in pursuing a goal of a college education despite their economic, social and linguistic backgrounds (Calaff, 2008).

Demonstrating care and support by teachers, counselors and administrators helped the participants in this study to understand that even though they differed culturally with many of the faculty, they realized the cultural differences were not important so long as the adult demonstrated authentic care and support. This framework is supported through the elements of Noddings (2010) care theory. Such authentic care and support meant that teachers would not allow a student to fail and that they persisted to ensure their students were successful, another component of Noddings' (2002) work in moral education. Also, when teachers provide words of encouragement that help students to see that their teachers believed in them and when teachers shared this verbally, it helped to foster resiliency among the immigrant students in this study (Calaff, 2008).

Blanco-Vega, Castro-Olivo, and Merrell (2008) consider resiliency factors among Hispanic immigrant adolescents. They explored ecological factors that may contribute to at-risk behaviors of Hispanic immigrant adolescents. Additionally, they provide context that supports resiliency among such students. The school environment may very well be the most important external element in building resiliency. “The type of support and belonging an immigrant student experiences when first entering the American school system will likely dictate the relationship and outcomes this student will have with members of the host culture” (p. 56).

Immigrant students need a school environment that allows them to express their cultural values through language and tradition. A school environment that is culturally sensitive to the immigrants’ need for belonging by providing bilingual and bicultural staff helps immigrant students feel more comfortable and relate to their new surroundings with less trepidation and anxiety. In other words, a school environment can help to build the immunity that oftentimes will make all the difference between an immigrant student engaging in risky behaviors or engaging in productive academic and social behaviors (Blanco-Vega et al, 2008).

High Stakes Accountability

“High school is where economically disadvantaged young people—many of them African Americans and Latinos—make it or break it educationally” (Carnoy, 2005, p. 19). In today’s era of high stakes accountability, particular attention must be given to the consequences of such legislation on minority students and low-income students. The literature is mixed in terms of high stakes accountability. While the original legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 did not prioritize the goal of college readiness, the *Blueprints for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (U.S. Department of

Education, 2010) emphasizes it very clearly. It is identified as the number one goal of the president and the Secretary of Education that every student should graduate from high school ready for college and a career, regardless of their income, race, ethnic or language background, or disability status.

Texas accountability history. To better understand the Texas state accountability system and its effects on Hispanic and low-income students, a brief history of Texas' standards based accountability is central to the facts in understanding today's state system. The accountability system in Texas was first adopted through Senate Bill 350 in 1979. SB350 required criterion-referenced tests to assess minimum skills in reading, writing, and mathematics for third, fifth, and ninth grade students. The test mandated in this bill became known as the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABS), which was given from 1980 to 1984 (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In 1984, HB 72 was passed which further enhanced state accountability by requiring students to pass an "exit exam" first given in grade eleven in order that they may receive a high school diploma (Texas Education Agency, 2004). Ross Perot, who chaired the Select Committee on Public Education, led this legislation. The revamped TABS became known as the Texas Essential Assessment of Minimum Skills or (TEAMS) under HB 72 and also required students to be assessed in all odd numbered grades beginning in grade three. From TEAMS, the student assessment program evolved a number of times. In 1990, legislation was enacted to further expand student assessment that would further test student knowledge based on the adopted curriculum called the Essential Elements (Texas Education Agency, 2004). This assessment became known as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills or TAAS. The TAAS assessed higher-order thinking skills and problem-solving skills in mathematics, reading, and writing. In 1993 the test moved from a fall

assessment to a spring assessment and expanded to include all grades from three through eight in reading and mathematics. In addition, the writing test was moved to grades four and eight and the exit exam was moved from grade eleven to grade ten. Also, a new statewide accountability system was implemented that rated campuses and districts based on the performance of all students and student subgroups that the campus/district was comprised of (Texas Education Agency, 2004). In 1999 legislation was enacted to transition the state student assessment program to match the recently adopted Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills that replaced the Essential Elements. This assessment was fully launched in 2002-2003 and became known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. In addition to a much more rigorous assessment, legislation was also enacted that ended social promotion based on the failure of a student to perform satisfactorily on the TAKS in grades three, five and eight. This was known as the Student Success Initiative or SSI. Large amounts of funding were made available to school districts based on the failure of students in mathematics and reading in these high stakes grade levels. However, funding has all but disappeared and the reassessment of third grade students was eliminated in 2009-10.

Today, another testing transition is occurring as part of SB1031 from the 80th legislative session as the new assessments evolve from TAKS to STAAR. The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) was first implemented in the 2011-2012 school year and will be fully implemented by 2014 (Texas Education Agency, 2009a). Students graduating in 2015 will be the first class of graduates to be fully assessed under the new requirements of the End-of-Course STAAR. Through this new student assessment program, students will be assessed on 12 End-of-Course assessments in the four core content areas and they must meet the minimum state passing standard average for each content area, which

gradually increases for each cohort of students over a five year period. In addition, the final grade in a course will reflect 15% of the student's performance from the End-Of-Course assessment. Finally, the STAAR will have measures that project readiness for future grade level assessments that correlate to the college readiness standards, which will be heavily assessed on the Algebra II and English III End-Of-Course assessments. In addition to a "satisfactory standard" and an "advanced standard" each student will be given a college readiness indicator measure on both the Algebra II and English III assessments that if met, reflects the student has attained the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in credit bearing college level coursework.

Some research suggests that high stakes accountability has in fact increased the readiness levels of students for college (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Carnoy, 2005). However, their research suggests that the largest gains in academic performance occur in the early grades rather than in high school and that performance is more significant for African American students in mathematics than other minority groups (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002).

Knowing that Texas is far from reaching the goal of the new *Blueprints for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) for all students, further research is necessary to determine how high stakes accountability impacts a students' readiness for college. Yet, despite the dismal statistics, a small number of immigrant, minority, and low-income students prevail and graduate ready for college.

There is growing belief that high stakes testing limits the opportunities for minority students to graduate ready for college (Brennan, Kim, Wentz-Gross, & Siperstein, 2001; Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey & Stecher, 2000; McNeil, 2000; Wagner, 2008). For example Brennan, Kim, Wentz-Gross, and Siperstein (2001) suggest that relying "exclusively or

heavily on high-stakes tests as a determining factor such as the granting of a high school diploma, might dramatically set back students of color” (p. 210). Additionally, Conley (2010) speaks about how many schools abandon their college preparation programs in order to focus on meeting the state testing requirements tied to public accountability and often, these schools are those that serve a large population of minority and low-income students. College readiness is “often overshadowed by an instructional focus on decontextualized content and facts necessary to pass exit examinations” (Conley, 2010, p. 32).

Yet, while there is debate over high stakes accountability and the widening gap of college readiness (ACT, 2007), the requirements and rigor necessary to receive a high school diploma have been the topic of public education policy for almost thirty years. Increased standards required for graduation all started with the publication of the landmark report entitled, *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Today, the same issue is at hand; students must be required to take a more rigorous curriculum in high school if they are to be deemed college ready. In the report *Mind the Gaps* (ACT, 2010) research offers a clear-cut solution: “help to ensure that underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students and students from lower-income families are ready for the challenges of postsecondary education through a rigorous core curriculum that is clearly focused on the essential knowledge and skills for college and career readiness” (p. 3).

Narrowing of the curriculum. In *Leaving Children Behind: How “Texas Style” Accountability Fails Latino Youth* (Valenzuela, 2005) evidence is provided with much merit through numerous variables that correlate to high stakes accountability and disparaging Hispanic youth academic achievement; yet, one interesting and significant variable demonstrates a correlation of declining ACT and SAT test scores that occurred during the

implementation years of high stakes testing. Accountability has constrained the practices of teachers to a narrow and linear approach to learning without allowing for real world connections or by demonstrating learning through robust discussion and writing (McNeil, 2005).

Often, the only curriculum available to students at schools with large populations of economically disadvantaged and minority student populations is one that is aligned to high stakes state assessments (Wagner, 2008). More importantly, minority student performance is of critical concern as high-stakes accountability silences the historical conditions of many school districts with large minority populations (Walker, 2005). High schools are judged by their overall performance on state tests tied to state standards composed of basic skills, not students' preparation for college (Pinkus, 2009). Due to the pressures of high stakes accountability, district and campus level administrators at low-income and minority campuses are often forced to reduce the curriculum opportunities to those that produce the needed results on high stakes state assessments and ignore a more rigorous curriculum that includes Advanced Placement course offerings (Wagner, 2008). Musoba (2011) conducted a cross sectional study that asked, "Are accountability school reform policies positively or negatively associated with readiness for college for students from different ethnic and income groups" (p. 453). The results of the study indicated that high stakes exams were not meaningfully related to readiness for college (Musoba, 2011). Finally, Wagner (2008) sums it up nicely by stating:

If we were a nation at risk in 1983... we are today more seriously at risk than most people realize. And while No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was well intended, its

implementation is, in fact, putting all of our children further behind in acquiring the new survival skills for learning, work, and citizenship (p. 9).

Musoba's (2011) cross-sectional study of the relationship between academic readiness for college and state education accountability policy found that state accountability policies, and specifically those characterized as high stakes accountability, had no positive correlation to a student's readiness for college. More importantly, she found that in some states, there was a negative correlation for minority and low-income students' readiness for college. Musoba affirmed, "This study tested whether exam policies were an incentive for schools and students or in some other way influenced students' academic readiness for college and they did not" (p. 474).

Further, much like Wagner (2008), Musoba (2011) claims that schools that serve low-income and minority students often have a narrowed and stringent curriculum focused on the minimum skills required for mastery of the exit exams in policy rather than a full curriculum that encourages creativity and higher order thinking skills.

Summary

The literature presented in this chapter helps to provide a broader perspective relative to the issues facing public education and higher education institutions in all regions of this country relative to college readiness. Institutional lawsuits and legislation as a result of the disparities among income, race and ethnicity in the public education setting has helped to broaden the horizon for all school children in hopes of closing the achievement gap. Yet, the struggle carries on as the legal system continues to characterize equity, efficiency and adequacy for all Texas school children regardless of income, race and ethnicity. Further, the viewpoint of college readiness among students residing in the southwest border community

paints a very different picture. Therefore, literature that relates to the student demographic of the southwest border community was reviewed to assist in understanding the unique challenges of Hispanic, low-income students. Only one study was identified that presented evidence of college readiness factors among immigrant students and in this study, many of the immigrants were not of Hispanic origin (Blanco-Vega et al, 2008).

Factors in addition to academic preparation were considered through the understanding of resiliency, particularly when examined from the viewpoint of student development and school environment. Parent and family support factors as well as external support factors were explored as key indicators for students to develop protective skills that allow them to overcome the challenges they have endured and develop into emotionally healthy and successful adults. Again, research relative to the demographics of the participants that were included in this study was limited in terms of the bodies of work available for resiliency theory.

Finally, high stakes accountability and its impact on a students' readiness for college is an important aspect that relates to the challenges placed on public education and the changing student demographics within these institutions. A philosophy of a continual narrowing of the curriculum was presented not as a means to place blame on educators but rather, to build context to the ever-increasing demands placed upon public educators and the challenges they face on a daily basis.

Examining the phenomena of recent immigrant, Hispanic, low-income student success as an interaction with college readiness was the basis of this research. For this reason, this study is offered as an attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the elements that may contribute to such success. The success of the participants as evidenced from their own

stories, their parents and their mentors are examined as a means to reveal the critical themes that lead to each participant's success.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Because the interests of the researcher reside in questions of meaning and culture, a qualitative approach was appropriate. This research sought to understand how three low socioeconomic, Hispanic, immigrant students experienced their lives in preparation for college admission and enrollment. This research sought to also become familiar with each participant's individual perspectives on public education.

Qualitative Approach

In view of the fact of the research questions in this study, it was suitable to rely on Erikson's (1986) interpretive methods. Erickson (1986) suggests key questions in qualitative research. These questions include, "What has happened here, specifically?" and "What did these happenings mean to the people engaged in them?" (Erikson, 1986, p. 124). When examining questions of culture, qualitative methods are the most fitting. Qualitative research allows for an understanding of how the culture and social organizations interact with the students in this study and how the culture allowed for choices and actions of the students (Erikson, 1986). Geertz (1973) offers a similar definition of culture, arguing that the purpose of research and analysis is to interpret observable actions in an attempt to ascribe meaning and understand the culture that shapes the actions.

Ethnography. Ethnography is the oldest formal type of fieldwork having derived from anthropology (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). It is "concerned with producing descriptions and explanations of particular phenomena, or with developing theories, rather than with testing existing hypothesis" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.21). In this study, ethnography was suitable, as it would allow for the research to take place in the participants'

setting over a period of time. Additionally, ethnography allows for the researcher to become a participant in the fieldwork itself (Shank, 2006).

Role of the researcher. As a public school administrator with 23 years of public school experience, this research project helped to inform the researcher in her role as an administrator in charge of the college readiness initiatives and programs for the district she serves. As an educational professional, the researcher has an interest in understanding the experiences and characteristics of the identified Hispanic, low-income, immigrant students and their successful high school graduation and college admissions and enrollment. The researcher is also concerned with the need to refine programs and services that better support underserved student populations in their quest for academic success to include graduating from high school ready for college. Through reflexivity and careful consideration of the researcher's subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988), the research was based on the shared experiences of the participants with full and unbiased accounts from all interviewees.

Research Design

In addition to relying on culture and social organizations, the research subscribed to Denzin's and Lincoln's (2005) five phases of the research project. It was anticipated that the methodologies to be employed would evolve throughout the course of the study and that certain phases might shift in perspective and/or strategy. The participants consisted of three recent high school graduates currently attending a college or university as a full time student. Because the researcher was interested in questions of meaning, participant interviews, mentor teacher, counselor, or administrator interviews, and parent interviews were used as research techniques. Through a "thick description" of the participant interviews, (Geertz, 1973, p. 6), the analysis of the research strived to provide a context that provides a deep understanding of

the lives lived of the recent graduates. Descriptive field notes from interviews as well as an analysis of student, parent, and mentor interviews provided for the identification of “domain structures” in the research (Spradley, 1979). The participant, parent and mentor interviews occurred during late summer and early fall of 2012.

Writing as interpretation was the premise of the ethnographic study in order that the researcher project an understanding of the key structures relative to the college readiness factors of the participating graduates. Through narrative descriptions, the reader will be able to make his/her own interpretation of these same structures.

The interpretive paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) to be relied upon allow for an eclectic approach. The researcher identifies herself as one who subscribes to the attributes of the postmodern period of qualitative research as described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). Additionally, the interpretations were based on her identity in a constructivist-interpretive theoretical paradigm yet also incorporating reflexivity, praxis, and emotion commonly identified with a feminist approach.

Research setting. Because this study employed ethnography, the research setting was to be in the field of the participants for most of the research study. It was expected that the participant interviews would take place in the current educational setting for each participant. However, some of the data collection was from the former high school setting of the participants. These included interviews of key educational personnel such as a teacher, counselor, or administrator that was instrumental in the lives of the participants. In addition, the parent interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and in their native language. Finally, some artifact collection in the former educational setting was necessary to the research.

Description of participants. Participants consisted of three recent high school graduates who are attending a college or university on a full time basis. Recent high school graduates consisted of students who graduated from high school no more than in the past three academic school years and are between the ages of 18 and 21. The participants were also students that did not require any college level remediation or developmental coursework at the start of their college or university enrollment. It was anticipated that not all participants would be in the border community region and that one or more participants may be enrolled at an institution of higher learning in another part of Texas or in another state.

As described in Hammersley and Atkinson (2007), the sample participants were chosen because they helped to answer the research questions. The participants for this study were found by using contacts available through university and public school K-12 networks and via professional association with college readiness preparation organizations. All chosen research individuals matched the specified criteria: Hispanic origin, immigrated during public school years and low socioeconomic status. The selected participants were required to provide written consent to participate. Finally, strict confidentiality of each participant's identity was maintained.

Additionally, the sample participants were purposely selected to include recent high school graduates attending a college or university. This was important because the students needed to be able to easily recall those high school experiences that helped to prepare them for life in college. High school graduates of low socioeconomic status and who immigrated during their public schooling years were key to the research because the data indicates that these students have an increased likelihood for the need for remediation upon post-secondary education enrollment. Unfortunately, some public school educators ascribe to deficit thinking

when faced with students of such demographics and do not promote college readiness for all. In addition, because these students successfully graduated from high school and have enrolled full time in a college or university, this study examines the student in transition from familiar to unfamiliar roles.

Instrumentation. In Chapter One, research questions were presented to provide an understanding of the nature behind this research. An in-depth, unstructured interview was the focus for the first participant interview in order to gain an oral history of each participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The participants were asked to share their personal stories that have led them to their current level of success and as such, open-ended questions were utilized to generate such responses. For instance, “Tell me about your life experiences that have led you to where you are today.” The second participant interview encompassed slightly more structure in order to elicit data relative to the transition from high school to college as well as to identify environmental and institutional factors. The open-ended questions listed below served as a guide but allowed for follow-up questions in order to elicit more in-depth responses.

- a. How did you get to where you are today?
- b. Talk to me about high school. What was that like?
- c. Who or what was most helpful to you during your high school years?
- d. What advice would you most like to give to a future high school graduate with similar characteristics about graduating college ready?

Appendix A provides a more descriptive list of the participant interview questions that were employed for the first two participant interviews. The participant interviews took place on two separate occasions. If there were unanswered questions that needed to be addressed, a

third participant interview was implemented with structured questions that were based on issues not yet resolved from the previous interviews. The instrumentation used for the identified mentor and parent interviews followed a similar approach to that of the participant interviews. Once again, the mentor teacher, counselor or administrator and parent interviews were somewhat unstructured so as to elicit the in depth oral histories in reference to the participants. However, “grand tour” interview questions were relied upon during the school employee interviews as a means to build a description of the cultural scenes from the lives of the participants (Spradley, 1980). Some of the open-ended questions listed below served as a guide for the mentor interviews.

- a. Tell me about a typical day in your role as a (teacher/counselor/administrator).
- b. How do you help to prepare your students to graduate college ready?
- c. How do you support students that require additional help?
- d. What do you remember most about (student participant’s name)?
- e. What or how do you remember in helping (student participant) to achieve success?
- f. Why do you believe (student participant) attained such success?

The parent interview consisted of similar open-ended interview questions to that of the student. While the list below is not exhaustive of all questions asked, Appendix A offers a sample of the questions that were utilized for the mentor and parent interviews.

- a. Tell me about your child (student participant).
- b. Why did you decide to move to the United States?
- c. What challenges did you experience in moving to this country?

- d. Tell me about your child's public school education here in the United States.
- e. What challenges did you both encounter as a result of public education, if any?
- f. How were you involved in your child's education?

Data collection strategies. Data was collected in this study through the use of participant interviews, school employee interviews, parent or guardian interviews and artifact collection. These techniques were used to get an "insider account" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 122) of the lives of Hispanic immigrant college students. In this situation, insider accounts helped to inform the researcher both about the students themselves and college student life as perceived by the participants. Additionally, in order to gather a true sense of each participant's experiences, it was important to gather the data in the field, meaning that it was an expectation to interview and observe the participants at their enrolled college or university as well as at their previous high school setting.

Participant interviews. The interview process was based on the two processes identified by Spradley (1980) – these are developing rapport and eliciting information. As stated in the instrumentation section, the initial participant interview was unstructured so as to elicit an oral history from each participant. During the subsequent interviews, descriptive questions were based on Spradley's (1980) five major types of questions as a means "to elicit a large sample of utterances in the informant's native language" (p. 85). Finally, the interview process was based on both personal and cultural questions so that the participants would lend their own point of view as well as share the patterns or behaviors in a particular scene or circumstance.

School employee interviews. As stated in the instrumentation, the school employee interview encompassed a similar approach to that of the participant interview but with some

structure based on Spradley's (1980) grand tour approach to interviewing. The school employee or mentor interview took place following the initial participant interview. Additionally, it was scheduled in the school setting so as to get a sense of the school culture that the participants were a part of during their high school years.

Parent interviews. The parent or guardian interview was intended to be more unstructured than that of the school employee interview. This was to allow for a similar oral history of the participants but from a parent perspective. The parents were interviewed in the home to, once again, gain a true sense of the culture in which the participant was a part of during their public school years. It was also expected that a more in depth oral history could be gathered from the parents if the interviews occurred in the serenity of their own homes.

Artifact collection. Because the participants in this study were required to reflect on the events from their high school education, artifact collection was key in providing for distinct memories of such events. Such artifacts included grade reports, course schedules, high school transcripts, college admissions applications, and photographs of significant high school events. It was expected that such artifacts would evoke the senses of the participants in this study to broaden their understanding of the events that helped to shape who they really are (Mason, 2002).

Procedures

The agenda that was followed in this research allowed for the study to be conducted in an organized and structured manner. Upon approval of the Institutional Review Board, potential participants were identified from area borderland high school records. Each participant was contacted via a phone call and an email. The invitation to participate in the study was offered. The research study was explained to the participants both verbally and in

writing. Upon acceptance to participate in the study, the participants were asked to provide consent to participate in the study. The participant consent forms can be found in Appendix B. Every effort was made to arrange dates and times for the interviews that allowed the researcher to conduct the first interview at the participants' school location. However, the first interview of one of the three participants took place one week prior to her departure to the university. The first interview took approximately 90 minutes in length and allowed for the researcher to get to know the participants on a fairly in depth personal level. Additionally, document or artifact collection was requested during the first interview. During the course of the first participant interview each participant identified a key public school teacher, counselor, or administrator as having significantly contributed to each participant's success.

The key person identified from each of the participants was contacted via a phone call and an email and asked to participate in an interview for this study. Consent was obtained prior to the interview and the research project was explained verbally and in writing to the identified mentor. The mentor interviews took place in their school building to allow for the researcher to gain an understanding of the school culture that the participants experienced during their time in high school. Again, some artifact collection did occur during this phase of the research.

Because of the distance and location of two of the participants' enrolled universities, it was cost prohibitive to conduct the second interview on the university campus. In this case, the subsequent interviews for the two out of town participants were conducted via Skype⁴. Once again, consent was obtained with a thorough explanation verbally and in writing of the

⁴ Skype is a voice-over-Internet Protocol service and software application owned by Microsoft that allows users to communicate with others by voice, video, and instant messaging over the Internet

research project. During this interview, the participant was asked to respond to questions that center on the experiences that helped them find success and obtain admissions to the college or university they are attending. In addition, during this interview attention was given to the experiences that the participants have encountered as they have transitioned from high school to college. Artifact collection did not occur at this stage of the research study.

Parent or guardian interviews were conducted after the completion of the first student interview. Once more, consent was obtained with a thorough explanation both verbally and in writing and in the parent's native language in reference to the research project. During the parent/guardian interview, a translator was necessary as all three parents were not able to communicate in the English language. The translator provided a signed statement indicating confidentiality prior to the interviews. This interview allowed the parent or guardian to share their hopes and dreams for their children and how they supported such hopes and dreams.

Audio-recordings were made during all interviews with the use of a smart phone recorder and a back-up digital recorder. All audio-recordings are stored in a locked filing cabinet and password protected on the personal home computer of the researcher. In addition, the recordings were copied; yet password protected onto a digital storage device. A trained transcriber conducted the transcription of the audio-recordings from the digital storage device. Prior to the transcription, the trained transcriber was asked to provide consent for confidentiality of the research materials.

Data sorting was conducted as the next stage of the research. An excel spreadsheet was utilized to categorize the transcriptions and field notes collected during the interviews and observations. Data was then queried to find patterns among the narrative responses provided by the interviewees. The data identified from the queries were then color coded and sorted to

determine if domain structures emerged. Domain structures were then the basis for the final analysis of the data. The analysis of data is discussed in chapter five of this research.

Ethical Considerations

Although there is usually some risk to participants of any study, the risks in this case proved to be insignificant. Pseudonyms were used to conceal the identities of all of the participants. Participants were asked to give consent both verbally and in writing at each stage of the research. Because all of the participants were over the age of 18, parental consent was not necessary. Additionally, the participants were graduates from different high schools and currently reside in different cities in and out of the state. This helped to conceal their identities as well. Participants that were not known by the researcher were selected as a means to objectively obtain information without prior knowledge of any of the individuals. Finally, there were no direct benefits attributed to the participation of the participants or the public school teachers, counselors, administrators, as well as their parents for participating in this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is “sorting out structures of signification and determining their social ground and import” (Geertz, 1973. p. 9). Data collection and data analysis occurs simultaneously in ethnographic research (Hamersley & Atkinson, 1995). The data analysis for this study began during the initial interviews in which descriptive field notes were taken at the same time that the interviews were being recorded. Next, the transcription of the recorded interviews allowed for further analysis by which verbatim word-by-word transcriptions allowed for the preliminary identification of similar ideas from each of the participants. Next, the data was indexed through the use of an electronic spreadsheet and employing an indexing

system using Mason's (2002) reading data categories of "literally, interpretively and reflexivity" (p. 148).

Swidler's (2001) conceptualization of "cultural repertoires" was the basis for the data analysis of this study. Swidler believes that people shape culture through their actions rather than Geertz's (1973) idea that culture shapes the behaviors or actions in which people engage. The researcher began the research with the primary idea that for the participants in this study there is a cultural repertoire from which they choose to act on every day. However, prior to the analysis of the data, it was not known what this repertoire would include. By investigating their accounts, the researcher sought to understand what it meant to the participants to be from an immigrant, low-income, Hispanic family, given their challenges and the current circumstances of college readiness for all students in general. As a result, "data" relates the stories of individuals and the interpretations of the data made by researchers. Because the data was based on interpretations by individuals, "cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete" and therefore, infinite (Geertz, 1973, p. 29).

Finally, critical themes or domain structures (Spradley, 1979) were constructed based on the categorization of the data accumulated. In addition to Mason's (2002) data indexing, the data was categorized in an excel spreadsheet which allowed for the identification of the repetition of key words and phrases in response to the open-ended interview questions. Such themes allowed for the interpretation of the events shared by the participants, as well as those observed and documented in collected artifacts. The interpretation of such themes was made with an awareness of the researcher's own subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988) so that she would be consciously aware of her own feelings throughout the interpretation process. The literature

review in this study helped to in some measure to identify the critical themes or domain structures as it related to the theoretical framework. These were:

- Childhood,
- High school environment,
- High school coursework,
- Extra-curricular activities,
- Assessment data,
- Mentor relationships,
- Parent and family relationships,
- Transition to college, and
- Advice to others

Next, the transcribed data was reviewed once more to ensure key findings were marked and to extract specific examples and quotes from the participants, from the mentors and/or from the parents. An outline was developed to identify the resiliency traits documented for each participant. A narrative of the resiliency traits for each participant concluded each of the three case studies.

Summary

Because this study hoped to convey meaning and culture of the lived experiences of the participants in this study, a qualitative approach was employed. Further, because fieldwork was utilized in the research process, an ethnographic study was appropriate. Denzin's and Lincoln's (2005) five phases of the research project helped to frame the basis for the research. Participant interviews through open-ended interview questions, descriptive field notes and document analysis were the techniques employed. The data analysis relied on

Swidler's (2001) conceptualization of cultural repertoires. Lastly, critical themes or domain structures (Spradley, 1979) identified from the shared and observed experiences provided for an interpretation of how three low-socioeconomic, Hispanic, immigrant students experienced their lives in preparation for college admission and enrollment. These critical themes helped to also reveal the participant's individual perspectives on public education.

Chapter Four

DATA PRESENTATION

This study was conducted to explore how three recent high school graduates, who immigrated to the United States, successfully attained a high school diploma and graduated ready for college credit bearing coursework. The criteria for inclusion in this study was that students be of Hispanic descent, be classified as low-income and immigrated to the United States during their public school years. The following research questions were examined: What is the nature of the phenomena of the selected Hispanic immigrant students' ability to attain college readiness while so many other borderland students are not able to do the same? How did culture help to shape the students' decisions and actions regarding post-secondary education? What are the attitudes and opinions of the selected students in regards to high school graduation and the pursuit of higher education? What factors have contributed to the development of the students' attitudes and opinions?

This chapter shares the stories of the three participants included in the study from their own perspective in terms of the challenges and successes they have encountered along the path to college readiness. The high school environment for each participant is detailed along with each participant's high school coursework, assessment data, and extra-curricular activities. In addition the perspective of each participant is shared from a significant mentor identified by each participant. The perspective of each participant is also detailed by one of each participant's parents. The experiences in terms of the transition to college are articulated from each of the participants. Finally, this chapter provides advice as presented from the participants themselves. Their advice is offered as a summary of their own successes. The

confidentiality of each participant is protected through the use of assigned pseudonyms for each participants, parent and identified mentor.

Case One: Jazmin Morales, Junior at Texas Woman's University

Childhood. Jazmin was raised in a large city in northern Mexico that sits on the United States and Mexico border up until age twelve. She was born as the oldest child of three girls to two loving parents and was described by her mother as a happy and healthy baby girl. Jazmin experienced a normal childhood despite the move from Mexico to the United States when she was only twelve years old and being raised in a low-income family. Jazmin was always serious about her studies in school both in Mexico and in the United States and she was organized and neat in everything she did – both of these traits are evident in her adult life as well. Additionally, she was and continues to be very protective of her two younger sisters. She is also a role model and teacher to her two sisters.

Upon moving to the United States, Jazmin was supposed to be enrolled in the eighth grade at her middle school, but rather was enrolled in seventh grade because, as stated to Jazmin and her family by school personnel, she did not understand the English language. Leaving her father in Mexico due to his career, Jazmin, her mother and two younger sisters first resided with an uncle for a few months until they were able to find a permanent residence of their own. Jazmin and her mother and sisters found a permanent residence in the southern part of Border City just a few feet away from the United States and Mexico Border – one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city as well as the state.

Jazmin admits that there were struggles during her first year in school in the United States. Jazmin needed to learn how to speak, listen, read, and write in English. At the same time, Jazmin had to navigate an unfamiliar education system and make decisions for herself

that could have long-term implications. However, she was never alone in these decisions. At first Jazmin wanted to return to her life in Mexico where things were familiar to her, where her friends were, where her childhood home was. However, Jazmin and her mother both expressed that once the English language was attained, life at school was much easier for her. Additionally, Jazmin was fortunate that her mother was very involved in her education. Jazmin's mother explained how even though some of the staff at Jazmin's middle school did not communicate in Spanish, her mother never let that prevent her from seeking information and becoming an advocate for all three of her daughters. Jazmin's mother expressed how she would be at the school on a regular basis to ensure that her daughters were doing what they needed to and to learn about how she could support them at home. Even though Jazmin's father did not make the move with the family, there has always been a close relationship between him and the family. Additionally, Jazmin's father knew the importance of a good education and wanted nothing less than for his daughters to acquire an education in the United States. Jazmin shared that she regularly saw her father during her middle and high school years and that he wanted Jazmin to be the first to graduate from high school and set high goals for herself. To this day, Jazmin's father still supports her and her siblings in their quest for a better education by providing financial support and emotional support.

Jazmin relied on the emotional support from both of her parents and acquired the English language in just one year. Even though her parents no longer lived together, they both shared the same goal for Jazmin and her sisters – that is to graduate from high school in the United States and then get a college education. She pushed herself to do her best in school by reading and studying hard every day. In the eighth grade she showed interest in a program known as Upward Bound. Jazmin went to a meeting in the spring semester of her eighth

grade year to learn more about this program after having been nominated by one of her middle school teachers. It was at this meeting that she realized that she knew she had to push herself even further in order to become better educated and have a chance to go to college. It was in this program that Jazmin first met Miguel Jaquez, her mentor for the program but also a mentor that helped to keep her dreams and the dreams of her parents alive and attainable.

Once Jazmin was selected to participate in the Upward Bound Program, she committed herself 100% to it by always attending the summer workshops and the Saturday seminars. Jazmin learned the importance of taking more rigorous courses if she was to be better prepared for college.

High school environment. Jazmin's high school resides in the south central side of Border City and is only a few feet away from the United States and Mexico border. Several government housing projects as well as older single-family residences reside within the feeder pattern. According to the latest census data available (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) the annual median household income for households in this high school feeder pattern is \$17,723. The campus serves students from the south central and the downtown areas and is one of ten comprehensive high schools in the largest school district in the region. The latest data (Texas Education Agency, 2012a) for the high school indicates a student enrollment of 1144 students. Of this enrollment, 99% are classified as Hispanic and less than 1% are classified as white. Just over 96% of the student population is identified as economically disadvantaged and 32% of the student population is considered to be of Limited English Proficient (LEP) status. The percentage of students meeting the college readiness benchmarks in both mathematics and English language arts is significantly lower at 27% compared to 52% for the state, 41% for the region and 39% for the district. Fifty-four percent of the graduating class of 2010 took

either the ACT or the SAT. This is in comparison to 63% of graduates for the state, 71% of graduates for the region and 67% of graduates for the district. The combined mathematics and critical reading average SAT score for graduates in 2010 was an 841 compared to a 985 for the state, an 859 for the region and a 943 for the district. The average composite ACT score for graduates in 2010 was a 15.7 compared to a 20.5 for the state, an 18.1 for the region and an 18.2 for the district (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

The student to teacher ratio in the core subject and foreign language content areas at Jazmin's high school is at 16.02. This compares to 17.7 for the district, 18.94 for the region and 18.56 for the state. The average years of experience for teachers are 11.6 years and the race and ethnic representation of the teaching staff is slightly different than that of the student population. Four percent of the teaching staff is African American, 79% is Hispanic and 17% is white. The per pupil expenditures are higher at Jazmin's campus (\$8,228) in comparison to the district (\$7,262) and the region (\$7,191) but lower than the \$8,802 per pupil spending at the state level (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

High school coursework. Jazmin began her high school coursework in middle school. Based on an analysis of her high school transcript, Jazmin started her freshman year in 2006-2007 with two full credits already awarded. These included a full credit of Spanish I and one half credit each in Keyboarding and Career Connections. While her freshman and sophomore years consisted of general education courses in the content areas and in some electives, her junior and senior years demonstrated a much more rigorous schedule of courses. She began taking several pre-advanced placement, advanced placement, and dual credit courses. These included successful completion of Advanced Placement English Language and Composition, Pre-Advanced Placement Algebra II, Pre-Advanced Placement Chemistry,

and Advanced Placement United States History in her junior year. In her senior year she successfully completed Pre-Advanced Placement Pre-Calculus, Physics, and Pre-Advanced Placement Anatomy and Physiology, Dual Credit United States Government and Dual Credit English IV. Coursework was not the only factor that played a role in helping Jazmin to prepare for college; Jazmin became involved in school activities.

Jazmin demonstrated a strong commitment to her coursework by managing to attain mostly A's and B's with some C's. However, the courses in which she made C's were the Advanced Placement or dual credit courses. Even with her challenging schedule in her last two years of high school, Jazmin managed to graduate with a 95.32 grade point average and was ranked in the top five percent of her class as number 12 out of 231 graduates.

Extra-curricular activities. While Jazmin concentrated solely on doing her best and getting a feel for high school in her freshman year, she became involved in journalism in her sophomore year. She continued this activity through her senior year by being a part of the school newspaper and the yearbook club. She was also involved in the Spanish club and the environmental club. Jazmin stated that much of her free time was consumed with Upward Bound activities but that these activities really prepared her for life after high school.

Mentor relationships. Jazmin shared how several teachers throughout her high school years supported and encouraged her to do her best. However, there were key teachers that helped to shape and mold her onto the path for college. One such teacher was her freshman English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher – Ms. Arias. Upon entering the United States, Jazmin was classified as a Limited English Proficient (LEP) student. Jazmin recalls how Ms. Arias really motivated her and her classmates to do their best in order that they no longer be classified as LEP students. Because of the encouragement

from Ms. Arias, Jazmin did attain success and was no longer classified as a LEP student two years after moving to the United States. In order for a student to be classified as non-LEP, the student must attain an advanced high on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System and successfully pass the state reading assessment in grades three through eight. In high school, the student must successfully pass the English Language Arts state assessment that coincides with the grade level and/or course that the student is enrolled in at the time of the assessment (Texas Education Agency, 2012b).

Assessment scores. Jazmin attained a score of 2230 on the English Language Arts Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills assessment in the spring semester of her freshman year. While this score was only 130 points higher than the required passing score of 2100, in her junior year she scored a 2403, which was well above the passing standard and at the commended level. This score also meant that she correctly answered 90% or more of the items on the assessment. In addition, this score was more than 200 points higher than the required 2200 necessary in order to be classified as college ready in English Language Arts. She also attained a score of 2401 in mathematics, therefore qualifying her to be considered college ready in both subjects (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2010a).

Jazmin's success in her English classes and on the state assessment for English Language Arts is also attributed to the support of her sophomore, junior and senior year English teacher, Mr. Valdez. Jazmin felt lucky to have had the same teacher for three consecutive years. Jazmin described Mr. Valdez as very strict but at the same time, very motivating. In her words, Jazmin stated:

He was really good in keeping me going. Because when I was with him I moved from regular English to AP English and then to Dual Credit English. He was very helpful in motivating me to take more challenging courses.

Having Mr. Valdez for three consecutive years helped her to develop a trusting relationship with him – one that despite his firmness with students, enabled Jazmin to filter the support and encouragement from his rigid routines.

Another key teacher during Jazmin's high school years was her Spanish teacher and the sponsor of the Spanish club – Ms. Soriano. Ms. Soriano and Jazmin developed a positive relationship because of her work in the Spanish club. Ms. Soriano emphasized the importance of never forgetting one's heritage and the importance of one's native language. This helped Jazmin to develop strong and lasting respect for Ms. Soriano. In the end, Ms. Soriano was one of two mentors that nominated her for the Gates Millennium Scholarship, which Jazmin was awarded late in her senior year. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provides funding for the Gates Millennium Scholarship. This scholarship is awarded to 1000 minority and Pell Grant eligible students across the United States each year that have at least a 3.3 grade point average and demonstrate strong community service (Gates Millennium Scholarship Program, 2012). The other mentor that nominated Jazmin for this scholarship was her Upward Bound counselor, Miguel Jaquez. When asked if she could name one person other than a family member that played a significant role in Jazmin's high school years, Jazmin easily shared Miguel Jaquez's name.

Mr. Jaquez first introduced Jazmin to the idea of the Upward Bound program in the spring semester of her eighth grade year. As a college enrollment advisor for the Upward Bound program at Southwest Border University, he was taught early the importance of

helping others and committed himself to a profession that supports and encourages those less fortunate. It is no surprise why Jazmin selected him as a significant mentor for her. He was educated at a small private catholic high school in Border City, Texas. After his high school graduation, Miguel attended the University of California at Berkley and majored in psychology. At the end of his bachelor's degree, Miguel did some internship work in teaching at Berkley High School and made the decision to attend Teacher's College at Columbia University to continue his education. After completing his master's degree, he returned to Border City and began work for a non-profit community agency that provides outreach services to areas of the city that are located in the most impoverished areas. His primary role was to provide job re-training services and to work with youth. This work eventually led to his completion of his Ph. D. in educational leadership at a neighboring state university.

Miguel's work with the Upward Bound program at Southwest Border University is a part-time position that requires most of his time on weekends to support and work with approximately 140 Border City students. The goal of the Upward Bound program is to provide college readiness training to low-income, first generation, under-represented students. This was a natural fit for Jazmin, who enthusiastically committed herself to every aspect of the program. The Saturday sessions are full day sessions in which students receive English and mathematics skills support as well as gain insight from guest speakers who have attained their own educational success. Miguel expressed the importance of parent participation in the Upward Bound program, as parents must work alongside their child to complete the Federal Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) as well as other admission components. The parent component was stressed as a key factor in the success of students in the Upward Bound

program. Miguel's own words demonstrate the level of commitment required of the parents for the success of Upward Bound students:

What we do during those Saturdays is that I typically schedule meetings at 7:00 in the morning. And so two hours before we begin our general session at 9:00, students must have a parent. I always insist on it, whenever I advise student upperclassmen (juniors and seniors), we have 34 seniors. I make a point of reaching out to each and every one of our students, by way of conference. So basically, I work up twenty to thirty minutes on any given Saturday – for example 7:00 to 7:20, 7:20 to 7:40, and just slowly, bilingually, explain to the students and their parents how to submit and complete the FAFSA financial aid, how to apply online and giving them a time frame. And that's on Saturdays, so Saturdays are very busy.

Mr. Jaquez also expressed that the real focus of the program is for the students to understand the importance of the overall message – that through hard work and persistence, a college education is well within their reach. Much of this message is expressed through the delivery of soft skills instruction not traditionally taught in the high school setting. These skills include resume writing, networking, being attentive and the importance of being on time.

It was important to gain the perspective of the participant from the eyes of the mentor. During the mentor interview, Mr. Jaquez was asked what he remembers most about Jazmin. He portrayed her as:

Soft spoken, quiet, but never missed a UB Saturday. She was always on time and I think one reason she was soft spoken and quiet even to this day... she was an ESL

student. She's from [Mexico], but I think part of her nature is not introverted but thoughtful and very economical with her language.

Mr. Jaquez also shared that much of Jazmin's success was the result of the support she received from her mother. Jazmin's mother remained in constant communication with the Upward Bound program through phone calls, emails and text messages as well as the required face-to-face conferences. Mr. Jaquez mentioned that Jazmin also had the support of caring teachers at her high school. However, he says that the final reason Jazmin attained so much success was simply due to her character. He said:

She was always focused on studying and she also mentioned that she dreamt about studying beyond elementary, beyond high school even when she was in [Mexico]. So when they crossed over, you know the border, she was on a pathway to success...she was able to link with role models and mentors. She was responsive.

Mr. Jaquez also shared that once Jazmin sits down and opens up to you in a one on one conversation, she is very focused with her expressions and that she will look you straight in the eye and let you know exactly what she wants and how she will make it happen. Finally, Mr. Jaquez ended the interview by simply stating, "she's going places."

Parent relationship. Jazmin's mother was interviewed in their small apartment on the south side of Border City, just a few blocks away from Jazmin's high school. In their modest but very clean and orderly apartment, Ms. Morales graciously shared her portrayal of Jazmin as a proud, yet very humble parent. Ms. Morales explained that while she, herself, only has an 11th grade education in Mexico, she has always wanted more for her daughters. She explained that Jazmin has always been very studious and has always liked school. When school would let out for the summer vacation, Ms. Morales expressed how Jazmin would cry

because she wanted to stay in school year round. Ms. Morales also shared that of her three daughters, Jazmin is more dedicated about school but that all three girls have always done well in school. Ms. Morales expressed that even with her own limited education, she wished she had more for herself but that parenting “has a lot to do with the parents having a better perspective on how to raise kids based on their own educational experiences.”

Upon moving to the United States, Ms. Morales explained that Jazmin seemed to do well in school but did feel the change and wanted to return to her old friends in Mexico; however, Ms. Morales expressed that “when I decided to bring them I made a decision to never go back because I’ve seen other kids that go back and they get lost.”

When asked about Jazmin’s initial enrollment in middle school upon moving to the United States, Ms. Morales stated that there were no real issues other than the fact that she and her daughters were temporarily living with her brother and did not have a permanent address. Permanent housing has been the most challenging part for Ms. Morales and her daughters. She expressed how complicated the process of finding and leasing an apartment has been but that they have finally settled into their current apartment.

Ms. Morales stated that Jazmin always had a lot of homework and that she was able to help her with some of her middle school homework as Jazmin was learning the English language because she understood some English herself. When asked about reading with her daughters, Ms. Morales acknowledged that Jazmin has always liked to read and that Jazmin loved the way that her mother read to her and Jazmin would ask her to read to her everyday.

Educational goals were discussed during the interview. In terms of the goals that Ms. Morales set for Jazmin and her sisters, she stated that:

It has always been a goal for them to finish school and get a career. I have always told them to take advantage of the opportunity that they have here and to study. We made the effort to bring them over here and for them to take advantage of that effort ... and for it to come from them, because we sometimes tell them, but they decide otherwise. Fortunately, my daughters have been good daughters and they understand the value of being here.

Jazmin's mother was very involved in her education as well as her sisters. Ms. Morales expressed how she would meet with school personnel all of the time during the first years because she wanted to know about schooling in the United States and understand how the system works and how the students handle themselves in the school environment. Finally, a closing observation from Ms. Morales was the mentor role that Jazmin plays for her two sisters. Ms. Morales explained that Jazmin has always been concerned with the academic performance of both of her younger sisters and always encourages them and helps them with homework so that they will have good grades.

Transition to college. Jazmin pointed out events that helped her to make the decision to leave her hometown and her family to attend Texas Woman's University. One such event was the University of Texas Math and Science Program. Jazmin spent one full month in the summer prior to her junior year in high school at the university with other kids from all over the state that were interested in math and science. It was during this program that Jazmin learned about Texas Woman's University and the opportunities they provided to students just like her. Jazmin revealed how this summer program helped her to get to know people from other cultures and "to have the strength to be away from home." Another event was the summer program at Southwest Border University in which Jazmin would spend six weeks of

her summer improving her English and mathematics skills while also gaining knowledge about college life.

The decision to attend Texas Woman's University was still a difficult decision for Jazmin and her family. Jazmin was offered a small scholarship from the university to supplement expenses in addition to the Gates Millennium Scholarship. Miguel Jaquez helped Jazmin with this decision as well by sharing with her the experiences she would gain by leaving home to attend college.

While these occurrences helped Jazmin make the decision to attend college away from her family and friends, she still maintained that it was a very difficult decision. Jazmin was nervous about living with three other girls who were from different cities and represented different ethnicities than her. She also worried about leaving her mother and sisters. Finally, she was fearful about the difficulty and the size of the classes. Some of the classes were as large as 200 students and she had never experienced taking a seminar course of this size in high school. In the end though, having three roommates the first year of school and taking seminar courses was a great help to her. This allowed her to make new friends and helped to ease her homesickness. In addition, her three roommates were from the general vicinity and were able to help Jazmin adjust to life in a new city.

The first semester away from home, Jazmin would call her mom and sisters everyday. With the adjustment to life away from home, the calls are less frequent today but still allow for Jazmin to feel connected to her home and her family. During the last interview Jazmin expressed how her family still relies on her and she gave the example of how she was helping her sister with her homework over the phone. Jazmin remains in contact with Miguel Jaquez also for support and advise. Phone calls are just but one means of communication – she and

her family rely on text messaging and social media such as Facebook⁵ as a way to stay connected.

Now that Jazmin has settled into life as a college student, she expressed that time management challenges her more than anything else. She shared how life in high school was so full of routines and in her own words,

When you're in high school you set up a routine like go to school, come home, do your homework. But as a college student you choose your classes, you manage your own time; you manage when you want to study and when you want to leave.

Jazmin seeks help from others at the university in addition to her roommates. Jazmin was fortunate to meet Ms. Bethany Ramirez, the Director of Intercultural Services at the university. Ms. Ramirez sought out Jazmin as a way to meet all Gates Millennium Scholars on campus. Through this connection, Jazmin was introduced to other programs that were of interest to her. One such program that Jazmin became involved in is G-Force. G-Force is a recognized student organization at Texas Woman's University that helps create the momentum in other students to go to college. G-Force at TWU works with 16 GO Centers at area high schools where TWU students act as mentors to underserved minority students. A GO Center is a college and career information center primarily located in high schools. GO Centers focus on creating a school-wide college-going culture and promote college awareness and accessibility.

Jazmin makes use of all resources available to the students at the university in order to continue on her path to success. Jazmin relies on support from her college advisors, professors, teacher assistants and lab tutors whenever she encounters a need for help. She is

⁵ Facebook is a social networking service launched in February 2004, owned and operated by Facebook, Inc.

committed to her plan to obtain a bachelor's degree in Chemistry with a minor in education within a year and then further her education by pursuing a master's degree. Jazmin claims that her main goal for now is to keep her grade point average up so that she will qualify for further scholarship funding as she pursues her next level of education. Though she is not certain what path to pursue for her master's degree, she believes it will either be in a science field or in education.

Advice to others. Jazmin was asked to share her advice to future graduating seniors with similar characteristics. Jazmin's advice is best described in her direct quote:

To never give up. It's hard to continue sometimes. You are like I don't know what to do or you're confused. But always try to rely on the people that support you and ask for advice from people that have already been there or expressing that in your questions; that they are trying to help you find the right answers. Never try to keep everything to yourself. You have to ask for advice or questions to anyone like your teachers, college advisors or professors; that's why they are there – to help you out.

Case Two: Javier Loya, Junior at Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Childhood. Javier Loya was born in a large urban city that rests on the Mexico and United States border. He started school in first grade at age four in August of 1997, just one month prior to his fifth birthday in September. He was given a test to determine if he was ready for school at such a young age and not surprising, passed all sections in order to start school early. Javier's family sent him to a private catholic school in the *Emilio Zapata* neighborhood even though Javier did not understand how the family could afford to send him there. The following year, Javier's parents separated and Javier moved with his mother to a new neighborhood called *División del norte* and began attending a public school. Javier

expressed how he remembers this school because he liked it. Yet, in fourth grade, his parents reconciled and he moved back to *Emilo Zapata* and attended the same private school once more. After the fourth grade, Javier's parents decided to immigrate to the United States. Javier remembers that he really did not understand what this meant at the time. Upon enrolling in public school in the United States, Javier's family lived in a south central neighborhood in Border City. He was told that he would have to repeat the fourth grade because he did not understand the English language. Javier was placed in a bilingual fourth grade class that first year. Javier expressed the anxiety he recalls from his first year of school in the United States:

I remember it a lot because it was a struggle whenever we had to pull out our English textbooks because they gave us the textbooks in English and the exact same thing in Spanish...I remember we would have hours of Spanish blocks in a day, just Spanish or English depending on what day it was. So, I remember the first week of school where they, the teacher was going down the line, he lined us up and sat us in alphabetical order and what he did is he started with the first one and asked them to read and he went down the line and this was the English book. I had no idea what was going on. I couldn't follow but I tried to see the words; to see if something made sense...When he came to me he asked me something and I didn't understand what he was saying and one of my classmates was sitting behind me and he would help me a lot. He would tell me what was going on; so I would turn around and ask him what did he say, "que dijo" and he told me he wants you to read and I told him this is the first time I read. I don't know any English and then [the teacher] told me to bring the book up to his desk. He opened up his book and then he told me to point to where he

was reading and to read exactly what he said and I just repeated every single word he said like a full paragraph. Every time it was my turn, it was the same thing. He would bring me up and it wasn't for embarrassment, it was more so I could learn. He did that every time we read and I actually learned English like that because by fifth grade I was in a monolingual class.

Javier learned the English language in only nine short months. At the start of fifth grade, he was placed in a monolingual class. Javier's family moved again, this time to a central neighborhood in Border City. He changed schools and stated that, "sixth grade was kind of easy. It wasn't until eighth grade where it got challenging because I took algebra and a humanities class." Javier expressed that even though the humanities course was very challenging to him, he learned a lot and liked his school.

When asked about his family, Javier smiled, started with his mom and simply stated, "She's a great, great lady. She encouraged me a lot, she's awesome; I don't know how else to explain her." Javier's parents separated again when he was in the seventh grade and his mom has raised him and his siblings on her own ever since. Javier is the fourth of six children. He has an older sister and an older brother who both have families of their own. However, Javier has never really been close to his brother. Next, he has an older sister just above him in age at twenty-three and as Javier exclaims, "she has her life together." Javier has a younger sister that is eight years old and the youngest is a brother who is six years old and in kindergarten. At one point, Javier thought his older brother was actually an uncle. It was not until he was in the sixth grade that he realized he was really his brother. Javier's grandmother decided to care for his older brother because his mother was already trying to raise his older sister as a young mother still in her teens and could not care for another baby.

Javier expressed how his father “ditched my mom” and that he never thought of him as a dad that gave a lot of advice. Javier did express that his father does remind him to be careful from time to time, but that he does not call regularly to see how he is doing. Even though his parents are no longer together, Javier shared that his father does care because he sees that his father and his mother get along better and that his father visits the house to see his younger sister and brother.

High school environment. Javier’s high school resides in an older neighborhood in central Border City. It is surrounded by homes built in the early part of the twentieth century, many of which are in disrepair. The median household income for households in this high school feeder pattern is \$23,943 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The campus opened its doors in 1929 as the second high school in the largest school district in the region. The latest data for the high school indicates a student enrollment of 1591 students (Texas Education Agency, 2012a). Of this enrollment, 91% are classified as Hispanic, 5% are classified as white and 4% are classified as African American. Just under 80% of the student population is identified as economically disadvantaged and 19% of the student population is considered to be of Limited English Proficient (LEP) status. The percentage of students meeting the college readiness benchmarks in both mathematics and English language arts is significantly lower at 28% compared to 52% for the state, 41% for the region and 39% for the district. One bright spot for the campus is that over 90% of the graduating class took either the ACT or the SAT. This is in comparison to only 63% of graduates for the state, 71% of graduates for the region and 67% of graduates for the district. The combined mathematics and critical reading average SAT score for graduates in 2010 was an 848 compared to a 985 for the state, an 859 for the region and a 943 for the district. The average composite ACT score for graduates in 2010

was a 16.4 compared to a 20.5 for the state, an 18.1 for the region and an 18.2 for the district (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

The average class size at Javier's high school is 18.92. This compares to 17.7 for the district, 18.94 for the region and 18.56 for the state. The teacher ethnicity and race distribution is very different than that of the student population. Five percent of the teaching staff is African American, 58% is Hispanic, 3% is Asian, and 34% is white. Additionally, the average years of teaching experience for teachers at Javier's high school is 12.3, this is no different than the average years of experience for teachers at the district level. Finally, the annual per pupil expenditures are much lower at \$6,915 compared to \$7,262 for the district, \$7,191 for the region and \$8,802 for the state (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

High school coursework. Javier's transcript analysis confirms what he shared during the first interview. He received high school credit for Pre-AP Algebra I in the eighth grade. In addition, he received one half credit for a keyboarding class he took in middle school. While he enrolled in general English language arts courses throughout his high school year, Javier took advantage of the most challenging course opportunities available in mathematics by enrolling and successfully completing Pre-AP Geometry, Pre-AP Algebra II, Pre-AP Pre-Calculus and AP Calculus AB. Javier also successfully completed AP Chemistry, AP World History, AP United States Government and AP Macroeconomics. Additionally, Javier managed to maintain an A average in all of these courses. Of particular note, while Javier did take four years of science courses, he did not complete physics. This was something that Dr. Taylor shared during his interview as well as Javier during his second interview. The circumstances regarding physics are presented in a later section of this study. Finally, Javier

completed two years of French as his foreign language requirement; therefore, making him tri-lingual.

Javier established a strong commitment to his coursework and extra-curricular activities simultaneously. Even with this need to balance coursework and school activities, he managed to maintain a 96.52 grade point average and graduated in the top of his class as the number four graduate out of 286 graduates. In fact, Javier never made a grade lower than an 84 during all four years of high school. Interestingly, the final course grade of 84 was not an advanced course, but rather a general biology class taken during his sophomore year. Thus, Javier's commitment to excellence is even more evident based on his high academic success in those courses aimed at best preparing him for life beyond high school.

Extra-curricular activities. Javier enjoyed playing sports in high school. He played on his school's football team all four years of high school. This was something that he continued from middle school even though football was interrupted in his eighth grade year due to surgery for an eye injury. Football allowed Javier a way to let out his frustration. He said that he needed football because it allowed him to "hit people." In addition to football, Javier played in the school orchestra both in middle school and high school. He played the cello and the bass and expressed that it was fun even though he never saw himself playing beyond high school. Javier expressed that because of the courses he was taking in his junior and senior years, he really did not have much free time for extra-curricular activities other than those he was already involved in. In his junior year, Javier was inducted into the National Honor Society and became active in this organization, something that was dormant at his high school until the arrival of a new principal, Dr. Joe Taylor.

Assessment scores. Dr. Taylor's arrival at Javier's high school proved to be helpful not only to the school as a whole, but in particular his arrival was especially helpful to Javier. Javier exclaimed:

Dr. Taylor was the best and main source I had. He wanted to know if I had taken the SAT or ACT, which I already had and I didn't do that great on those tests... but when Dr. Taylor wrote this letter of recommendation to MIT, he said he told them about my English being my second language and that explained the low scores in those subjects.

While Javier and Dr. Taylor both shared that the scores Javier obtained in critical reading and writing on the SAT were not very good, his math scores were through the roof. In addition, he took the ACT two times scoring a composite 19 the first time and a 27 the second time with a 35 in math and a 31 in science. A score of 35 in math is just one point below a perfect ACT math score of a 36. He scored a 710 on the math section for the SAT, which was clearly high enough for any college or university. But when combined with his critical reading and writing, the overall scores did not look as good. That is why Dr. Taylor's letter proved to be instrumental in Javier's admission to MIT. It is no surprise that Javier identified Dr. Taylor as a significant mentor during his high school years.

Mentor relationships. Dr. Joe Taylor became principal at Javier's high school as Javier was transitioning to his junior year in the summer of 2008. Dr. Taylor was a perfect fit for this position. He was born and raised in Border City and knew the community well. He is the son of college-educated parents, although his father did not receive his degree until after Dr. Taylor was born. As the youngest of four children, Dr. Taylor proudly admits that everyone in his family has obtained a college degree. Dr. Taylor started out in education as a teacher at a small private catholic high school and then moved to a public middle school by

serving as a special education teacher for behaviorally challenged students. From there, Dr. Taylor became an assistant principal in a small neighboring school district at the only middle school in the district. From there he quickly moved up to the role of principal at the same school. An opportunity opened up at Dr. Taylor's own middle school back in Border City and he made the decision to put his name in for the position. After serving as a very successful principal at his own middle school for four years, Dr. Taylor was given the opportunity to take on a principal role at an inner-city academically struggling high school – Javier's high school. When asked what Dr. Taylor does specifically to help prepare students for college, his answer was more than what is expected of a comprehensive high school principal. He stated:

I call in any senior who wants to come in on Saturdays and we go to our college readiness room and this past Saturday is let's get everything set. Where are you going to apply? Where are the best places to apply? Let's get your "shoe in schools" and let's start narrowing it down...because you have a lot of kids saying, "I'm going to go to college, I'm gonna get it done, I'm gonna get it done," but they don't know how to get it done. They don't know how to sit down and get the plan started. So, my typical day is making sure, have you started, have you come into the room where we've gotten you set to go, have you taken your second ACT yet, are we there yet...I actually know where these kids are (pointing to a stack of folders), these are kids that I was working with on Saturday and they've given me their folder, they've given me their email. They're going to be given all the web addresses for the common application for the applytexas.org. All of their deadlines will be given to them when they need to have things, like the first Southwest Border University scholarship

application is due November 1st...So it's doing that and knowing the kids that I have gotten to, seeing them in the cafeteria. It's like "did you get started over the weekend?" Finding the kids that I haven't seen yet and especially the ones that I have when I look at their ACT scores and the kids that I know really can do well but they don't know they can really do well and say "Have you come in yet? We're expecting you." And making sure that we're getting these kids and seeing them face to face and starting to get them to apply and starting to get them to believe that they can do it.

Dr. Taylor clarified that he works alongside with one school counselor to ensure the Saturday sessions are well managed. He also emphasized that he restructured the responsibilities of this one counselor so that she is the "go to" person for anything regarding college planning, college admissions, and scholarships.

Dr. Taylor expressed how as a principal he must help his students to understand that they have so many opportunities in front of them and that they can accomplish whatever they set out to do. He merely puts action behind his words by helping students to actually begin taking advantage of these opportunities. Moreover, Dr. Taylor began making adjustments to the course offerings at the high school by providing more Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement courses as well as dual credit courses. Dr. Taylor also emphasized the importance of being there for the kids by attending as many activities as possible because in his own emphatic words, "It's really important to the kids!" Dr. Taylor's support of the students at his high school has led to a tradition of students lining up outside of his office door after report cards have been sent out so that the students can share with him their individual grades. When asked why they do this, Dr. Taylor could only say, "They just want to show me...they want feedback."

Dr. Taylor's passion for college readiness was very unmistakable. He fervently believes that any and all students can and should obtain a college education. This approach was emphasized based on a story he shared about his own older brother and how his father forced him into to college:

I had an older brother who was not, to put it nicely, was not a good student in high school, who graduated in the bottom portion of his class. Poor grades, poor attendance, I mean poor attitude, everything. And my dad's whole concept was, "So what, you're going to college" and it was a kicking into college and you will do it and he did wake up. He woke up real well; he's very well set to say the least. And it was that push from the parents saying, "You may not think you're ready now but you are ready and you are going to pursue this" and it was that refusal of "No" and I guess I look at some of my kids who I normally wouldn't even look at as college ready if I'm looking at them on a piece of paper, but I know they can do it. I know it's just a time of waking up and I guess I get scared with all the testing that we do because we're starting to determine kids' lives before they've even opened up their eyes.

Dr. Taylor also expressed how Dr. Steven Murdock changed his perspective of preparing students for life after high school. He shared that Dr. Murdock was his motivation to ensure that his high school would not neglect any student based on his or her ethnicity or race because they very well could be the doctors and lawyers of tomorrow. Dr. Taylor expressed how the entire school culture at his school has changed in recent years. Though, he was too humble to accept the positive shift in culture due to his leadership. The year prior to his arrival in 2008, the most recent graduating class only had 10% of its graduates attending a two- or four-year college. Even more distressing was the fact that the class of 2008 only had

198 graduates when four years prior as freshmen the class was well over 500 students. Dr. Taylor's latest figures indicated that 91% of graduates were admitted to at least one four-year college or university.

When asked what Dr. Taylor remembers about first meeting Javier, he shared that, "he looked like a thug and yet he was so nice." Dr. Taylor also remembers the first time when he really remembered who Javier was. He stated that it was at the National Honor Society Induction Ceremony during Javier's junior year and that the school inducted 115 students that year because NHS had been non-existent for four years. After the ceremony, Dr. Taylor remembers Javier in his very nicely pressed pink dress shirt coming up to him and thanking him for the ceremony and then asking him, "What exactly is NHS?"

During one of Dr. Taylor's initial meetings with Javier, Dr. Taylor shared how his SAT math scores were good enough to go to Harvard or Princeton or Yale or even MIT. It was at that time that Javier said, "Sir, I've heard of the other three, but what's MIT?" That is when Javier began researching more about MIT on his own. After doing his own research on MIT, Javier discovered that representatives from the university would be at a local small Catholic high school one evening the following week. Javier never hesitated and asked Dr. Taylor if he would join him at the presentation. It was during this session that Javier was totally sold on the idea of MIT as Dr. Taylor stated:

I remember going there and they gave a whole spiel and I think it was the slide that they showed with the car on top of the MIT dome and knowing that this was one of the pranks that the students did and Javier said "how did they do that ... I just got to go there, I just got to go there!" And I go, they only accept about eight to 11 percent of their applicants, but let's put in the best [application] that you can.

Javier provided context of the times that he and Dr. Taylor shared on those Saturdays as he planned out everything for college admissions. Javier said exactly what Dr. Taylor advised him to do:

Apply to a safe school, the one you know you're going to get into. And for everybody that was Southwest Border University. He wanted everyone in the senior class to apply to Southwest Border University, no exceptions. He wanted everyone to have a secondary school out of town...it didn't matter where, and to have a dream school, the one you really wanted to go to. The one you would work hard at if you got in. He wanted you to apply to those two schools. So I had Southwest Border University, two secondary schools, UT Austin and Texas A & M.

Of course, his dream school was MIT and had been ever since Javier did some of his own research after he and Dr. Taylor were discussing his stellar SAT math scores. Javier began researching Ivy League schools on his own after the counselors at his school mentioned that he was Ivy League material. Once he saw the caliber of students at these institutions, Javier admitted that he felt like these schools were out of his reach. After one of his meetings with Dr. Taylor, Javier came across MIT and UT Austin. Both of these schools caught his attention because of something Dr. Taylor said that day in his office and because of the engineering programs available to prospective students. During the summer before Javier's senior year in high school, he ran into Dr. Taylor in the weight room while lifting weights for football. Javier said that he waited until Dr. Taylor was finished talking to the coaches and then went up to him and said, "Sir, my name is Javier and I want to know if you could help me get into MIT?" Javier expressed that Dr. Taylor never hesitated and said, "Sure, we can do that. Just come talk to me and I'll look at your transcript and we'll make this happen."

Dr. Taylor mentioned how Javier's residency status became an issue as time began winding down in his senior year. When the acceptance letters to the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A & M came in but without much financial aid it was then that Dr. Taylor became worried that Javier's chances for financial aid in general was a serious problem. Javier expressed his concern as well. However, the concern from Dr. Taylor was never evident to Javier. In fact, Javier expressed the support and encouragement that Dr. Taylor continually provided by stating, "You will be fine, MIT will take care of you. They have great financial aid packages." Javier currently is not a citizen of the United States but has temporary residency with a work permit. This prevented him from qualifying for federal financial aid through the FAFSA. Therefore, MIT's private foundation scholarship funds were the only hope that Javier had for a full scholarship.

Dr. Taylor expressed how fervent Javier was about not accepting anyone's charity, even to this day. He explained that there was an issue with sending Javier's latest test scores to MIT and that they almost did not get them there in time. Javier finally shared that the reason the scores had not been sent was that his family did not have a credit card to bill the fee for sending the scores electronically. Dr. Taylor recalls sharing a few choice words with Javier while he brought him to his office and went online to send the scores for him. The following day, Javier walked straight up to Dr. Taylor at breakfast time in the cafeteria and shook his hand and in it was a \$10.00 bill to repay Dr. Taylor for his "charity" from the previous day.

Dr. Taylor shared one other story that was deeply emotional for him in reference to Javier. It was during the application process to MIT and there were two essay questions that required Javier to be creative and respond so that the admission's office would get a good

sense of who he really was. Dr. Taylor shared that Javier was having difficulty with these two essay questions. One of the questions was to share something you have accomplished. Javier could not think of anything at first but with some probing from Dr. Taylor, Javier finally remembered that as an eighth grade student, he installed a swamp cooler on his mother's home all by himself. Dr. Taylor assured Javier that installing an air-conditioner as a young teenager without any help was certainly an accomplishment and something that he was sure would interest the admission's office at MIT.

The second question centered on an event or challenge that you have overcome. Dr. Taylor was surprised that Javier found this question to be difficult and thought that perhaps Javier was having a difficult time trying to pick one of the many challenges he had endured in his short life so far. But upon further probing, Javier said to Dr. Taylor, "I haven't had any challenges." Dr. Taylor expressed that he became visibly emotional and pointed to one of his own eyes to gesture to Javier that he should write about how he lost his vision as a young boy in the one eye. Javier was stern in his response and stated, "That has not been a problem, and I've been fine. It was difficult for my mother financially, but it's been nothing for me." In the end, both of these essay questions and his responses proved to the admission's office at MIT just how special Javier really is and he was accepted with a full scholarship to pursue his passion for mechanical engineering. When asked why Javier has attained the success that he has thus far, Dr. Taylor responded, "it's total intrinsic motivation. He is humble but there's also confidence there. No one quite like him that I have ever met."

Parent relationship. Javier's mother and two younger siblings live in an older small red brick house in a quiet central Border City neighborhood. Ms. Loya made herself available for the interview while the two younger children worked in the kitchen. She began by

explaining their move to the United States in 2001. She shared that there were many challenges with the move because they did not know anyone in the United States. At the time of the move, she and her husband were still together but that Mr. Loya was the only one with residency papers. She explained that Mr. Loya was supposed to take care of the papers for the children but he never did. In the end, when Mr. and Ms. Loya separated, he lost his residency for failing to report that he was living in Mexico once again. Other social issues were challenging to the family.

Ms. Loya expressed that there were racism issues when they first arrived. Additionally, she shared that people would make fun of Javier because of his darker complexion. Others made the assumption that Javier was a *cholo* based on his appearance.

Ms. Loya expressed that Javier has never enjoyed reading when they first arrived in the United States. This was something that, at times, seemed to be characterized by the injury Javier sustained to his left eye, yet at other times it was characterized by his lack of understanding of the English language. At his first elementary school, Ms. Loya stated, “He would cry whenever he had to read.” After his first year in school in the United States, he began to enjoy school much more. Ms. Loya shared how Javier began to realize how important school was when he got to middle school and then “all Javier wanted to do was to study, study, and study.”

During the early years after their move, Ms. Loya shared that finances were very tough and with Javier’s eye injury there was a need for lots of medical attention. She explained:

I used to sell *menudo* and clean houses. There are many guardian angels here with me. They have always helped me when we didn’t have anything to eat especially

during the time that Javier was very ill. We would just pack a sack lunch and get on the bus.

Currently, Ms. Loya works full time and cares for the two youngest children; however, Ms. Loya expressed that she wished she had continued in her own education as she only has a ninth grade education from Mexico. She said, “I am very intelligent and I know I could have done better.”

When asked about Javier’s time in high school, Ms. Loya shared that Javier always had homework but that she could not help him with it because she did not understand English. If Javier needed help, he would get it from his two older sisters. Ms. Loya explained, “I was surprised he studied so much because his eye always bothered him.” What's more, Javier was a tutor to other kids while in high school. Ms Loya described how other kids would be at the house but that they were there because Javier would help them with their homework. While she was not directly involved in his education by meeting with teachers, she knew enough to know how he was doing in school. She explained that she never went to the school to talk to the teachers or administrators about Javier because he always did well in school and she did not need to.

Even before the family moved to the United States and despite the fact that Javier did not enjoy reading, Ms. Loya knew that Javier was really good in school. At one of the schools he attended in Mexico, Ms. Loya would go to pick him up when it was time to leave but that Javier would “run me off and tell me to leave” because he enjoyed school so much.

Ms. Loya set goals for all of her children. She always reminded them to study hard in school so they would not have to work and struggle like she did. She also reminded them to always smile when they were around other people and to never forget where they came from.

Ms. Loya shared that she did not want her children to be like some of the immigrants who live in the community who act very different than when they lived in Mexico, those that try to pretend that they have always lived in the United States. Javier's family refers to him as *Pepe* and as a way to remind him of his roots. According to Ms. Loya, Javier always tells her that he will never forget where he came from.

Javier shared how his mother has always supported him by setting high expectations for schoolwork. One example of this encouragement was captured during the first interview:

The encouragement my mom gave me, it's kind of funny. When I would get my report card I would go show it to her and if a grade dropped from a 97 to a 96, she asked me "what happened here?"...That was a good thing. I would tell her it's still an A+. She was like but you dropped and then she would see a 97 to a 98 and she wouldn't say anything about that. So I was like ok come on. She would say, "You dropped," but I would say but I went up here and she'd say, "That doesn't matter." So that was good.

Javier also explained how his mother would threaten to move him to another high school that had a better reputation if he ever brought home grades lower than an A. Javier wanted to stay at his high school even though his mom thought it was not a great school. Javier said, "That definitely kept me going. I didn't want to go to Chapman."

At the conclusion of the interview, Ms. Loya was given the opportunity to share anything else that she felt was important. Ms. Loya stated:

I just wanted to say that all my kids are good. My daughter that just walked in is also studying mechanics and she would cry because she was not able to qualify for a scholarship because she does not have papers to apply. She is twenty-three and her

father had papers and he was legal to be here, but he never helped his daughter to become legal. Now that we're doing well, Javier tells me "remember mom when we didn't have anything and we were just starting; now look at where we're at. Thank you mom, thank you for everything." Javier always tells me that he is going to buy me a new house when he graduates.

Transition to college. Javier explained that it was not a difficult decision for him to make about attending MIT once he was admitted. It really came down to the fact that it was the only school that gave him enough financial aid to cover almost everything. Javier's mother was not too sure about him leaving and going so far away. At first she wanted him to stay and attend Southwest Border University and live at home, but with the near full ride endowment grant from MIT, she realized too how good an opportunity it was for him.

In terms of the admissions, the endowment grant was not the only consideration given to Javier. Javier expressed again how MIT took into account that Spanish was his first language. This was evident from his lower than usual SAT writing and critical reading scores.

Javier expressed that the most challenging part of college is the coursework. He stated that the coursework is challenging for most of his friends too so that made him feel better about the transition. He shared that each year the coursework has progressively become more challenging to him and that he is really stressed because of the difficult courses he is enrolled in this year. For his senior year, Javier will be required to write a senior thesis or partake in an Undergraduate Research Opportunity. Whatever decision Javier makes, he will be assigned a special advisor to work with him on his research. Aside from the challenging

coursework, Javier said, “it was a little bit of a culture shock not having people speak Spanish over here...it was definitely different.”

Even though he had already been admitted to MIT, the university required that Javier have some previous physics knowledge. This was something that Javier did not take in high school. Dr. Taylor felt responsible for not catching this issue in time so that Javier could take physics his senior year. However, Javier was invited to attend an early admissions summer program designed to provide him with the necessary knowledge and skills that most college freshmen have upon enrolling at MIT. This tailored program allowed Javier to become familiar with his new surroundings and campus life weeks prior to the start of his freshman year.

When Javier needs help with a class or has a question about something in reference to college, he depends on his fraternity brothers in Delta Kappa Epsilon. Delta Kappa Epsilon is a fraternity with many members from varsity and club athletics on the MIT campus. Javier expressed that his fraternity brothers really look out for each other and that he can depend on any of them when he needs help. Interestingly, Javier mentioned that he does not talk to faculty members outside of class. However, he stated that he has developed a friendship with one man who works at the machine shop for mechanical engineering because of the interesting machines in the shop.

When asked about his free time on campus, Javier did indicate that he does have time for some social activities but that “it gets you a little more behind. You always feel behind all of the time.” He mainly spends his time in class or at the fraternity house studying and doing work for his classes.

Javier does make time to call and check on his mom and his two younger siblings. He stated that he talks to them about two times per week. He will talk to his dad if he is at the house visiting his sister and brother, but other than that, his dad does not call him. Javier's mother shared that when Javier calls her sometimes his friends from school hear him talking to her in Spanish that his fluent Spanish intrigues them. Javier explained to his friends that his mother does not speak English. Ms. Loya shared that his friends do not really know what people from Border City are like.

Even though he is far from home, Javier manages to mentor and encourage his younger sister and brother. Both Javier and his mother explained that his younger brother really looks up to him and that he wants to be just like Javier. Javier's sister is very smart just like him and has shown an interest in someday attending Harvard. The distance from home makes it difficult for Javier to travel home more than once or twice a year, but during those times, he spends almost all of his time with his family. Javier understands the need to stay connected to his family as a way to remind his mother that he is proud of his heritage and will never forget where he comes from.

Advice to others. Javier shared similar context in terms of advice for his peers as well as his younger siblings. He said:

You have to ask for help; that's the main thing. You have to understand not to do it alone. I think I figured it out early enough to try to make this happen and that's the main thing. You have to have known someone that's going to help you and to me that was Dr. Taylor. I heard he was awesome, but I didn't know he was going to be this great. I mean he helped me out. Yeah! You might not want to talk about issues that

you might have, but if you don't you're not going to get past them. So, yeah, figure that out early enough to make it happen so that's a good thing.

Case Three: Marco Avila, Freshman at Southwest Border Community College

Childhood. Marco lived in Mexico up until he was fourteen years old. As a member of the Avila family, Marco is the second of three children. Marco's older sister is twenty-one years old and she graduated from high school in Mexico before the family made the decision to move to the United States. His two-year old younger brother is the only American citizen in the family as he was born after the move to the United States.

His father and mother have provided a home for Marco and his younger brother on the far east side of Border City. When the family first moved to the United States, Marco's parents rented a house in a rural community south of Border City. This allowed Marco to be close to his cousins and to attend the same high school along with them. After three and a half years, Marco's father was able to purchase their current home in far east Border City. Marco's father is an electrical engineer and received a college degree in Mexico. Marco's mother is a homemaker; yet she has received her GED since moving to the United States. However, Mrs. Avila stressed that she is not satisfied with her own level of education and wished she had more.

Marco expressed that school has always been very easy for him. In fact, Marco stated that the curriculum in the United States was easier for him than the curriculum in Mexico. The only thing that made school difficult for him at first was his lack of knowledge of the English language. Marco expressed that the biggest difference he noticed about schooling in Mexico compared to the United States was that in Mexico all of his subjects were taught to the same room of students, much like that of elementary campuses here in the United States.

He said that at first it was a little difficult trying find his way around his large high school campus and getting to know everyone in his different classes.

Marco learned the English language in a little over a year and during his sophomore year, he passed the state English language arts assessment with a commended score of 2400 and he was exited from the ESL program. When asked about things in high school that bothered him about high school, Marco mentioned two things: first the counselors and second his freshman Algebra I class. Marco stated that the counselors did not really help him or other students. In his words, “they give you the classes and that’s it. They don’t orientate you.” As for his algebra class, Marco said that it was hard because the teacher did not speak any Spanish and the other students in the class knew that he did not understand English and would push him aside during class discussions. Marco expressed this by saying, “even though most of the students at [my high school] were Mexican...just because they know English they think they are better than the ones that just came from Mexico.” This was not the only frustration that Marco encountered with his peers.

Marco expressed that many times he felt as if he was the only student in his class that really cared about his grades. This was often realized whenever his teachers would assign group projects. Oftentimes, Marco was the only one in the group that really cared and that meant that he would end up doing the entire project on his own because his group partners did not really worry or care about their work in school.

These peer frustrations and his frustration with learning the English language made Marco to want to return to Mexico. What kept Marco from going back to Mexico was the support of his family and a young and very dedicated teacher. Both of his parents made the decision to move to the United States for Marco’s future and they made it clear to Marco that

he could not permanently move back to Mexico until he received a full education in the United States – a high school diploma and a college degree.

When asked about the staff members at his high school, Marco expressed that he felt as if most of his teachers and the administrators cared about him as an individual. He felt safe at school and stated, “The administration was pretty good. They were always checking classes, teachers and the students. They were always making it secure for us to have a peaceful environment inside and outside of the classroom.” Again, Marco stressed how he felt that the counselors did not really help him. However, Marco did indicate that there was one teacher in particular that did help him – Ms. Apodaca. Her role is addressed in a later section of this research.

High school environment. Marco’s high school resides in a suburban rural community on the outer edge of the Border City community. Diminishing farmland, *colonias*, non-incorporated neighborhoods and younger, newer neighborhoods, mostly due to urban sprawl, surround his high school. With an annual median household income of \$26,506 for households in this high school feeder pattern, Marco’s high school community can boast the highest average family income of all three participants in this study; yet well below the state median household income of \$49,392 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The campus opened its doors in 1965 as the only high school at the time in the small but rapidly growing rural district. Today the district is nearing 45,000 students with five comprehensive high schools and is considered a suburban urban school district. The latest data for the high school indicates a student enrollment of 2662 students (Texas Education Agency, 2012a). Of this enrollment 95% are classified as Hispanic, just over 4% are classified as white and less than 1% are classified as African American. Slightly less than 87% of the student population is

identified as economically disadvantaged and 11% of the student population is considered to be of Limited English Proficient (LEP) status. The percentage of students meeting the college readiness benchmarks in both mathematics and English language arts is significantly lower at 34% compared to 52% for the state, 41% for the region and 44% for the district. Just over 55% of the graduating class took either the ACT or the SAT. This represents a deficit in comparison to 63% of graduates for the state, 71% of graduates for the region and 59% of graduates for the district. The combined mathematics and critical reading average SAT score for graduates in 2010 was an 842 compared to a 985 for the state, an 859 for the region and an 872 for the district. The average composite ACT score for graduates in 2010 was an 18.1 compared to a 20.5 for the state, an 18.1 for the region and a 19.2 for the district (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

Marco's high school average class size is 24.14 compared to 23.18 for the district, 18.94 for the region and 18.56 for the state. The racial and ethnic representation of the teaching staff is slightly different than that of the student population. Just under 3% of the faculty is African American, 77% is Hispanic and 20% is white. The average number of years of experience for the teachers at Marco's high school is 9.4. Lastly, the annual per pupil expenditures are \$6,400 compared to \$6,868 for the district, \$7,191 for the region, and \$8,802 for the state (Texas Education Agency, 2012a).

High school coursework. Marco was older than the other two participants in this study when he and his family immigrated to the United States. Marco enrolled straight into the ninth grade upon the move. However, Marco was awarded two full years of Spanish credit from the school he attended in Mexico. Marco's first semester in the United States was definitely challenging for him as he made mostly D's and F's. This was sharply contrasted by

the straight A's he made in the second semester. Marco quickly realized the need to increase his efforts at school if he was to be successful. Marco continued on his path to academic success for the remainder of his high school years.

Based on an analysis of his transcript, Marco successfully completed general education classes in the four content areas all four years with the exception of mathematics. Marco completed Pre-AP Algebra II with a 92 average in his junior year and then completed Pre-AP pre-calculus with an 86 his senior year. He also demonstrated an interest in career and technical education after his sophomore year.

Marco successfully completed a sequence of career and technical education courses in the Information Technology field. These courses included web technologies, principals of technology, digital and interactive media and architectural design. Marco demonstrated an interest in these courses as he maintained straight A's in each of these courses with the exception of principals of technology, which he received an 88.

In Marco's junior year he successfully completed an Advanced Placement course in Spanish in which he received an A for a final grade. Marco shared during his interview that he was not aware of the other Advanced Placement courses available at his school and that if he had known, he would have taken more of these courses.

Extra-curricular activities. Marco found solace in his participation with the high school soccer team. Soccer allowed Marco to feel as if he had not left his home country. He loved playing competitively and was excited to have the opportunity to travel when the varsity soccer team made the playoffs. Marco shared his excitement for soccer by providing context after he was able to travel to another town for a playoff game, "It just makes you feel happy on how the coach looks at you and he tries to help you by taking you somewhere else

to learn another way to play soccer.” In fact, Marco would like to play soccer in college once he transfers to a four-year university.

Assessment scores. Marco’s strength in mathematics was evident from an analysis of his transcript. Marco also noted this, himself, in the interview. Marco tested college ready on his exit level state assessment in both English language arts and mathematics on the first attempt during his junior year. His English language arts score was just over the required 2200 with a score of 2261 while his mathematics score was well over the required 2200 with a commended score of 2491. It should be noted that this measure was taken just two years after Marco arrived in the United States.

Mentor relationship. Ms. Apodaca began her teaching career during Marco’s freshman year in high school, although she did not have Marco as a student until his sophomore year. She received a bachelor’s degree in English Literature from Southwest Border University in 2008. Ms. Apodaca had hopes of returning to the school district in which she graduated from to give back to her community as a gifted and talented teacher because she wanted to teach kids “that are inspiring and have so much to say and write.” When a job in her own community on the far west side of Border City did not materialize, Ms. Apodaca began looking for opportunities in other school districts. She came across a job opening in a fast growing school district on the east side of Border City that was for an ESL teacher. Ms. Apodaca explained that she was not too excited about teaching ESL and “was prejudiced against it at the beginning.” But, she soon realized the benefits of teaching English Language Learners and that ESL students could be “a blessing to my life.”

Ms. Apodaca expressed that the first year she taught Marco “was a life changing year in my life.” She explained that even though she was the teacher, she felt as if she learned

more from the kids than they learned from her. The opportunities that Ms. Apodaca provided to Marco and his classmates ensured that engagement and interaction in the classroom was at an optimal level.

The environment and culture in Ms. Apodaca's classroom had been established so that students feel valued and trusted. This allowed the students the freedom to explore and interact with each other but more importantly, to interact with trust and respect for Ms. Apodaca. When asked to share what a typical day in her classroom was like when she taught Marco, Ms. Apodaca smiled and shared in rich detail exactly what occurred. She said:

Okay, when my students come in, it's very, very important to me that they know that I acknowledge their language, their native language and that it's important to me that I do not take that away from them...When my students come in I want them to feel something that I don't think anybody else can give them. My class, being an English class, is to allow them to open windows into a new life and to allow them to have perspective in my class. So when they come into my class, I really try to center it around them. I let them know that their views are important to me. I let them know that their perspective is important to me. And I allow them to do this through their journals. I think this is where I build a bond with my students, because you don't get to talk to them every day. It's just too difficult and there is no time. By reading their journals, I really get to look into their personal lives and to the way they view being here and how it feels. And that's the angle that I take to establish a relationship.

Ms. Apodaca was also able to share her views on what it means to be a recent immigrant that just arrived in a large public high school in a border community. For most of them, she truly believes that they do not want to be in their new schools. Ms. Apodaca

explained that for some of the students in her classes, it was more than leaving a familiar culture, it was also leaving parents behind. There were immigrant students who were sent to live with an aunt or uncle or other family member without their parents. For them, Ms. Apodaca noticed a very troubling transition that often did not lead to student success. However, Ms. Apodaca learned from their sacrifices and tried to value each student's sacrifice as a way to build a relationship with them. She stated, "I try to fill in the gaps for them and I let them know that I know the sacrifices that they've made and that it's worth it."

In terms of preparing her students to graduate ready for college, Ms. Apodaca expressed that it begins with the expectation that all students can go to college. The daily conversations that Ms. Apodaca had with students centered around the idea that her students were already in college. Additionally, Ms. Apodaca incorporated college essays as a means to help students to picture themselves as college students. In particular, Ms. Apodaca spoke of an essay that Marco wrote in response to a prompt about the characteristics that make him a good candidate for admissions to a college or university. While his English skills amazed her, his confidence and his determination to become an electrical engineer in the future were most evident in the essay.

Ms. Apodaca also provided context on how she supports struggling students. Because her students are transitioning to a completely new and different environment and trying to grasp a new language at the same time, most of her students do struggle at the beginning. One way that she supports her students is to make herself available to them outside of class. Ms. Apodaca makes a point to arrive at work early, to stay in her room during lunch and then to stay late after school so that students are able to come in and work or just sit and find a comfortable and more familiar place for themselves. She makes her classroom inviting by

allowing students to bring their lunch trays into her room because many of her students do not feel comfortable in the large open cafeteria with students who are not like them. At the same time, Ms. Apodaca takes advantage of this extra time to provide more one-on-one support to her students. She said, “When they come to me before school or after school or during lunch, I make it a point to give them twenty minutes of my undivided attention.”

Ms. Apodaca’s experiences with Marco were vivid and easily recalled during the interview. She mentioned how well and how quickly Marco picked up the English language upon his arrival in the United States. In her words, she said, “He can manipulate [the English language] and he writes as if he was a native. He struggled with his verb tenses but I remember Marco just sticking out from the rest.” Marco was also a mentor to other students in the class according to Ms. Apodaca. She teamed Marco up with other students who had more difficulty with the content and the language as a means to allow Marco to share the information in more student friendly language. While this definitely helped the struggling students, it also helped Marco learn the content even better.

One of the key questions asked of Ms. Apodaca during the interview centered on Marco’s success. Ms. Apodaca shared that she believed Marco always had it in him to be successful and to go to college. She elaborated on what she may have done to help fuel his success by saying:

In every aspect of his life he is going to be amazing personally, he’s going to be amazing professionally. He’s just meant for great things. What might have happened in my class is that I allowed him to express those ideas and write them down so it became more of a reality for him like it’s going to happen for me.

Ms. Apodaca concluded by sharing a piece of important information for other teachers that work with ESL students. She emphasized that many ESL students feel as if other teachers and students look down upon them. She stressed that this caused some of her students to build resentment against the system as a whole and oftentimes give up. Her advice to prevent resentment among any recent immigrant student was simple – acknowledge their first language. Ms. Apodaca ensured that her students’ native language was acknowledged and valued by incorporating Spanish poetry and allowing students to use their native language along with the English language arts. She stated, “It’s not just about teaching them English, it’s about just teaching them, molding them, and shaping them. A teacher does so much more than teach.”

Parent relationship. Marco, his parents and his younger brother live together in a nice two-story stucco home in the easternmost part of Border City. The home is modest in size but only a few years old and rests in a neighborhood comprised of young families and many military families. Marco’s older sister was too old to qualify for a temporary work permit and is the only member of the family that is still in Mexico. Marco’s mother is a homemaker and takes pride in caring for all members of the family. Throughout the interview, Mrs. Avila demonstrated a strong commitment in supporting Marco’s education. One way this was evidenced was in her commitment to ensuring Marco gets to and from his classes each day at Southwest Border Community College. Because Marco does not have permanent residency or a temporary work visa, he is not able to apply for a driver’s license. He depends on his parents to get him to his needed destinations. Mrs. Avila is happy to support Marco.

Mrs. Avila expressed that she and her husband have set high academic goals for Marco and his older sister. In her words she said:

He had to finish school. Like we told him, this is what's going to determine his future. This is what's going to make him a man. What is going to be their lifestyle and what type of lifestyle do they want. They need to live their life a day at a time.

Mrs. Avila also voiced that school in the United States was very different than school in Mexico but that Marco did very well in school in both places. She shared that Marco did have homework on most days but that he had great self-management skills and knew the importance of doing all of his homework as soon as he would come home from school. This is something that she witnesses Marco doing even as a stay-at-home college student in his first semester of college.

Mrs. Avila shared that she and her husband would attend the open house events at Marco's high school and would ask questions of the administration or teachers if questions came up; but that for the most part, Marco did very well in school and that most of the support came from conversations with Marco as well as through their own actions. As an example of how she and her husband supported Marco:

It's more about talking to him and supporting him because I am unable to help him with his work because of the language barrier. It was just being with him and supplying him with the tools he needed for the work he did in school. He couldn't be absent and he had to take school seriously and realize that school would come first.

When asked about helping Marco to make the decision to attend Southwest Border Community College, Mrs. Avila stated that it was about supporting his goals. Marco set a goal to continue on to college and eventually find a career. As a parent, she shared that it was

important to talk to Marco as a means to show support for him and his goals. Mrs. Avila said, “I told him to be happy with whatever he studied and he would be successful.”

Transition to college. Even though Marco had a very impressive high school transcript and could have been admitted to a number of four-year colleges or universities, Marco and his family decided that he should start at Southwest Border Community College simply because of finances. Marco’s temporary residency does not allow him to work and therefore, he does not have a social security number. Without a social security number he is unable to qualify for any federal financial aid. His father has submitted the papers for Marco to receive the work permit, but the immigration office keeps telling them that it will take a year or maybe two before Marco will receive it.

Marco has decided to follow in his father’s footsteps and become an electrical engineer. Marco has always been very good in mathematics and is intrigued with his father’s work. Even though Marco felt that high school was fairly easy, he explained that he was excited but also nervous about starting college. He was most worried about his ability to communicate in English because he knows that in college you have “speak and stand in front of everyone” for presentations and projects.

When Marco completes his basics at Southwest Border Community College, he plans to transfer either to Southwest Border University or to another four-year university. The opportunities beyond his basic courses all depends on the availability of financial aid. Currently, Marco resides at home and relies on his mom and his dad to transport him to and from his classes. Marco is able to discuss his daily encounters as a college student during this time. His parents and Marco are true partners in his college education.

Marco enjoys his college classes much more than he did his high school classes. Partly because Marco claims that the college professors make learning fun for the students and partly because unlike his high school classes, all of the students in his college classes really want to be there and to learn. College classes for Marco are more challenging but Marco is more content with challenging coursework than with what he experienced in high school. This is because he knows he is truly learning.

While he did make some friends in high school, he has had the opportunity to make new friends in college as well. Some of the same friends from high school attend Southwest Border Community College with him. Even though Marco has made new friends and sees friends from high school, he prefers to study on his own at home. This may be a carry over trait that Marco used during his high school years. At the same time, Marco does not currently seek support from professors or advisors at Southwest Border Community College; rather he relies on his family for his support.

Advice to others. Marco's advice offered a different perspective – one of caution rather than of the support of others. He said:

Watch out for all those students, those guys that are there to make your life harder. They're just trying to bring you down. They do not care about school at all. Keep your focus on your work and never look back.”

Marco's experiences were shorter in terms of the time he spent in U. S. public schools prior to graduation. It is obvious from his advice as well as from the context he provided during the interviews that his overall high school experience was more about finding success on his own while at school. It may be a fair assumption to make that due to Marco's limited time in public school that perhaps his experiences in terms of survival and finding success

relied less on others and focused more on his own means. In any account, Marco's advice may very well serve many other students just like him; but more importantly, it serves as advice to school leaders about the struggles that students like Marco face when entering a new school and trying to make it on their way to a successful future.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to examine the lives of the three identified participants who immigrated to the United States, were from a low-income family, of Hispanic descent and graduated from high school ready for college. This chapter presented the data collection from interviews of the participants, their parents, and an identified adult mentor. The data findings were presented as shared stories of the three participants but in the context that allowed for a deep understanding of the lives and culture of the three participants as well as that of their families.

These stories were presented from the participants' own perspective in terms of the challenges and successes they have encountered along the path to college readiness. The high school environment for each participant was detailed along with each participant's high school coursework, assessment data, and extra-curricular activities. In addition the perspective of each participant was shared from a significant adult mentor identified by each participant. The perspective of each participant is also detailed by one of each participant's parents. In terms of the transition to college, the experiences of each participant were articulated. Finally, this chapter presented the initial findings relative to resiliency theory.

Chapter five presents the findings relative to the research questions offered in this study. Following the responses to the research questions, the critical themes and domain structures are communicated relative to the theoretical framework. This allows the data to be

presented with objectivity but in keeping with the thick description of the shared experiences presented in chapter four. The critical themes are also presented through a cross case analysis both in narrative and chart layout. Finally, the next chapter will take a look at resiliency and resiliency theory as it applies to the critical themes or domain structures that have emerged and offer recommendations and implications for further research. In conclusion, a personal epilogue of the researcher is offered as well.

Chapter Five

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Significance of Qualitative Research

Because the interests of the researcher reside in questions of meaning and culture, a qualitative approach was appropriate. This research sought to understand how three low socioeconomic, Hispanic, immigrant students experienced their lives in preparation for college admission and enrollment. This research sought to also become familiar with each participant's individual perspectives on public education.

Qualitative Approach

Based on the research questions in this study, it was appropriate to rely on Erickson's (1986) interpretive methods. Erickson (1986) suggests key questions in qualitative research. When examining questions of culture, qualitative methods are the most fitting. Qualitative research allows for an understanding of how the culture and social organizations interact with the students in this study and how the culture allowed for choices and actions of the students (Erickson, 1986). Geertz (1973) offers a similar definition of culture, arguing that the purpose of research and analysis is to interpret observable actions in an attempt to ascribe meaning and understand the culture that shapes the actions.

Presentation of Findings

Chapter Four provided the stories of the participants from three varying perspectives – from the perspective of each of the participants, from the perspective of each participant's mentor and from the perspective of each participant's parent. A thick description of the participants' stories allowed for a context that provided a deep understanding of the lives lived of the three participants (Geertz, 1973). In this chapter it is suitable to view the stories

from a different perspective. This chapter will present data that answers the research questions proposed in this study. The perspective to be presented is offered to produce descriptions and explanations from all three of the participants and to discover the developing theories and critical themes among the three participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Additionally, the critical themes are presented through a cross case analysis in narrative and chart form. The narrative provides direct quotes as evidence for each critical theme or domain structure and the chart layout provides ease in interpretation of the critical themes.

Research Questions

The research questions presented in this study were developed based on the qualitative data that was expected to provide meaning of the three participants identified for the study. The case study research questions are presented with corresponding responses from the findings.

Research Question One: What is the nature of the phenomena of the selected Hispanic immigrant students' ability to attain college readiness while so many other borderland students are not able to do the same?

To answer this research question, data was extracted from the interviews of each participant as well as from the mentor and parent interviews. Much of this phenomenon comes from the support of each participant's parents. All three student subjects relied on a parent or both parents as a means to persist with the difficult challenges and decisions they each encountered. While the challenges were different, the reliance on a parent was constant among Jazmin, Javier and Marco. Jazmin shared "They really pushed me and they supported me...The support of my family really kept me moving and going through anything." Javier's context of his mother characterizes his success through his words, "She's a great, great lady.

Encouraged me a lot, she's awesome. I don't know how else to explain her." Marco relied on the support of his family when he struggled with decisions at school. While evidence also suggest much of each participant's success was inherent, all three participants attribute much of their success to their parents.

Research Question Two: How did culture help to shape the students' decisions and actions regarding post-secondary education?

As stated in the first research question response, all three participants relied heavily on the support a parent to attain their success. Therefore, family culture was instrumental in shaping each participant's decision about college. The culture of each family in this study does provide for some commonalities between the families; however, much about each family can be considered unique. One commonality that existed in Jazmin and Marco's family was the belief of higher education. Jazmin and Marco both shared that they always knew they would go to college even when they were very young. Javier, on the other hand, did not really begin to develop the idea that he too could go to college until his sophomore year in high school. His belief was based on his economic situation rather than his academic readiness. He had always performed well in school, but his residency concerns and the economic situation of his family prevented him from believing he could truly go to college until his sophomore year.

Research Question Three: What are the attitudes and opinions of the selected students in regards to high school graduation and the pursuit of higher education?

The attitudes and opinions of the participants in regards to high school graduation and the pursuit of a college education offer some interesting and differing context. Jazmin believed that there were great teachers that supported her along her path to success. This was

noted in the mentor section of chapter four as she easily provided numerous teachers' names as mentors for her. However, there was a concern that Jazmin voiced regarding her friends and their ability to navigate the college admissions process at her high school. Javier voiced some concerns for the education he received at his high school. He said,

[My high school] was actually easy...I didn't learn much. The only class I actually learned more was Calculus and Pre-Calculus. I didn't really learn much in [other classes] and Dr. Taylor knows. Dr. Taylor actually told me that I'm smarter than most of the teachers there.

Javier's concerns for his high school have led him to believe that school was not challenging enough and may have prevented him from believing in his dream to attend college until he came in contact with his mentor, Dr. Taylor. Marco offered similar experiences as a basis for his attitudes and opinions regarding high school graduation and post-secondary education. Marco's parents shaped much of his attitudes and opinions about graduation and college, as he has always known he would go to college. Marco felt confident in the teachers and the administration at his high school. However, he noted twice in the interview the negative opinion that he had for the counselors and his own counselor in particular. Additionally, Marco noted the negative pressure he was sometimes subjected to among his peers. Marco shared how some of the students in his school really had no concern for their academic future and could easily become a burden or obstacle for others. Further context is provided in the following research question regarding Marco's attitude and opinion.

Research Question Four: What factors have contributed to the development of the students' attitudes and opinions?

The factors identified that have contributed to the development of each participant's attitudes and opinions have been analyzed from the data collected. Jazmin, Javier and Marco each have provided context that can be considered as factors attributing to the attitudes and opinions of each. While most of the perspectives provided helped the three participants to development positive attitudes and opinions relative to their own success, it is evident that there were some negative attitudes and opinions that each participant portrayed. Jazmin provided context to support her positive opinion of her teachers at her high school. In addition, Jazmin has developed an attitude that all students should be afforded the opportunities that she experienced; yet, this belief was not evident for her friends based on Jazmin's interview. This was best detailed in the experiences she shared regarding her friends that were not a part of the Upward Bound program. She said,

They didn't talk much about college until your last year and it's very important to start in your mind that you want that goal for your life...I was lucky to be a part of the Upward Bound program but a lot of my friends were not and were very confused. They didn't know what to do or what colleges to apply for.

Javier believed that high school was easy and that the teachers should be more challenging. He always believed in himself and his own personal growth, but because of residency issues and his own economic situation he truly did not think he could go to college until he started working with Dr. Taylor. Javier said, "I don't know what would have happened with [former principal] but I know that I owe Dr. Taylor a lot for my success." His attitudes and opinions were strongly shaped by his mentor. This factor alone is a critical theme worth further research. Dr. Taylor and Javier had a very strong mentor-mentee relationship that fueled much of Javier's success.

Marco developed an attitude of apathy towards his counselor based on his experiences. This can best be summarized by his response to one of the interview questions, “I didn’t like the fact that many counselors don’t really help you. They like give you the classes and that’s it. They don’t orientate you.” Additionally, Marco shared a perspective relative to some of his peers as having a negative influence due to their own apathy towards academic success. Marco’s advice to others demonstrates this attitude best, “Watch out for all those students, those guys that are there to make your life harder. They’re just trying to bring you down. They do not care about school at all.”

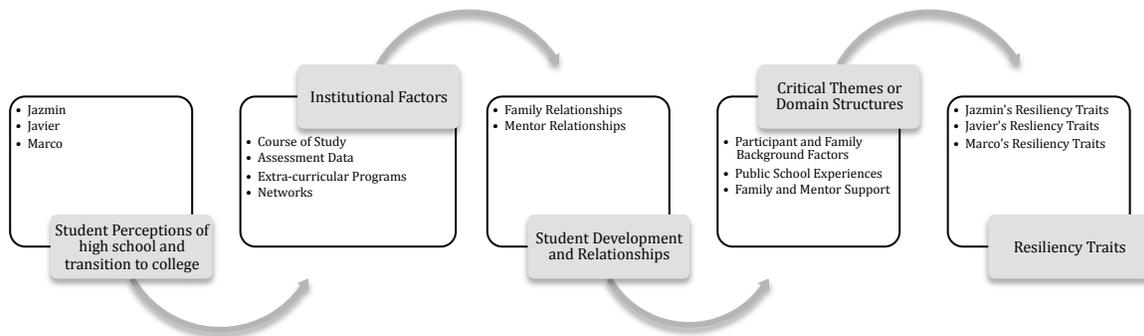
Theoretical Framework Applied

As mentioned in the first chapter of this study, resiliency theory was the foundation of this research. Resiliency theory as it relates to student development, family environment, social capital, and the educational environment was central when examining the three student subject’s perceptions of their own success. Resiliency theory was identified as a means to assist in understanding the progression of each student subject’s high school successes and transition to college. Through the use of this theoretical framework, the researcher first examined the perceptions of the three students in the study to determine if patterns or relationships existed relative to the students’ perceptions of high school and transition to college. From these patterns, critical themes have emerged and have assisted in the identification of the distinct resiliency traits of each student participant. Each participant’s childhood, high school environment, course of study, involvement in extra-curricular programs, and individual assessment data was analyzed to further understand how each of these have contributed to each student’s success. The context of each student’s high school

experiences helped to understand institutional and organizational structures that played a significant role in determining college readiness for the students in this study.

Upon the conclusion of institutional and organizational factors, student relationships with teachers or mentors and family members were examined. From the analysis of the data, the critical themes are portrayed as a path to the resiliency traits among the three participants. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of this sequence.

Figure 2



The Application of the Theoretical Framework of College Readiness Success for Low-income, Hispanic, Immigrant Students

Organization of Critical Themes

Critical themes or domain structures are presented in the following section. To illustrate the critical themes or domain structures found during the analysis of data, direct

quotes from the student subjects, their parents and/or their mentors are utilized as supporting evidence. At the conclusion of each critical theme a chart layout is provided to assist the reader in further identification and understanding. The critical themes that emerged from this study include the following:

1. participant and family background factors;
2. public school experiences; and
3. family and mentor support.

Each theme is presented with data gathered from the interviews of the participants, their mentors as well as from their parents. Context is provided from the perspectives of each participant as well as from that of the parent and the mentor. This context helped to provide evidence from the rich detail collected from the interviews that allowed for critical themes to emerge based on the similar experiences of the participants.

Participant and family background factors. The backgrounds of each of the three participants and their families are offered as a critical theme simply by the nature of the participants themselves. All three participants emigrated from northern Mexico to the United States. The participants were between the ages of 10 and 14 at the time of immigration. Jazmin, Javier and Marco all expressed the struggles they endured when first enrolling in a new school and new and unfamiliar surroundings. Each participant expressed their desire to want to return to their more familiar lives in Mexico after their initial arrival in the United States. This was mostly attributed to their lack of English language skills.

Of the three participants in the study, only Marco's parents live as a married couple. While Jazmin's parents are separated primarily due to her father's work in Mexico, her mother and father share the role of parenting all the children and both parents remain a vital

part of her life. Javier's parents are separated due to irreconcilable differences and are currently working on obtaining a divorce. Javier's mother has been responsible for most or all of the parenting for the major part of his life. Javier shared that while his mother and father have a better relationship now that they are no longer together, his father has not been a major part of his life and the decisions Javier has made regarding attending MIT.

Occupational and educational attainment of the participants' parents offers an additional domain structure. Marco's father is the only parent with a college education obtained in Mexico. By trade he is an electrical engineer. Jazmin parents completed some high school and then stopped to begin working. Javier's mother completed the ninth grade but his father dropped out just six months prior to graduation to begin his career. Jazmin's father worked for the city government in Mexico. Javier's father worked as a butcher. One similarity is that all three participants chose to have their mothers interviewed rather than their fathers even though Jazmin and Marco both stated that their fathers had been instrumental in their success. All three mothers have similar educational attainment. Additionally, all three mothers expressed regret for the level of education they each attained. Each mother expressed during the interviews that they hoped to have attained more education than they each currently possess, but that family obligations have prevented each of them from pursuing their own educational goals.

All three participants come from homes with more than one child. Jazmin is the oldest of three girls, Javier is the fourth out of six children and Marco is the second out of three. However, Jazmin is the only participant with all siblings living in the United States. Javier and Marco both have an older sibling still residing in Mexico. The significance of birth order and siblings was not explored in this study. However, through an analysis of the data the role

of each participant revealed that they were viewed as mentors themselves to their younger siblings. This was noted from the interviews of the participants and from their mothers.

Jazmin's mother stated:

She's always motivating them and making sure they get good grades...She worries about them if they have a low grade in a class. She wants them to raise that grade. She has been a good kid, good daughter and sister. If I'm not home, she takes my place.

Javier's mother shared similar context regarding his younger siblings. Ms. Loya said, "One of his sisters wants to go to Harvard because her brother [Javier] has become a mentor now that he is attending MIT. They believe they can be a part of these schools...He has opened doors for his siblings." Marco's mother did not say something in particular, but she did have her two-year old son with her during the interview. Marco was mindful of his younger brother's needs during this time and unquestionably portrayed the role of a loving and caring older brother – more like a parent than a brother.

In terms of extended family support and economics, Javier's family appeared to struggle financially more than Jazmin and Marco. In fact, there were times when Javier's family was in such severe financial hardship that they did not have food to eat or a permanent place to stay. This was noted by Dr. Taylor and Javier's mother but not by Javier. Dr. Taylor expressed how Javier insisted on repaying him for the \$9.50 fee to send his exam scores to MIT electronically and that it was "at a time when I think he and his family was living in a motel room." Javier's mother also shared similar context during the times that Javier was undergoing medical treatment for his eye injury. She said, "We didn't have anything to eat especially during the time that Javier was very ill." This may be attributed to the fact that

Javier's family was the only family that made the move to the United States and had no other family in the U. S. to provide support. Jazmin's family relied on her two uncles and Marco's family had the support of his aunt upon their initial arrival. This support was instrumental in navigating an unfamiliar way of life when first moving to the United States.

Interestingly, Marco's family seemed to be the most stable in terms of personal finances, yet his family is not without struggles. Marco's family by definition is still classified as low-income; however, Marco is the only participant in this study who was not able to receive any financial aid for college. This is not due to the family income, but rather an issue with his residency. Jazmin and Javier's college education is more or less 100% funded through private scholarships.

While Jazmin qualifies for federal financial aid, residency issues have been a concern for Javier and Marco and continue to be so as both are still awaiting permanent residency status. This issue also spilled over into their college or university choice. Javier has a temporary work permit, whereas Marco does not. Marco cannot obtain a driver's license nor can he find part-time work to help pay for college expenses. Marco's family believes that it will be another year before he will receive his work permit; yet, even once he receives this, he will still not be able to qualify for federal financial aid until he obtains permit residency status. This is not likely to happen until after Marco completes his college degree. Javier is able to work part-time at MIT as part of a work-study program that offsets some of his college expenses. Javier hopes to obtain permanent residency and then one day become a U. S. citizen.

Table 1 portrays the characteristics of that have led to the identification of family and participant background factors as a critical theme. Family support and mentor support are examined more closely in a later critical theme.

Table 1

Participant and Family Background Factors

Factors	Jazmin	Javier	Marco
Age at Time of Immigration	12	10	14
Parents' Marital Status	Separated	Separated	Married
Parents' Highest Level of Education	Some High School	Some High School	College Educated
Birth Order	1 out of 3	4 out of 6	2 out of 3
Viewed as a Mentor to Siblings	Yes	Yes	Yes
Extended Family Support in US	Yes	No	Yes
Residency Issues	No	Yes	Yes

Public school experiences. The experiences that each of the participants encountered during their time in U. S. public schools have been identified as a critical theme. This can be attributed to the similarities that each of the participants experienced as struggles or perhaps as coping mechanisms. Jazmin and Javier both experienced an issue with the proper grade placement upon their arrival in the United States. Jazmin was placed in the seventh grade upon her arrival here even though she had completed this grade in Mexico and Javier was placed in the fourth grade even though he too had completed this grade in Mexico. Both Jazmin and Javier's families were told that this was due to their lack of understanding the

English language. Interestingly, Marco arrived in the United States after completing the second year of *secundaria*, which is equivalent to eighth grade and he was enrolled in the ninth grade without any questions. It should be noted that both Jazmin and Javier attended schools in the same school district and their grade placement may have been a district procedure or practice as Marco enrolled in a different school district. The obstacles that Jazmin and Javier experienced as a result of having to repeat a grade may have helped them to both further develop resiliency as a way to overcome their impasse.

All three participants were exited from the Bilingual and/or ESL program from which they were enrolled in after a period of eight months to 18 months. While all three participants had a strong grasp of the English language after just one year, Javier was exited earlier than Jazmin and Marco. However, Javier was also the youngest upon entering the United States at only ten years old. Jazmin and Marco exited after a similar amount of time in the program. Jazmin and Javier both demonstrated confidence in their use of the English language during the two interviews. However, even though Marco has a strong grasp of the English language both verbally and in writing, his confidence was not as keen. This was evidenced through apologies that Marco offered regarding his belief in his lack of strong English vocabulary on more than one occasion during the interviews.

The manner in which the participants were exited was based on the criteria set forth by the state. Javier and Jazmin were exited based on state assessment scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills as well as obtaining an Advanced High rating on the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System. Due to the fact that Marco first enrolled in high school upon his move, he was exited from the ESL program based on scores from just the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills.

Jazmin, Javier and Marco all participated in extra-curricular activities while in school. While Jazmin and Javier seemed to engage in more activities than Marco, he settled on his love for soccer as a means to feel more connected with his former culture. Jazmin admitted that her time in Upward Bound prevented her from participating in more activities than the journalism and yearbook club as well as the Spanish club. Javier was the most active in terms of extra-curricular activities even though he did not feel he was very involved. This was iterated by Javier when he concluded his list of activities by stating, “that’s pretty much it.” He played football, was a member of the school’s orchestra, was a member of the National Honor Society and was a member of the University Interscholastic League (UIL) academic math team during his four years in high school. Jazmin demonstrated an increased effort to become more involved as time evolved during her high school years. Jazmin stated, “My first year was like I really wanted to do good...So, I really didn’t get that much involved in sports or any organizations. I was really more involved in my classes and everything.” Marco expressed his love for soccer by sharing,

It was great. It was the first time I went to the playoffs. I traveled with my team to another city...It just makes you feel happy on how the coach looks at you and he tries to help you by taking you somewhere else to learn another way to play soccer.

Course selection and enrollment plays a role in the domain structure for school experiences. All three participants selected and enrolled in more rigorous coursework than the general high school curriculum provided for at their high schools. Jazmin and Javier took full advantage of the rigorous course offerings made available to them in high school by each taking a total of nine advanced college preparatory courses. Marco took advantage of advanced courses primarily in the area of mathematics. His transcript revealed a total of five

advanced college preparatory courses. His decision to take primarily advanced mathematics courses may be attributed to his need to navigate the educational system without the proper guidance and support from his high school counselor. While he did have a strong mentor in Ms. Apodaca, her support was primarily based on the premise that Marco could graduate and go to college. Ms. Apodaca may have not been fully aware of his strong academic ability in all subject areas and having been new to the teaching profession herself, she may not have been fully aware of all the advanced course opportunities available to all students at the school.

The opportunity to learn about college is a characteristic that is attributed to the domain structure of public school experiences. All three participants had the opportunity to learn about college admissions and scholarships as they participated in one or more college preparation programs. Jazmin was provided intense college readiness support through her participation in the Upward Bound program. She acknowledged this by saying:

I really liked [Upward Bound] because not only do you learn more about your classes – you get better in math and English – but you also have the opportunity to have presentations from people that graduated from college and are working and also can share their stories on how they got there.

Javier shared his experiences in some of his advanced courses but it was the work he participated in on Saturdays with Dr. Taylor that really demonstrated how well he was taught about life in college and the admissions process to get there. Javier said, “He guided me through every step...every question they had for me.” Marco had similar experiences to that of Jazmin and Javier. Marco shared the experiences he had from one of his college preparatory classes, “We were always talking about how college is. How you have to be

taking notes on each word the teacher says. That is wasn't going to be easy...[the teacher] kept talking to us about managing our time.”

In terms of identifying aspects about school experiences that were not helpful to the participants, Jazmin mentioned the one thing that stood out for her about her high school was that they really did not share much information with students about college until students were seniors. She said, “I was lucky to be a part of the Upward Bound program but a lot of my friends were not and were very confused. They didn't know what to do or what colleges to apply for.” Javier said that some of his elective classes were not very helpful such as his foreign language courses. He was fortunate enough to take French as Spanish was his first language but that he really did not see the need for another language if you plan to stay in the community. Javier said, “At [my high school] you learn some French, but you pretty much know Spanish if you're at [my high school].” In other words, most students already had a good command of more than one language and the need for a third language was not necessary in his opinion. Marco was the one student that stressed how the counselors were not helpful to him. This could be similar to Jazmin's concern regarding her friends not learning about college admissions and the applications process until their senior year; however, Marco's concern seemed to go deeper. He felt that his counselor was not a help to him when he first arrived at the campus and that it was his counselor's job to orient him to his new school. Additionally, Marco shared concerns about not learning about all of the college preparation programs available to him at his high school. This was something that his counselor should have provided to him so that Marco could make a more informed decision about his future.

Table 2 provides an overview of the critical theme of public school experiences and how these experiences provided additional support to help each participant build resiliency. The characteristics of each participant’s public school experiences are interesting in terms of the challenges and the successes the participants encountered and how they reacted to each.

Table 2

Public School Experiences			
Experiences	Jazmin	Javier	Marco
Proper Initial Grade Placement	No	No	Yes
Extra-Curricular Activities	Yes	Yes	Yes
Time Until Exit From Bilingual/ESL Program	12 Months	8 Months	18 Months
Enrolled in Advanced Courses	Yes	Yes	Yes
Provided College Readiness Assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes

Family and mentor support. The family and mentor relationships of the participants in this study revealed that this critical theme had the closest correlation among all three participants. The thick descriptions provided in the shared stories in chapter four provided great depth of this correlation. However, further characteristics are identified from direct quotes of the participants, their parents and their mentors. Additionally, this critical theme is portrayed visually as a means to develop a better understanding of the strong correlations among the participants.

Communication between the participants and their parents and mentors was noted in all of the interviews. However, the data suggests that even after the participants graduated from high school, the communications between the participants and their parents continued to grow. Additionally, Jazmin and Javier still remain in communication with their identified mentor three years after graduating from high school. Marco's mentor moved away from his high school prior to his graduation, but he still holds her in high regard even today. The communication characteristic is explored as a means to develop a better understanding of the context behind each participant's success. Communication is first viewed from the participant and parent relationship and then from the participant and mentor relationship.

Jazmin and her mother and father have a very strong line of communication with each other. Even though her parents are separated, Jazmin is very much a part of both her mother and her father's life. During the interview, it was evident that Jazmin responded to the support and encouragement of both of her parents. She shared how it was her father's idea to move the family to the United States even though he would have to remain in Mexico due to his municipal job. Jazmin spoke of the words her father shared with her, "You are here because of your education; so you can be the first to graduate from high school and move on and have a better life." Jazmin also spoke about how the communication between her and her mother was supportive not only for Jazmin, but for Ms. Morales as well. As an example, Jazmin said of her mother, "She's very supportive. I try to motivate her too. She's learning English. She took some classes because she wanted to be learning at the same time with us." The same characteristics were evident between Javier and his mother as well.

The communication between Javier and his mother was one in which Javier was often viewed as a peer rather than a child to his mother. This may have been attributed to the fact

that Javier was the oldest male in the household or perhaps Ms. Loya truly reveres her son as someone she can confide in. Javier shared one such instance:

She had a couple of serious boyfriends which I don't know how to talk to her about them cuz she doesn't listen to my advise and when I say that she never, she never listens to my advice. But she'll ask for it, but I don't know what that's all about. It always turns out that I was right, but she doesn't listen...now, even if she asks me I try not to give her a direct opinion, but she'll ask, "What do you think I should do?"

The nature of this conversation between Javier and his mother definitely appears to be unsettling for Javier and rightfully so for any son and his mother; but it truly demonstrates the level of confidence Ms. Loya has in Javier. The confidence between Ms. Loya and Javier is evident in the decisions Javier has made regarding his education. Javier's mother said, "I was afraid [about MIT] but I pushed him a little because I didn't have money. He wanted to go there and he was set. I told him to go wherever he wanted."

Marco shared how he relies on his parents for everything due to his residency issues. Marco's dad symbolizes the strong parent role model, one that Marco strives to become someday. Marco shared that his dad "doesn't tolerate it when we get low grades or we don't do something correctly" as a means to demonstrate his presence in Marco's life as well as his two siblings. At the same time Marco emphasized the support he receives from both parents. He shared how it was both parents that offered encouragement and guidance when Marco wanted to leave and go back to his friends and familiar life in Mexico soon after his arrival here in the United States. Communication was not only a strong theme between participant and parent but also between participant and mentor.

The communication between the participants and the mentors is one that reveals complete confidence and trust mutually between the participants and the mentors. Jazmin still communicates with Mr. Jacquez today as a way to continue to gain his insight and support regarding her post-secondary education decisions. During the interview with Mr. Jacquez alluded to the two-way communication he has with Jazmin. Mr. Jacquez said, “Actually we spoke, she called me a few days ago and she is on target, on time” in reference to future scholarship funding. The strong level of communication between Javier and Dr. Taylor was obvious based on context from both Javier and Dr. Taylor. Dr. Taylor shared a conversation he had with Javier after he arrived at MIT.

It took him a while when he first got up to MIT, he was terribly intimidated and he goes, “these kids are so much smarter than I am and they have so much more.” I go they are not more intelligent than you. You got in there for a reason; you would have never gotten in if they didn’t believe in you. They probably do have more experience than you, but you will catch up, you will catch up, you do belong.

Javier shared how he still communicates with Dr. Taylor. When asked when was the last time you spoke to Dr. Taylor, Javier said, “last week.” The association and advice from Dr. Taylor is still very evident even three years after Javier’s high school graduation.

Marco and Ms. Apodaca have not spoken in recent months, but Marco still attests to the role that she played in his success. He shared that Ms. Apodaca and him communicated by text message as a way to stay connected. Again, Marco emphasized that she spoke to her students both as their teacher and as their friend as a way to build rapport with one another.

In addition to strong two-way communication between the participants, parents and mentors, it was discovered that participants and their parents as well as participants and their

mentors shared similar beliefs and values. The evidence of supportive beliefs and values was expressed in the stories from participants, parents and mentors. Evidence from Javier is shared first as his relationship appeared to be shaped by the beliefs and values of his mentor more than the other two participants. This is best described by the belief that Javier did not truly think he could go to college until his sophomore year in high school. Jazmin and Marco stated that they both felt like they always knew they could go to college. Javier's relationship with his mother has been described as strong and supportive; however, her belief system did not include college simply because the college experience was never present in her life until Javier went to high school. Furthermore, it should be noted that Ms. Loya always had high expectations for all of her children when it came to schoolwork. She demanded that all of her children receive good grades in school and behave even though the understanding of a college education was not a constant factor in the household until Javier went to high school. As Javier's relationship with Dr. Taylor evolved, Javier's own beliefs and values changed and at the same time his mother's beliefs and values were also impacted. The mentor relationship that Javier has with Dr. Taylor is the strongest of the three participants. Dr. Taylor truly looks at Javier as his own son. It was evident from Dr. Taylor just how special Javier is to him as he became emotional during the interview. Dr. Taylor shared some of Javier's personal struggles:

Every time I talk about it I cry. As you know, Javier, he's gone through many, many challenges such as born into poverty in [Mexico]; there's even a story when he was four years old. He was on a bus trip in Mexico and the bus wrecked. He was thrown out of the bus. People, family members died in this bus accident and he was left for a few months in a body cast. You speed up to the time when he was seven years old and

he and his sister and his uncle are cutting up aluminum soda cans to make their toys. And as they're playing around with them, his sister shoots one and it goes into his eye and that's what started his eye problems which eventually led to him having virtually no vision in the one eye.

Dr. Taylor summed up his description and the respect and esteem that he has for Javier by saying, "No one quite like him that I have ever met."

Jazmin and her mentor, Mr. Jaquez, share a more formal and professional relationship than that of Javier and Dr. Taylor. Mr. Jaquez described Jazmin as shy and quiet, yet confident. Nevertheless, Mr. Jaquez has been able to establish great rapport with her. He said, "You have to really, really have rapport and draw her into the conversation...She's very focused with her expression and she'll look you straight in the eye."

Marco's family has always shared the same beliefs and values. Marco and his parents have always believed in his ability to go to college someday. His mentor, Ms. Apodaca, shared the same beliefs and values. Because of his consistent support it was just a matter of helping Marco to truly believe in himself. There was self-doubt on Marco's part at first and even as he began to approach graduation. The self-doubt at first was due to language issues. The later self-doubt was due to Marco's concern for his residency and the lack of financial aid he would receive. In the end, he did make it to college but without financial aid. The support he received from Ms. Apodaca is illustrated in the quote below.

I remember he would go to my class and he would tell me "Miss, I'm so behind. I'm becoming a procrastinator." And I told him you're young but that procrastinating goes away when you go to college, it just begins to click. And it was always just in Marco to be somebody amazing.

In addition to the shared beliefs and values, the mentors also shared in the participant's struggles. In other words, if Jazmin, Javier or Marco were presented with a difficult problem, their mentors felt as if it was their problem as well. This was noted specifically in interviews with Javier's mentor, Dr. Taylor, and Marco's mentor, Ms. Apodaca.

Ms. Apodaca shared a situation that she adopted as a problem of her own from a challenge that Marco was experiencing. She said:

I remember speaking to him during lunch when his friends or his girlfriend was absent and he would go sit down with me during lunch and we would talk about college and about how he was an immigrant student so he might not be able to qualify for financial aid but he would have to go investigate. So it was always on his mind and it was always on my mind.

Dr. Taylor shared a similar experience in terms of the issue with financial aid that Javier was experiencing. Javier had been accepted to two in state universities but the financial aid was an issue due to Javier's residency status. Dr. Taylor said,

The difficulty with A & M and UT for him was citizenship. If he had had the citizenship he would have survived like our other kids have. But, that's when I started realizing, oh dang, we have an issue here. I had no idea what an issue that was going to be.

Dr. Taylor expressed how he helped to handle the problem he shared with Javier by saying,

I prayed a whole lot and was really hoping that something was going to come through and the whole irony of it is I don't know if any other school other than an MIT or Harvard like or Stanford could have done for him what's been done, because their

pockets were deep enough that they didn't have to worry about financial aid for their kids.

Table 3 provides a cross case analysis of the critical theme of family and mentor support. Family and mentor support provided the strongest correlation among the three participants as evidenced from the data presented.

Table 3

Family and Mentor Support

Support	Jazmin	Javier	Marco
Positive Two-Way Communication with Parents	X	X	X
Positive Two-Way Communication with Mentors	X	X	--
Supportive Beliefs and Values of Parents	X	--	X
Supportive Beliefs and Values of Mentors	X	X	X
Shared Responsibility of Challenges by Mentors	--	X	X

Resiliency

Resiliency theory in the context of student development and the school environment was central to the identification of the critical themes or domain structures found in this study. The participants' understanding of their own student development and the identification of the challenges and adversities from their youth helped to determine if such critical themes existed among the three participants. The school experiences that each participant endured were also examined as a means for the participants to build upon them if the experiences were positive

or to build protective skills if the experiences were negative. What follows is a narrative of the resiliency traits identified for each participant.

Jazmin’s resiliency traits. Based on the shared experiences of Jazmin, attributes of resiliency even from an early age are evident. Jazmin demonstrates a strong level of confidence and relies on external and familial support, both of which are protective factors among resilient youth (Bernard, 1991; Garmezy, 1991). She has set goals for herself, even as a young girl prior to her move to the United States by knowing that she wanted to go far in her education – further than anyone in her family. Prior to high school she re-examined her goals and put herself on a path to success by fully committing to the Upward Bound program. Through external support and an environment that encouraged resiliency, she managed to leave the familiar surroundings of her family and home and venture more than 500 miles from home to attend college. Her confidence in knowing exactly what she wants to do despite the challenges she is faced with do not prevent her from losing sight of her goals. She seeks out support from a number of trusted adults. Even as a shy and quiet young lady, she demonstrates determination and internal motivation that is unbending.

Confidence, intrinsic motivation, seeking help from others, and goal setting are all resiliency traits that are evident for Jazmin. She understands the need to be purposeful and resourceful in order to realize her own success. Each of these traits have helped her to overcome the challenges she has endured thus far – low socio-economic status, limited English proficiency and immigrating to an unfamiliar culture. As her mentor said, “she’s going places.”

Javier’s resiliency traits. Javier’s story, from all of the perspectives detailed previously, demonstrates many characteristics of resiliency. Javier shows pride in his heritage

and is reluctant to accept charity from others as a means to be more independent and self-supportive. He views what others would say are challenges as opportunities. He is connected to his mother through her encouragement, tough love and support of his own dreams.

Javier has experienced more challenges than the other two participants based on the data collected in this study, yet Javier does not view these as challenges – he sees them as opportunities. This was evident in the story that Dr. Taylor shared regarding the essay questions for the MIT admissions application. Javier never discussed the details of his eye injury during the interviews. It was apparent that his noticeable injury was not an issue for Javier. Even his mother was brief in describing this issue. Only through Dr. Taylor’s interview were the details of Javier’s injury made known. Javier sets goals for himself and seeks understanding on his own. Yet, he does realize that there are times when there is the need to seek help from others. This was evident during both interviews with Javier and the interview with Dr. Taylor. Javier knew that he wanted to go to college but he did not think it was financially possible. He was not sure how to approach this; therefore, Javier knew he needed to seek help from others, namely Dr. Taylor. This characteristic is similar to the findings in the research of Bernard (1991), Garmezy (1991) and Waxman et al. (2001).

Javier’s support from his mother is characterized by the stories she has shared with all of her children as a means to fuel resiliency among them so that they will not encounter the same struggles she has endured. This is similar to what Ceja (2004) found in his study of first generation chicana college students. Ms. Loya’s support for Javier and his siblings is also reminiscent of Werner and Smith’s (1992) research in that Javier demonstrates all of the traits found in their research – “socially responsible, tolerant, adaptable, achievement oriented and having a good self esteem” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 74).

The attributes of resiliency that Javier lives by were evident from each of the interviews. The love and support of his mother, the encouragement and guidance of his mentor, Dr. Taylor, and Javier's internal motivation have all been instrumental in shaping Javier into a very successful young man. As Dr. Taylor said in the interview, "it's total intrinsic motivation. He is humble but there's also confidence there. No one quite like him that I have ever met."

Marco's resiliency traits. Marco presents resiliency in similar fashion to Jazmin and Javier. However, there are marked differences with Marco. Marco is the only college student in this study that is still at home with his family. While the issue with residency and financial aid are the primary reasons, it should also be noted that Marco has a deep appreciation and connection to his parents. Even if financial aid was not a concern, Marco may continue to reside with his family because of his deep connection to his parents. This familial support is one of the strongest resiliency traits observed for Marco. Additional resiliency traits that were evident from the interviews are that Marco is socially responsible and achievement oriented, similar to the findings of Bernard (1991) and Garmezy (1991).

Marco's parents were strong supporters of his goals and dreams, but they were also strict with him when things seemed to overwhelm him. At first, Marco felt out of place and was challenged in some classes because of his lack of English language skills. However, his parents pushed him to keep trying and to not give up. This support is evidenced even today as Marco attends college. Marco relies on his parents for financial support, emotional support and even academic support.

While Marco's parents fed his resiliency primarily, Ms. Apodaca also encouraged resiliency in Marco. Her one-on-one attention, her encouraging words, her inviting classroom

and her emotional support were all practices that enabled Marco to persevere. When Marco was feeling out of place and wanted to return to his familiar culture and friends, Ms. Apodaca was instrumental in helping Marco to feel as if he could push forward with his goals and his dreams.

Marco also exhibited intrinsic motivation as was evidenced by Ms. Apodaca. However, the support and encouragement of Ms. Apodaca allowed Marco to act on his internal motivation and reach his goals. Ms. Apodaca understood Marco's needs and she acknowledged his heritage and his first language. This allowed Marco to trust Ms. Apodaca and open up to her with his concerns.

Marco's resiliency is noted through his trust and his respect for the adult role models most important in his life. Marco demonstrates a positive self-esteem, he is achievement oriented and he put trust in his teacher, Ms. Apodaca, as well as his parents. The relationship and trust with his parents continues to be one that allows Marco to succeed in college and continues to foster his goals and dreams for the future.

Summary of Findings

The findings presented above have provided evidence to support the three critical themes identified from an analysis of the data. These critical themes include participant and family background factors, public school experiences, and family and mentor support. The factors that were outlined based on the critical theme of participant and family background included seven participant and family background characteristics. Age of the participant at the time of immigration was considered as a contributing factor. The participants ranged in age from 10 to 14 at the time of immigration. Parent marital status played a role for each student in the study. Two of the three participants (Jazmin and Javier) come from families

where their parents are separated. The highest level of education attained by the parents of the participants was analyzed as important information. Marco's father was the only parent with a high school diploma and a college education. It was also noted that all three mothers in the study were not satisfied with their own level of education and all wanted more for their children in terms of education. While birth order was noted, it was more important to view the participant as a mentor for the siblings in the family. All three participants were viewed as mentors for younger members of the family. Finally, the support of extended family members in the United States and residency issues were examined as key factors. Javier's family was the only family that immigrated without the support of any extended family in the United States. Javier and Marco both experienced some issues with residency that was concerning in terms of attaining federal financial aid. This issue continues to be a challenge for Marco.

Public school experiences as a critical theme was based on five key factors identified from the data. The first was the proper grade placement of the participants upon their initial enrollment in U. S. schools. This was key as two of the three participants experienced a problem with the proper grade placement. This school experience may have been a contributing factor that helped to build resiliency in the two participants – Jazmin and Javier. Additionally, extra-curricular activities were examined as a means to understand how students related to their peers and what interests they had outside of the classroom. All three participants engaged in some level of extra-curricular activity. Next, the exit time from the bilingual or ESL program was analyzed. The exit time for all three participants was relatively short in comparison with other students in similar situations. Enrollment in advanced courses was a key factor that contributed to the success of all three participants as

each did take advantage of more than just the regular high school curriculum. Finally, all three participants were provided with a college preparation program of some type. This proved to be very helpful for all three and even provided some negative attitudes about school as to why not all students are afforded the same opportunities.

The last critical theme that emerged from the data in this study was the support of family, particularly parents and of mentors. Five factors were identified as key evidence of this critical theme. Positive two-way communication was examined as a contributing factor and was evident among all three participants; however at a much higher level for Jazmin and Javier than for Marco. Positive two-way communication between the mentors and the participants were evident for all three students in this study. Again, it was evident that this communication was more pronounced for Jazmin and Javier as the evidence supported a continued relationship with their mentors three years after graduating from high school. Supportive beliefs and values were examined for the parent role and the mentor role. While Jazmin and Marco's parents provided evidence of a more supportive belief system in the goal of attending college when both students were very young, Javier's mother changed her beliefs and values as Javier's success was made more evident to others. All three mentors shared strong beliefs and values that were closely aligned to the beliefs and values of each participant. Lastly, when a participant experienced a problem or a challenge, the mentors shared in this experience as if it was their problem as well. This helped the participants to understand that they can rely on adults to support and share in their challenges as a means to problem solve.

Recommendations and Implications

The circumstances provided through the shared stories of Jazmin, Javier and Marco offer recommendations for practitioners in the field as well as for those that prepare educators whether they be classroom teachers, counselors or administrators. Additionally, there are implications for policymakers as a means to better support public education of minority, low-income and immigrant students. Finally, these circumstances lend to further research in the field.

Implications for practitioners. It is important for educators to understand the challenges that immigrant students bring with them and to acknowledge their pasts. The notion of assimilation should not be the focus of the educator. Rather, the focus of educators should be understanding and acknowledging the immigrant student's heritage.

Assimilation has long been the belief of many educational practitioners based on the multicultural education they themselves were taught in their educator preparation programs. Yet, the stories of Jazmin, Javier and Marco all revealed positive outcomes relative to the practices of educators that acknowledged and valued their cultural heritage instead of demanding that they assimilate. As was evidenced in the literature review, Valdés (1996) emphasized that educators must value the linguistic and cultural heritage that immigrant students bring with them to their new schools as a means to show care and concern for such students. Waxman et al. (2001) stressed the importance of the teacher providing a caring and supportive relationship with each student as crucial to the development of their own protective skills such as self-actualization, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Svedman (2007) emphasized similar practices for educators and believed that oftentimes it is more important of what goes on outside of the classroom between the teacher and the newly arrived immigrant student than

the content taught in the classroom. Educators must have an understanding of the family structure and issues faced by immigrant students in order to build resiliency among these students. However, educators must also possess attributes of a caring and trusting adult.

Attributes of a caring and trusting adult. Immigrant students arrive with anxiety and fear but if they encounter a caring and trusting educator success is more likely to occur. While each of the student participants may have not always experienced a positive relationship with every educator they encountered, it was clearly evident that the positive experiences they did encounter were the result of certain attributes that their mentors possessed. The attributes of a caring and trusting adult are those that Jazmin, Javier and Marco described in their stories. A caring and trusting adult should be committed to helping others as was evidenced by one of Jazmin's mentors, Miguel Jaquez. He has committed himself to a profession that supports and encourages those less fortunate. Mr. Jaquez is very well educated and some might even say he comes from a privileged background; yet, he has always and continues to work in a profession that supports and upholds those most in need.

A caring and trusting adult must be willing to give of his or her own time. Javier embraced the support of Dr. Taylor as a caring and trusting adult based on Dr. Taylor's belief in him. Dr. Taylor and Javier continue to benefit from a relationship based on trust because Dr. Taylor committed much of his own time to work with him on Saturdays. Being at as many school activities as possible was another way that Dr. Taylor gave of his own time and showed support for Javier and his classmates. Additionally, Ms. Apodaca possesses this same attribute. She made a point to arrive early each day to school so that her newly immigrated students had a safe environment to come to as they learned how to navigate their new and unfamiliar surroundings. Ms. Apodaca also gave of her own time during her daily lunch

break, again as a means to provide a safe environment for students, many of which were anxious and fearful of their new school.

A caring and trusting adult must value the differences and acknowledge the heritage of all students. Ms. Soriano and Ms. Apodaca portrayed these attributes for Jazmin and Marco, respectively. Both of these teachers understood the importance of valuing the linguistic and cultural heritage of their students through acknowledgement and through the incorporation of cultural lessons that strengthened Jazmin and Marco's original identity. Javier was provided with this same attribute from his mother. Ms. Loya expressed how she expected all of her children to be proud of their past and their heritage and to never forget where they came from.

Jazmin, Javier and Marco were each fortunate in that they developed a trusting relationship with an adult mentor at school or as a part of their schooling. While this is not a mandate for educators, it certainly plays a significant role in the success of students, especially those that are new to the culture and the system itself. Jazmin, Javier and Marco relied on the support of a caring and trusting adult and sought their support as a means to further develop their own resiliency. A mandate of this type of relationship is not the answer to the problem. Rather, if teacher preparation programs and other educational preparation programs stressed the significance of trusting and caring relationships between students and adults, perhaps more educators would be willing to seek out and get to know more students on a more personal level as a means to assist students like Jazmin, Javier and Marco.

Implications for curriculum and instruction. The instructional practices employed by educators are an important aspect of providing college readiness for all students but more importantly for minority, low-income, immigrant students. Effective curriculum and instructional practices may help to develop protective skills in students when faced with

difficult challenges. Such practices include providing differentiated instruction tailored to individual student needs, emphasizing choice and autonomy among students and experiential approaches to learning (Alfassi, 2004). Waxman, Pardon, and Arnold (2001) suggest that learner-centered instruction lends to developing a sense of purpose among students. Further, educators that communicate and maintain high expectations for all students are critical for the development of a positive academic self-concept (Waxman et al., 2001).

While the three participants in this research were privileged enough to have been provided with special college preparation, this is something that should be afforded all students in any given school. Dr. Taylor and Jazmin both expressed concern for this issue. First, Dr. Taylor expressed his changed perspective based on the work of Steve Murdock. Dr. Taylor shared how Murdock was his motivation to ensure that his high school would not neglect the educational opportunities for any student based on his or her ethnicity or race. Dr. Taylor believed that anyone of the students walking the halls could very well be the doctors and lawyers of tomorrow. When asked if there was something that Jazmin did not like about her high school, she mentioned the practice of providing college preparation only for a select few students. Jazmin stated, "I was lucky." All students should have the same chances she and her two counterparts were given. This leads to implications for policymakers.

Implications for policymakers. College readiness should not be a program designed for a certain demographic in public education. College readiness should be afforded to all students. While House Bill 1 of the 79th legislative session provided targeted college readiness funding called the High School Allotment meant to support this very need, this policy decision did not come with significant requirements (Texas Education Agency, 2009b). Many public schools have used this funding to offset the costs of retaining personnel rather

than to expand college readiness opportunities to students. As such, more stringent use of these funds may be necessary as a means to ensure that the funds are used to target college readiness rather than as a means to supplant existing programs. However, due to recent sweeping budget cuts, additional public funding is necessary to ensure that all high school students are exposed to a rich college preparation program – one that goes beyond the requirements to attain a high school diploma in the era of high stakes accountability. Students should be provided with the opportunities to learn about the process of applying for admissions to college and applying for college scholarships as part of their general curriculum. It should not be something that is only provided for those who seek it on their own or those that are a part of a particular program. More importantly, college readiness programs should not be targeted for just a select group of students. This is evidenced by the fact that three Hispanic immigrant students found success when many in the public education setting today would not take the time to work with students of this demographic on college admissions and scholarships. Dr. Taylor and his support for all students at his high school is evidence of this belief. Policy decisions that specifically address the roles and responsibilities of specialized school personnel could assist in this area. Paper work reduction has already been addressed for classroom teachers. Perhaps counselors could benefit from this as well. Finally, equitable funding for all school children continues to be a battle among policymakers. Weighted funding is made available for students of varying demographics and need, but equity, adequacy, and efficiency are still a topic of courtroom debate. Until equal funding of all school children in this state is attained, college readiness for all will continue to be a challenge for property poor school districts.

Implications for further research. The role of the mentor is an area worth further investigation. The manner in which educators and students develop a mentor-mentee relationship may be helpful to educator preparation programs, school leaders and social service workers. Youth mentoring programs have been a topic of considerable interest in the education community for a number of years. Youth mentoring opportunities differ considerably, yet all strive to achieve the same goal. Mentoring programs provide students with the support of an adult advocate in which the teacher/student relationship is cultivated to ensure the student understands and makes wise life style choices that promote academic success and good self-esteem. Further research of in-school youth mentoring programs may be beneficial for students in this community and their academic and social success.

Whereas Jazmin and Marco both experienced a great deal of support from their mentors, Javier's mentor was truly unique in that he was the high school principal at Javier's high school. Dr. Taylor's support of students like Javier was truly unique and unanticipated by this researcher. Further research of the changing role of the high school principal may help to answer how school leaders may better support all students. Research of the role of a school principal as a mentor may be an area worth further investigation.

While the study provides valuable insights regarding the three participants selected for this study, it does not take into account the countless other students that come to school everyday with one or more challenge that often impedes their individual success. Much more work needs to be done to support students when they encounter a roadblock. If all students were fortunate enough to have the support of a mentor such as the mentors in this study, many, many more would find similar success to that of Jazmin, Javier, and Marco. Yet, at the same time, because this study only examined three students, it is fair to say that further

research of additional students with similar characteristics may discover other findings than the ones identified in this study.

Personal Epilogue

This study was based on the story of Edgar. His resiliency helped me to realize that students like him are worthy of more research. Edgar persisted despite the subtractive schooling practices he was exposed to, despite the poverty he was raised in, despite the inequitable funding provided to students in property poor districts like his, and despite the high stakes accountability that has narrowed the curriculum in so many schools across this state. Edgar and the participants in this study opened my eyes as a practitioner. I never expected to be so drawn in to their stories and their lives. Taking the time to learn about Edgar and then getting to know Jazmin, Javier and Marco was some of the best professional development I have encountered. I aspire to help more students just like these tremendous scholars more so than ever before. As an advocate for college readiness, I am committed not only to finding ways for every student to attain the level of educational success needed to be college ready, but I also aspire to find solutions to the financial constraints that hinder many immigrant students in our school systems. Edgar, Jazmin, Javier and Marco are all great role models not only to their families and their friends; they are all role models for practitioners in the classroom, in the principal's office and in district offices.

Even though this research has concluded, I expect to stay connected with these amazing students as I want to share in their future challenges and successes as they continue their paths to becoming college graduates and someday U. S. citizens. Perhaps additional research upon their degree completion is the next chapter for this study as well as for my role as an educator, researcher and advocate for students.

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Appendix A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Students Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. I am interested in finding out what factors may have contributed to your success. I will be interviewing two other students who demonstrate the same characteristics. Your answers will be extremely helpful in understanding your experiences in regards to preparation for college and high school graduation.

- a. Are there any questions you would like to ask before we begin?
- b. Before beginning, we do need to discuss the involvement of human subjects, which is required for any research involving people. Please be aware that participating in this interview is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. You will be compensated a total of \$50.00 for taking part in this research study. In addition, I would like to use an audio recording in this interview for which I need your authorization. Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all your responses will remain confidential. Your identity will be protected and only I will have access to all the records and transcripts of our interview. Are there any questions about any of this?
- c. I am going to begin recording now, is that all right with you?
- d. Any other questions before we begin?

II. Questions for student participants

- a. Tell me about yourself.

Follow up/clarifying questions: age, siblings, parents,
grandparents

- b. How did you get to where you are today?

Follow up/clarifying questions: why decided to go to college,
career aspirations

- c. Talk to me about high school. What was that like?
- d. Who or what was most helpful to you during your high school years?
- e. Is there someone from your high school years that you feel was instrumental in preparing you for college? If so, who and why?
- f. What activities, clubs or organizations were you involved in during your high school years?
- g. What classes did you take that you believe helped prepare you for college?
- h. Were there things about high school that you believe did not help you? If so what and why?
- i. What advice would you most like to give to a future high school graduate with similar characteristics about graduating college ready?
- j. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- k. Do you have any other questions or comments?
- l. Thank you so much for your time and participation in my study. If you ever have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact me.

III. Questions for second interview

- a. Tell me about starting college. What was that like?

- b. How often do you speak to members of your family, friends from high school, teachers/counselor/administrator from high school?
- c. What has been most difficult for you about college?
- d. Tell me about the admissions process here. How did that go?

Clarifying questions: financial, paperwork, were these concerns take care of?

- e. When you were beginning, who or what was most helpful to you?
- f. Did you receive any sort of orientation when you began your program? What are your thoughts about this?
- g. Where do you go for help now that you're in college?
- h. Tell me about your interaction with the faculty thus far.
- i. How about your interaction with other students/peers?
- j. What are your thoughts about your coursework at this point?
- k. Thinking about the interactions between faculty, students, and staff, you have witnessed so far in college, what things stick out in your mind.
- l. Tell me about your advisor and your relationship with him/her.

Clarifying questions: how met up with advisor, why, recommendations, assigned advisor?

- m. What comes next for you? What are the next steps? How do you feel about those next steps?
- n. Is there anything you would like to add?
- o. Do you have any other questions or comments?

- p. Thank you so much for your time and participation in my study. If you ever have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact me.

IV. Third student interview (if needed)

- a. A third student interview will be scheduled only in the event of the need to clarify information from the previous interviews. The protocol for this interview is contingent upon those areas where information is still needed. Therefore, a formal protocol for this interview is not applicable.

Mentor Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. I am interested in finding out what factors may have contributed to your role in the success of (student participant). He/she identified you as a key individual responsible for much of his/her success. Your answers will be extremely helpful in understanding your experiences in regards to your role in mentoring (student participant) for high school graduation and college readiness.

- a. Are there any questions you would like to ask before we begin?
- b. Before beginning, we do need to discuss the involvement of human subjects, which is required for any research involving people. Please be aware that participating in this interview is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study. In addition, I would like to use an audio recording in this interview for which I need your authorization. Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all your responses will remain confidential. Your identity will be protected and only I will have access to all the records and transcripts of our interview. Are there any questions about any of this?
- c. I am going to begin recording now, is that all right with you?
- d. Any other questions before we begin?

II. Questions for mentors (teacher/counselor/administrator)

- a. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
- b. How did you become a teacher/counselor/administrator? Follow up/clarifying questions: age, background education, family background, why decided to choose this profession
- c. Tell me about a typical day in your role as a (teacher/counselor/administrator).
- d. What comes to mind when you think of Hispanic, immigrant, low-income students?
- e. How do you help to prepare your students to graduate college ready?
- f. How do you support students that require additional help?
- g. What do you remember most about (student participant's name)?
- h. What or how do you remember in helping (student participant) to achieve success?
- i. Why do you believe (student participant) attained such success?
- j. Is there anything else you would like to add?
- k. Do you have any other questions or comments?
- l. Thank you so much for your time and participation in my study. If you ever have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact me.

Parent Interview Protocol

I. Introduction

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. I am interested in finding out what factors may have contributed to your child's success. I will be interviewing two other students and parents who demonstrate the same characteristics. Your answers will be extremely helpful in understanding your role as a parent in regards to your child's preparation for college and high school graduation.

- a. Are there any questions you would like to ask before we begin?
- b. Before beginning, we do need to discuss the involvement of human subjects, which is required for any research involving people. Please be aware that participating in this interview is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study. In addition, I would like to use an audio recording in this interview for which I need your authorization. Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all your responses will remain confidential. Your identity will be protected and only I will have access to all the records and transcripts of our interview. Are there any questions about any of this?
- c. I am going to begin recording now, is that all right with you?
- d. Any other questions before we begin?

II. Questions for parent participants

- a. Tell me about your child (student participant).
Follow up/clarifying questions: How old were you when he/she was born?
Were there any health issues or complications in his/her early years or at birth?
- b. Why did you decide to move to the United States?
- c. What challenges did you experience in moving to this country? How long did it take to immigrate?
- d. What help, if any, did you receive in making the move to this country?
- e. What is your highest level of education? Are you satisfied with your level of education? If not, why?
- f. Tell me about your child's public school education here in the United States.
- g. What challenges did you both encounter as a result of public education, if any?
- h. How often did your child have homework and were you able to help him/her with this homework? If so, how did you help?
- i. How often did you and your child read together at home?
- j. Did you set goals for your child? If so, what were they and how were they shared?
- k. How were you involved in your child's education?
- l. How often did you meet with the school personnel in regards to your child's education?
- m. How did you help your child in making the decision to attend his/her current institution of higher learning, if you did?
- n. Is there anything else you would like to add?

- o. Do you have any other questions or comments?
- p. Thank you so much for your time and participation in my study. If you ever have any questions, concerns, or comments, feel free to contact me

Protocolo de entrevista con los padres

I. Introducción

El propósito de este estudio es para demostrar lo que significa emigrar a los Estados Unidos como un niño o adolescente, matricularse en la escuela pública y adaptarse a una nueva cultura todos en la búsqueda de lograr un diploma de la secundaria y con ambición de graduarse de colegio para finalmente obtener un título universitario. Estoy interesada en averiguar cuáles son los factores que han contribuido al éxito de su hijo. Yo entrevistare otros dos estudiantes y padres de familia que demuestran las mismas características. Sus respuestas serán sumamente útiles para poder entender su papel como padre en cuanto la preparación para la universidad y la graduación de secundaria de su hijo.

- a. ¿Hay alguna pregunta que le gustaría preguntar antes de que comenzar?
- b. Antes de comenzar, es necesario examinar la participación de seres humanos, que es necesario para cualquier investigación que involucran a personas. Por favor tenga en cuenta que la participación en este tipo de entrevista es voluntaria y se niega participar no causará una sanción, ya que no se compensara por el hecho de participar en el estudio de investigación. Además, me gustaría utilizar una grabadora de audio en esta entrevista para la cual necesito su autorización. Por favor tenga en cuenta que la información recabada será confidencial; no hay ningún riesgo de divulgar opiniones personales debido a que sus respuestas son confidenciales. Su identidad será protegida y solamente yo voy a tener acceso a todas las entrevistas y las transcripciones de la entrevista. ¿Hay alguna pregunta acerca de esto?

- c. ¿Voy a comenzar a grabar, están de acuerdo?
- d. ¿Alguna otra pregunta antes de empezar?
- II. Preguntas para el padre participante
 - a. Cuéntame a cerca de tu hijo (el estudiante participante)
Recalara/aclara las preguntas: ¿Cuántos años tenía cuando su hijo(a) nació?
¿Hubo un problema de salud o complicaciones en sus primeros años o cuando nació?
 - b. ¿Por qué decidió mudarse a los Estados Unidos?
 - c. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos que usted experimento cuando se traslado a este país?
¿Cuánto tiempo le tomo para emigrar?
 - d. ¿Qué tipo de ayuda, si alguna, recibió al trasladarse a este país?
 - e. ¿Cuál es su más alto nivel de educación? ¿Esta satisfecha con su nivel de educación? ¿Si no, porque?
 - f. Cuénteme acerca de la educación pública de su hijo aquí en los Estado Unidos.
 - g. ¿Cuáles son los desafíos que enfrentan como resultado de la educación pública, si alguno?
 - h. ¿Qué tan seguido tenía tarea su hijo y lo pudo usted ayudar hacer la tarea? ¿Si lo hizo como lo ayudo?
 - i. ¿Qué tan seguido leían juntos usted y su hijo en la casa?
 - j. ¿Usted fijo metas para su hijo? ¿Si lo hizo, cuales eran y como se compartieron?
 - k. ¿Cómo se involucro usted en la educación de su hijo?

- l. ¿Qué tan seguido se reunió con el personal de la escuela en cuanto a la educación de su hijo?
- m. ¿Cómo ayudo a su hijo a tomar la decisión de asistir a su actual institución de educación superior?
- n. ¿Hay algo mas que quisiera agregar?
- o. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta o comentario?
- p. Muchísimas gracias por su tiempo y su participación en mi estudio. Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, preocupaciones o comentarios, no dude en comunicarse con migo.

Appendix B
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Dear Undergraduate College Student:

I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso. I have received authorization to conduct voluntary in depth interviews among recent Hispanic, low-income high school graduates that immigrated during their public school years and graduated college ready. This study aims to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. The objective of conducting interviews is to obtain detailed information of student perceptions about those factors that were most important in attaining college readiness despite the challenges endured.

In addition, your input from my interviews will add to the knowledge regarding the outcomes of students with similar backgrounds in public education policy development. Voluntary interviews will consist of open-ended questions about your high school experience. I need also your authorization to use an audio recording device during the interviews.

Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all of your responses will remain confidential. None of the information will identify you by your name. Data will be transcribed, coded, and will be appropriately protected to ensure a controlled and lawful release. The results of this study will be shared with you once my committee allows the dissertation defense. The information will be kept in a secure file, with limited access to my dissertation chair, and will be destroyed after two years from the completion of the study.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your participation in it, please contact me at (915) 433-8442 or via email at hkfields@miners.utep.edu, and/or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Don P. Schulte, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Foundations, (915) 747-7591 or via email at dpschulte@utep.edu.

Sincerely,

Holly Fields
Doctoral Student

Informed Consent

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Holly Fields from the University of Texas at El Paso. I understand that I will be interviewed up to three times and that each interview may take approximately 90 minutes.

My participation is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. I understand that there are no known risks and that I will be compensated \$50.00 for my participation in this study. I understand that the purpose of the interviews is to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree.

I understand that the principal researcher, Holly Fields, will schedule an initial interview at my enrolled institution of higher learning, meet with me at this initial interview, ask me to share my story in terms of successfully graduating college ready from high school and obtaining admissions to my current institution. I will also be asked to identify key documents from my high school years that may assist in identifying the factors that aided me in obtaining this success. These documents may include: my high school transcript, SAT or ACT scores, Advanced Placement test scores, and certificates or honors from various school affiliated organizations, clubs or activities.

I agree to participate in up to two subsequent interviews. The subsequent interviews may take place in person or via Skype™ depending on my location at the requested time of the interviews. I understand that all interviews will be audio recorded and that all data from the recordings will be stored electronically with password encryption.

In compliance with the IRB protocol approved for this project, any information I provide will be kept confidential. Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939.

Authorization Statement

I have read and I have understood the above. Completion of the survey and interview is deemed consent to participate.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Authorization for Audio Recording

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Dear Teacher/Counselor/Administrator:

I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso. I have received authorization to conduct a voluntary in depth interview of a mentor identified from student participants who are recent Hispanic, low-income high school graduates that immigrated during their public school years and graduated college ready. This study aims to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. The objective of conducting this interview is to obtain detailed information from an identified mentor of the participating student about those factors that may have aided the participating student in attaining college readiness despite the challenges endured.

In addition, your input from my interview will add to the knowledge regarding the outcomes of students with similar backgrounds in public education policy development. This voluntary interview will consist of open-ended questions about your role in working with the student participant. I need also your authorization to use an audio recording device during the interviews.

Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all of your responses will remain confidential. None of the information will identify you by your name. Data will be transcribed, coded, and will be appropriately protected to ensure a controlled and lawful release. The results of this study will be shared with you once my committee allows the dissertation defense. The information will be kept in a secure file, with limited access to my dissertation chair, and will be destroyed after two years from the completion of the study.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your participation in it, please contact me at (915) 433-8442 or via email at hkfields@miners.utep.edu, and/or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Don P. Schulte, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Foundations, (915) 747-7591 or via email at dpschulte@utep.edu.

Sincerely,

Holly Fields
Doctoral Student

Informed Consent

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Holly Fields from the University of Texas at El Paso. I understand that I will be interviewed one time and that this interview may take approximately 90 minutes.

My participation is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. I understand that there are no known risks or benefits involved in my participation in this study. I understand that the purpose of the interview is to provide context that may have assisted the student participant in this study that demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree.

I understand that the principal researcher, Holly Fields, will schedule an interview at my place of employment. I understand that I will be asked open-ended questions that pertain to my experiences with the student participant.

I understand that all interviews will be audio recorded and that all data from the recordings will be stored electronically with password encryption.

In compliance with the IRB protocol approved for this project, any information I provide will be kept confidential. Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939.

Authorization Statement

I have read and I have understood the above. Completion of the survey and interview is deemed consent to participate.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Authorization for Audio Recording

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Dear Parent:

I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso. I have received authorization to conduct a voluntary in depth interview of a parent identified from student participants who are recent Hispanic, low-income high school graduates that immigrated during their public school years and graduated college ready. This study aims to demonstrate what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree. The objective of conducting this interview is to obtain detailed information from the parent of the participating student about those factors that may have aided the participating student in attaining college readiness despite the challenges endured.

In addition, your input from my interview will add to the knowledge regarding the outcomes of students with similar backgrounds in public education policy development. This voluntary interview will consist of open-ended questions about your role as a parent with the student participant. I need also your authorization to use an audio recording device during the interviews.

Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all of your responses will remain confidential. None of the information will identify you by your name. Data will be transcribed, coded, and will be appropriately protected to ensure a controlled and lawful release. The results of this study will be shared with you once my committee allows the dissertation defense. The information will be kept in a secure file, with limited access to my dissertation chair, and will be destroyed after two years from the completion of the study.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your participation in it, please contact me at (915) 433-8442 or via email at hkfields@miners.utep.edu, and/or my dissertation supervisor Dr. Don P. Schulte, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership and Foundations, (915) 747-7591 or via email at dpschulte@utep.edu.

Sincerely,

Holly Fields
Doctoral Student

Informed Consent

I agree to participate in the study being conducted by Holly Fields from the University of Texas at El Paso. I understand that I will be interviewed one time and that this interview may take approximately 90 minutes.

My participation is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. I understand that there are no known risks or benefits involved in my participation in this study. I understand that the purpose of the interview is to provide context that may have assisted my child, a student participant in this study, that demonstrates what it means to immigrate to the United States as a child or young adolescent, enroll in public school and adapt to a new culture all in pursuit of obtaining a high school diploma with the ambitions to graduate college ready and ultimately, receive a college degree.

I understand that the principal researcher, Holly Fields, will schedule an interview at my home. I understand that I will be asked open-ended questions that pertain to my role as a parent and my experiences with my child, the student participant.

I understand that all interviews will be audio recorded and that all data from the recordings will be stored electronically with password encryption.

In compliance with the IRB protocol approved for this project, any information I provide will be kept confidential. Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939.

Authorization Statement

I have read and I have understood the above. Completion of the survey and interview is deemed consent to participate.

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Authorization for Audio Recording

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Queridos Padres:

Soy un estudiante de doctorado, estoy trabajando en mi tesis de administración y liderato en la educación en la Universidad de Texas en El Paso. He recibido autorización para efectuar una entrevista profunda y voluntaria a uno de los padres participantes de un estudiante hispano, con bajos ingresos graduado de la escuela secundaria que inmigraron durante sus años escolares en una escuela pública y graduaron preparados para ir al colegio. Además esta entrevista se enfocara en demostrar que significa inmigrar a los Estados Unidos siendo un niño o un adolescente joven, inscribirse en una escuela pública y adaptarse a una nueva cultura en la búsqueda de lograr un diploma de la secundaria y con la ambición de graduarse preparado para el colegio y al fin obtener un título universitario. El objetivo de conducir esta entrevista es con el fin de obtener información detallada del padre del estudiante participante sobre los factores que ayudaron al estudiante ir al colegio a pesar de los problemas padecidos.

Además, el apoyo de esta entrevista se sumara a los conocimientos respecto a los resultados de los estudiantes con antecedentes similares en la formulación de pólizas educativas. Esta entrevista voluntaria consistirá en preguntas abiertas sobre su papel de padres con el estudiante participante. Además necesito su autorización para poder usar una grabadora de audio durante la entrevista.

Por favor tenga en cuenta que la información recabada será confidencial, no hay ningún riesgo de divulgar opiniones personales debido que sus respuestas son confidenciales. Ninguno de los datos lo identificarán por su nombre. Los datos serán transcritos, codificados, y debidamente protegidos con el fin de asegurar su control para su liberación. Los resultados de este estudio serán compartidos con ustedes una vez mi comité permita la presentación de la tesis de defensa. Dicha información será archivada en un lugar seguro con acceso limitado a mi presidente de tesis y será destruido dos años después de la realización del estudio.

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio y su participación en el, por favor comuníquese con migo al teléfono (915) 433-8442 o por correo electrónico a hkfields@miners.utep.edu, y/o con mi supervisor de tesis el Dr. Don P. Schulte, Profesor Asistente, Liderato Educacional y Fundaciones, (915) 747-7591 o por correo electrónico a dpschulte@utep.edu.

Sinceramente,

Holly Fields

Estudiante Doctorado

Consentimiento informado

Yo estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio llevado a cabo por Holly Fields de la universidad de Texas en El Paso. Tengo entendido que voy a ser entrevistado una vez y que esta entrevista puede tomar aproximadamente 90 minutos.

Mi participación es voluntaria y si me niego a participar no provocará una sanción. Tengo entendido que no se conocen los riesgos o beneficios de mi participación en este estudio. Entiendo que la participación de la entrevista es para entender el contexto que podría haber ayudado mi niño, un estudiante que participe en este estudio, que muestra lo que significa para emigrar a los Estados Unidos como un niño, niña o adolescente, se matriculado en la escuela pública y adaptarse a una nueva cultura todos en la búsqueda de obtener un diploma de la secundaria con las ambiciones de colegio de postgraduados listo y en última instancia, por obtener un título universitario.

Tengo entendido Holly Fields, investigador principal, programará la entrevista en mi casa. Tengo entendido que se me harán preguntas abiertas que se relacionan con mi papel como padre y mis experiencias con mi hijo, el alumno participante.

Tengo entendido que todas las entrevistas serán audio grabado y que todos los datos de las grabaciones serán almacenados electrónicamente con encriptación de contraseñas.

En cumplimiento con el protocolo IRB aprobado para este proyecto, cualquier información que proporcione será tratada de manera confidencial. Cualquier duda con respecto a la realización de esta investigación o sus derechos como participante en la investigación pueden ser dirigidas al administrador IRB al teléfono (915) 747-7939.

Autorización De Declaración

He leído y he entendido lo anterior. La conclusión de la encuesta y entrevista es considerada consentimiento para participar.

Nombre del Participante: _____ Fecha: _____

Firma del Participante: _____ Fecha: _____

Autorización para la grabación audio

Nombre del Participante: _____ Fecha: _____

Firma del Participante: _____ Fecha: _____

CURRICULUM VITA

As a public school educator with over twenty years of experience, Holly Fields continues to serve in her role as an assistant superintendent in the El Paso area. She earned her Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from the University of Texas at El Paso in December 2012. She has also obtained various professional certifications, which include the following: Superintendent Texas Educator Certificate, 2007; Mid-Management Administrator Professional Educator Certificate, 1999; Counselor Professional Certificate, 1994; and Secondary Business Composite Professional Certificate, 1988. She received her Master of Education degree in 1994 from Sul Ross State University and her Bachelor of Science degree in Secondary Education from Texas Tech University in 1988.

She began her career as a business and computer science teacher in the Clint Independent School District in 1989 at Mountain View High School. She continued her career as a high school counselor also in the Clint Independent School District in 1996 and then went on to be an assistant principal in 1999. She became a campus principal for Clint ISD at a middle school in 2001 and was then a high school principal from 2003 to 2006. She worked briefly in 2006-07 for the Education Service Center Region 19 in the El Paso area as a school improvement specialist. Dr. Fields has been an assistant superintendent in far West Texas since May 2007.

As an advocate for college readiness, Dr. Fields serves as a member of the College Board's Southwest Regional Council and is a member of the ACT Texas Council. She is married to her husband of 22 years, Mike Fields and is mother to two teenage boys – Zach Fields, a sophomore at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA and William Fields, a high

school sophomore at Eastlake High School in the Socorro Independent School District.

Dr. Fields' dissertation entitled, "Readiness For College: A Case Study of Three Hispanic Immigrant Students Who Overcame the Odds" was supervised by Dr. Don P. Schulte.